SEBASTIAN M. HERRMANN

Data Imaginary

Literature and Data in Nineteenth-Century US Culture

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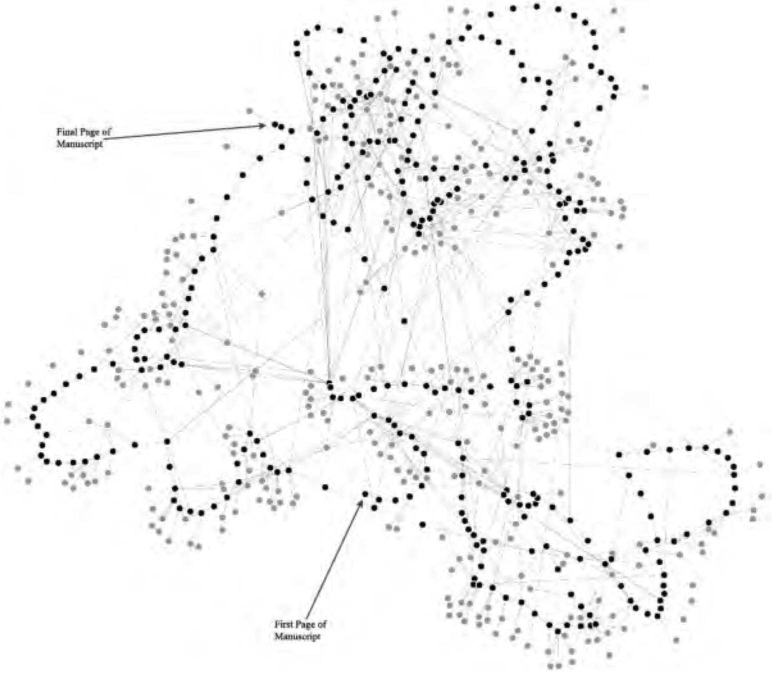
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Fig. 1: Force graph visualization of this study. Cf. appendix D

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Of course, the above list merely scratches the surface of academic and intellectual support I received over the years. As a list, it is, perhaps by its very nature, incomplete, insufficient, and somewhat incoherent. But there are also many other people, outside the academy, without whom this book would likely never have been written, and thinking about them and about the long, even more incoherent list of names they would comprise, I cannot help but notice the formal peculiarity of this genre of the academic acknowledgment. After all, this is a book about different symbolic forms, their (seeming) differences, and their interplay, and so it seems fitting to briefly pause here and to talk about matters of form.

Typically, and particularly so in their second halves, acknowledgments sections tend to become lists of people to whom "thanks are also due." Here, the form of the list reveals these names as, ultimately, data. This is not surprising: Acknowledgments sections are akin to an act of accounting, a ledger, a catalog of debts incurred. Help was given and is being repaid now, partially, in another form: space on the pages of a book. I will say much more about the symbolic form of data in the chapters to come. Suffice it for now to point out that, as data, acknowledgments display two interrelated qualities: One is massification, a longing for ever more data points driven by the operative fantasy that one could potentially include all: With every name added, more come to mind that press onto the page. Especially in the humanities we are used to thinking of such massification as inflationary: We think that the unique value of each data point is lessened by the addition of more. In the massifying logic of data, however, the opposite is true... The other quality, closely related, is a yearning sense of incompletion. Precisely because the form of data is unbounded, because it could theoretically capture all, its inherent lack of closure becomes poignantly clear.

But this data set at the beginning of almost every academic monograph, of course, is everything but 'mere' data: It also constitutes a ritual —another symbolic form. As ritual, acknowledgments publicly celebrate the vast degree to which all academic work relies on the support of others: of individuals and institutions. That such ritualistic incantations are necessary at all, then, paradoxically illuminates how powerful myths of individual origination are in academia. To think that any one person could, simply out of themselves, write a mono-graph, is obviously absurd. It is, however, a fantasy so deeply entrenched that we seem in need of these rituals to counter it.

Finally, acknowledgments, as dataesque as they are, also display a conspicuous degree of narrativity. Typically written at the end of a years-long process, they signal closure, a moment when the action has run its course. Despite being situated in the opening pages of the book, they indicate this magical place, the ending, from which all that has come before is expected to make sense. After all, this is what endings do, narratologists tell us. Such narrativity shows whenever the acknowledgments chronologically retrace the process of researching, writing, and publishing; when they go back to 'the beginning' or revisit a pivotal moment of crisis; or when they offer glimpses into the writers' private lives—lives to which the authors presumably return, now, after the 'hero's quest' of writing is fulfilled. This is where narrative thrives: in making sense, wrongly or rightly so, out of a collection of events.

So all these forms mix and mingle in the acknowledgments sections of academic books, signaling that neither of these forms alone can ever be enough. After all, ritual, for all its stability, cannot do justice to the individuality of a given book; narrative, for all its value as a meaning-making tool, falls flat whenever life does not happen in neat narrative arcs of conflicts and resolutions; and data, for all its flexibility, might not offer enough meaning on its own, or might read 'dry' or 'cold.' And so, by necessity and by convention, acknowledgments sections end up being this hybrid mix of data, ritual, and narrative, reminding us that in this catalog of people that is a monograph's acknowledgments section, each data point, from the first page to the last, is more than just a name. It is also a public expression of gratitude, of attachment, and of connectedness.

So, to pick up where I left off, at the transition from the more academic to the more private, heartfelt thanks must, once again, go out to many. Among them are: Gesine Schröter, who was there in the beginning, in that dreamy, sunbathed morning kitchen, and who was never really far throughout these years; Claudia Müller, who is so reliable a friend and who knows the labor of writing, and all its many obstacles, like no one else; Johannes Zotz, who was a rock and a brother in these years; Florian Bast, who moved away from academia and from Leipzig, but who moved even closer as a friend; Cathy Chung, who remains so dear to me even if we go a year or two without a word—which, really, we should not; and Jolyn Stenschke, who loves books, who is accepting like no other, and who likes to dance. Indeed, throughout these years, this writing body, it seems to me, was sustained less by the *alma mater*, with its research and its reading rooms, and more by the miracles of dance, music, and sunlight, and by a beautiful community of fellow dancers. And so, some more names are in order, representative, again, of many more: Andrea, Claudi, Giulia, Kathleen, Laura, Linda, Nadine, Rafa, and Sandra. Thanks, finally, go to my parents, for being around for yet another book, and for being so marvellously young at heart and mind as old age reaches in.

Leipzig, August 2023

1 Introduction

1.1 The US ‘Data Imaginary’ and the Outlines of the Literary

This study is about the co-evolution of the literary and of data around the middle of the long nineteenth century. It argues that, during romanticism, US culture negotiated the outlines of the literary—what literature is, what literary value consists of, and what literature can do—in relation to the outlines of another representational project that was gaining sharper contours and a stronger foothold in public perception at the time: data. In making this case, I proceed from the observation that the middle of the nineteenth century saw not only increasingly refined, proliferating, and potent data practices: sophisticated methods for collecting, processing, and relaying ever-growing quantities of abstract, structured, uniform information. It also saw these methods’ massive popularization: their increasingly widespread application for representing reality, the nation, the social experience at scale; it saw a massive overall increase in the presence of data-driven practices in public consciousness; and it saw a particular and particularly American connection emerging between these practices and US national identity. Thriving thus, the symbolic form of data came to be invested with a distinct set of representational promises and desires. My study captures this decidedly cultural presence of data in the phrase of an emerging ‘data imaginary’ in nineteenth-century American life. This data imaginary, in turn, played a crucial—and so far largely overlooked—role in articulating the formal outlines, the cultural presence, and the representational promises and desires of literature.

Data and literature are often seen as two categorically, ontologically opposite objects. In contrast, this study contends that their relationship is best understood not as one of natural, inherent, ontological distance but as one of repressed proximity. In their modern sense, data and literature, “two loosely constructed domains” with fuzzy outlines and a considerable overlap (Lee, *Overwhelmed* 4), develop as a dialectic, intimately linked to one another in a process of mutual othering, one serving as the foil to define the other. From romanticism onward, this deepening and widening data-literature divide then comes to host performances of difference between these two—ranging from subtle, even tacit boundary drawings to veritable category dramas of sorts—that all serve to reaffirm the presumed and presumably ‘natural’ chasm, a rift expressive of an ‘inherent difference’ between literature and data. These performances of difference can take the form of contrast, arguments insisting on the categorical difference between the two. They can also take the form of ambiguation, attempts to blur a boundary that, in being thus challenged, is nevertheless acknowledged as present. In both cases, the border zone between data and literature becomes a zone of animated cultural contention. However, as with all binaries, these performances of difference are not evidence of a ‘natural’ alterity at all. Rather, and perhaps counter-intuitively at first, they are evidence of the intimate ties between the two; and of a cultural need, increasingly emerging in the nineteenth century and staying with us ever since, to repress these intimate ties—to view data and literature as inherently different and to thus keep unseeing how similar they are.

As this study approaches the matter, the relative cultural salience of literature and data accordingly does not lie merely in them being two symbolic forms—two modalities of textualizing the nation, the world, or experience generally, an aspect and a terminology I will return to below. Rather, data and literature matter culturally for how they engender two imaginaries that each come with rich cultural associations, that project different social enterprises, and that manifest in different cultural institutions. For the largest part, these associations are still with us today, they regulate how we think about books, about statistics, about authorship, about bureaucracy, and about many other aspects of culture past and present. Given this study’s disciplinary home in literary studies, my main interest in these associations, however, lies in the role the data imaginary has played in articulating the outlines of the literary. In other words: Thinking about data in the nineteenth century, and thinking about data by way of the data imaginary, allows me to focalize debates about the contours of literariness that played out in US culture in the nineteenth century and that continue to regulate our views of literature (and of literary studies) until today. Many of these debates are familiar to scholars of American studies, but they appear in a new light when engaged through the critical lens of the data imaginary.

This study hones in on four such debates to cover a comparatively large ground while still discussing each individual case in sufficient depth. The first of these is the antebellum concern for an American national literature and the transcendentalists' conflicting desires for this national literature to be at once 'democratic' and 'first rate'—different from yet on par with a European, 'aristocratic' standard of literariness. Registering how well data practices can represent the nation to itself, how they can capture aggregate democratic pluralities without submitting them to hierarchizing selectivity, the transcendentalists turned to the decidedly dataesque poetic of catalog rhetoric to integrate the egalitarian appeals of data in their literary project. My first chapter traces the ambivalences around this integration and the conceptual tensions that it caused for the then-developing literary field.

Staying with the appeals of catalog rhetoric, this study then zooms in on one individual figure, Walt Whitman, his formal innovations in lyric poetry, and these innovations' ties to knowledge work. It argues that Whitman—coming to literary writing from a much more general interest in information practices and continuing to be fascinated by a plurality of emerging technologies of representation—turned to the lyric in an effort to ambiguate the boundaries between symbolic forms, between literary and dataesque textualizations of the world, and between a 'mere' storage of experience and its refinement in literary texts: Only by being thus ambiguated could the literary host the dataesque storage desires Whitman invested it with. My chapter explores the formal expression of these storage desires in *Leaves of Grass*, and it traces their role in Whitman reception, as critics fought to contain them and to fix the Whitmanian ambiguities around the data-literature divide in strictly literary terms.

The third debate this study focuses on is another well-established site at which US culture negotiated the outlines and ambitions of literature, especially so regarding its political efficacy: abolitionism. The abolitionist movement found it difficult to effectively represent the full scope of slavery in ways that would overcome the hardened factionalism around the matter. Data, which projected an air of objectivity and of fact-driven, cool deliberation in face of heated national controversy, promised to resolve this impasse. While the abolitionist movement's function as an engine of textual innovation is widely recognized, its reliance on data has found only limited attention yet. Reading abolitionism's more broadly acknowledged use of the sentimental mode, its impulses toward realism, and its reliance on serial writing as 'datafying' strategies of denarrativization, my third chapter identifies a nexus between the abolitionists' reliance on data for political argument and their use of these three literary dispositions. Data's displacement from the literary, I argue, here parallels the 'minoritization' of these dispositions, their dismissal as 'subliterary,' and their relegation to the fringes of the literary.

Finally, a fourth cluster steps outside of the main time frame of this study. Using an extended, reflexive coda, I pull together three academic debates over the role of data in literary studies at the end of the nineteenth century, the middle of the twentieth, and the beginning of the twenty-first. In each of these three historical moments, controversies over the value and validity of data-driven, quantitative methods served to express conflicting visions of literary studies' potential and responsibility to be a socially invested, 'democratic' discipline. Indeed, as the final chapter will show, American (literary) studies keeps revisiting the data-literature divide, explicitly or implicitly, whenever the field's disciplinary workings appear to be in need of revision, or, more pointedly, whenever its disciplinary identity is called into question.

All four of the debates that are at the center of this book's four chapters are deeply familiar to scholars of American studies; all four have played an important role in the evolution of the discipline; and all four gain additional depth when seen against the backdrop of the data imaginary. In all four of these debates, US culture negotiates the outlines of the literary by turning to the foil of data. Moreover, and more specifically: In all four of these debates, the data-literature divide constitutes a (so far under-acknowledged) master trope by way of which US culture negotiates literature's relationship to society. This may seem paradoxical at first. After all, within the logic of the data imaginary, it is data, not literature, that effortlessly integrates with matters of society and that is uniquely suited to capture social totalities and to 'objectively' reflect the 'facts' of reality. But in all this, of course, data competes with literature, and this competition animates the boundary between the two. The data-literature divide, then, becomes an important site at which literature's role vis-a-vis society and its political valencies are being fought out and articulated both in competition to and in dialog with the representational aspirations of data. Many of the texts investigated in this study borrow representational strategies from data, or they make dataesque appeals. Often they obfuscate the boundary between literature and data. Often they do so while they themselves, or the critics discussing them, insist on this boundary's absolute, nonnegotiable clarity and solidity. This then ties in with another core finding: In how data and literature each get invested with contrasting meanings, functions, and aspirations, the data-literature divide comes to express a tension between a number of egalitarianisms, which cluster around data, and a number of elitisms, which cluster around literature. This is not to say that data *is* egalitarian, or that literature *is* elitist. Rather, it is to say that within the project of representing the young nation to itself, US culture encountered conflicting desires —for refined, artistic excellence and for simple, unmediated egalitarian representation—and the data-literature divide provided one location, and one conceptual framework, in which these conflicting desires could be spelled out.

1.2 Context: Fringe Literariness, Print Culture Studies, and Media History

In its interest in the contours of the literary and in these contours' evolution in the nineteenth century, this study joins a recent, ongoing wave of revisionist, historicist work in American studies. This revitalization of historicist inquiry has been building over the last fifteen or so years, it follows after and at times contrasts itself to the New Historicism, and it has at times thus been "called a 'third wave'" of historically inflected American studies scholarship (Werner 172). Work in this vein revisits the formation of literary culture in the nineteenth century, it asks for the concrete material and discursive conditions by way of which US culture "became bookish" during romanticism and after (Piper 3), and it aims to reconsider how this process played into the social and political national consolidation of the young republic.

I characterize this swell of recent historicist work as revisionist among other things for how it disrupts a well-established narrative about the relationship between print, literature, and nation, which is still circulating powerfully in the academy and in the popular imagination. In this narrative, a "coherent and connected print culture" in the early nineteenth century provides the ecosystem for a textual and, consequently, literary culture from which a similarly coherent national identity then emerges (Loughran xviii). In this traditional view, it is shared narratives, circulated widely and uniformly in a coherent print sphere, that end up tying together the nation; it is the "coherent narrative shape" that turns the "the inchoate ideas of the American people" into an effective, foundational "national myth" (Arac 24). This view is often deeply convincing, and it has indeed been widely popular for a long time. It is easy to see why. Such loose adaptations of Benedict Anderson's 1983 *Imagined Communities* are attractive to scholars in the humanities, and in literary studies in particular, for how they endow literature with social relevance. They are attractive culturally for how they invest the emergence of the nation with the teleological drive of narrative. They align the ‘imagined’ in Anderson’s “imagined communities” with the kind of imaginative work narrative fiction does, and they align a formal quality, cohesion, that they see in both narrative and literature with the same sense of cohesion that they identify in print culture and with the one that they envision as characterizing the nation. Put differently, in the traditional accounts, in which American national identity flowers from the rich soil of a coherent literary print culture, the formal properties of this print culture as well as the formal properties of the young republic’s nationalism come to mimic the formal properties of narrative: The cohesion of the print sphere and the cohesion of the narratives it circulates come to beget the cohesion of the nation.

Many of the recent, revisionist accounts of the relationship between literature and society, between print culture and national identity, break with this paradigm in a number of important ways to “destabilize ossified beliefs within American literary studies” (Gordon 534). Among other things, these studies tend to focus on the fragmented, disorderly quality of the nineteenth century’s textual ecosystem, thus characterizing it not so much as a homogeneous realm primarily of literary production but as a highly heterogeneous, fractured, chaotic information landscape full of conflicting, contradictory impulses at textualization that only seem meaningfully directed toward a shared national identity in hindsight. The image of the print sphere that these newer studies paint, in other words, is one characterized by fragmentation and information overload—too much material circulating in too incoherent a form to jibe with the earlier accounts.

It seems fitting that this revisionist view, invested in the incoherences and pluralisms of print culture and gaining traction in the first decades of the twenty-first century, emerges after the apogee of the narrative turn. It seems similarly fitting that it takes place at another “transitional” moment for print culture, a moment similarly marked by a sense of informational incoherence, of information overload, and of a loss of (grand) narrative coherence in culture; a moment in which print fully “goes digital” and in which “the transformations of print culture two centuries ago take on a new urgency” (Gordon 536). It is similarly unsurprising yet equally worth noting, finally, that this view draws its crucial impulses from academic fields that are in themselves located on the outer boundaries of literary studies and that have only marginal stakes in proving the social and political efficacy of literary narrative: media history, science studies, information studies, book history, and others.

Trish Loughran's seminal, 2007 monograph on *The Republic in Print* exemplifies several of these aspects well. Written as a "partial and [disciplinarily] hybrid endeavor, joining history, literature, and cultural theory in equal parts" (xxiii), the book aims to challenge the dominant view in which "America began [...] 'in print,'" when a nation of "readers and writers [...] organize[d] themselves collectively through the institutions of a thriving print culture." Working against this view, Loughran turns to the "numberless fragments and piece-fictions from which the United States literally produced itself" (xviii). Rather than in the cachet of literature and the coherence of (literary) narrative she is interested in the effects of the loose, the fragmented, and the inchoate. In thus shifting perspectives, her emphasis on "produced" here is characteristic. As she asserts, she is interested in, "quite literally, [the] issue of *building*" and the "essentially *material* business" of textuality (xvii), a programmatic emphasis that serves to counter the lure of the literary as it exerts itself in more traditional studies of nineteenth century literature. After all, her book, despite all its historicist thrust, stays firmly invested in the role of text in culture, and it constantly has to work against ingrained narratives of the importance of (long-form) literary texts and narrative cohesion. Challenging the existing accounts as "ahistorical, a postindustrial fantasy of preindustrial print's efficacy" in forging a coherent national narrative, she thus uncovers instead a plurality of "local and regional reading publics scattered across a vast and diverse geographical space," an information landscape in which "fragmented pieces of text circulated haphazardly and unevenly" (xix). In many ways, her account suggests, the publishing environment of nineteenth-century America was much closer to our current moment of data-driven 'filter bubbles' and fragmented, siloed and tribal micro-audiences than to the Andersonian, 1980s vision of a (still fairly) coherent nation held together by the circulation of (still fairly) coherent national narratives.

Phrased more narrowly in the disciplinary terms of American studies, then, the current wave of historicist inquiry is revisionist not least in how it turns to decidedly 'nonliterary' materials and practices to revisit and remap the canonical outlines of the literary. Earlier revisionist work in American literary studies had made its impact on the field by studying and rehabilitating presumably 'subliterary' genres of writing, texts that had been excluded from the canon as inferior in literary value, often by way of structural discrimination against their authors. This new wave of revisionist work, in turn, frequently focuses on forms of textual production that sit on the fringes of the literary altogether. It thus follows "what [Bruno Latour] calls a strategy of deflation—to look, that is, for more mundane phenomena": "documents," rather than the "more elevated uses of text, as in 'the literary'"—as Lisa Gitelman theorizes this interest in the nonliterary printed matter, be it historical or contemporary, in one of her studies (*Paper* 5; 6). In this sense, Peter Stallybrass's work on a printer's "little jobs" of broadsides and other single-sheet work (315), or Matthew P. Brown's discussion of the role of "the massive production of broadsides and blank forms" for the development of print culture are fairly extreme yet somewhat characteristic examples of this trend (228). Both engage textual materials that are about as far removed from literary aspirations as a printed work can be—artifacts of information culture, resonating with the bureaucratic not the bibliophilic, and yet nevertheless testifying to the "subjective life of their users" (229). In somewhat more moderate terms, work such as Jared Gardner's volume on early American magazine culture turns to miscellaneous fictional texts and their circulation in the periodicals of antebellum culture to identify, in these presumably lesser texts, "a consistent and radical attempt to revise and reimagine the function of literature and the role of the editor in the new republic" (6). And Meredith McGill's groundbreaking and influential study on the "culture of reprinting," of course, follows a similar interest in those apocryphal, small, highly mobile texts, circulating as "cheap reprints," that so far have failed to register in literary studies for their mundane, quotidian quality (*American* 1). All these studies embrace the fringe quality of their materials, and they typically do so by accentuating qualities of mass production, mass circulation, and high mobility—all of which are more closely associated to the information practices and cultural imaginations of data than to the literary. These cultural imaginations of data are an aspect I will return to in section 1.4 below.

In many cases, this revitalization of historical inquiry and this interest in the fringes of the literary then occasions not only an *expansion of* the archive to include materials that had slipped attention so far because they had been considered too mundane to justify serious study. It frequently also occasions a *return to* the archive—either in the form of an actual visit to physical archives in order to discover new materials, or by way of new, digital methods that allow for the inclusion of materials that have been digitized before but that had remained unstudied so far, due to their obscurity or their sheer mass. In this sense, this "return to the archive" is "*doubly* paradoxical in that the new age of archival research is made possible by advances in digitization" (Gordon 537). In many ways, it is the massive, indiscriminate digitization of material and its availability as 'not literature'—searchable, traversable 'raw,' perhaps even 'big,' data—that enables this new wave of archival work and, hence, this new vision of literary culture in the nineteenth century: "The stable, if limited, canon of literary texts in the early twentieth century and the expanded multicultural canon of the late twentieth century" thus "[give] way to the new print culture canon of the twenty-first century," writes Gordon (537). Undoubtedly, this new fascination with "archival reading" not only signals a desire for new materials, or a search for alternative critical modalities besides the "two dispensations" that hold considerable "sway in the [contemporary] humanities: postcritical reading—that is, the urge to rid literary studies of 'the hermeneutics of suspicion'" on the one side and "distant reading—that is, the machine-based tabulation of verbal content, where data mining becomes literary meaning" on the other (Brown 229). The emphasis on the material and nitty-gritty quality of archival 'field work' also serves to distinguish and emancipate this new wave of historicism from the New Historicism's embrace of generalization and wide-ranging association.

Another important facet of the iconoclast thrust in this current body of revisionist studies resides in how these approaches tend to work to (once more) decenter the author as an organizing figure for literary studies. At times this impulse stems from—and finds expression in—an interest in the presumably lesser figures of the printer and the editor, and in the presumably menial work of materially producing, building, redacting, and reassembling texts. This refocalization also indicates a shift of emphasis in how textual, even literary, practices are seen: more as a form of information work and less as a matter of creative origination. Indeed, these studies' heightened rhetoric around the materiality of their objects speaks eloquently of how they engage the ingrained cultural divide between 'art' and 'craft,' and of how they side with the down-to-earth materiality of print over the, in contrast, ethereal, artistic qualities of literature (if one subscribes to this dichotomy). It is the material, and the material practices of production and circulation, work in print culture studies regularly asserts, that played at least as much of a role in shaping the literary culture of the nineteenth century as the ‘authors’ and their ‘works’ did, and this assertion again often helps complicate the boundaries between more narrowly literary production and textual production in more general terms. And yet, as much as these studies emphasize their decentering of the presumably always-already dead author, figurations of the author here often play a crucial role in forging an interface between these studies’ intervention and more traditional literary studies—for example when McGill reads Dickens, Poe, and Hawthorne as part of her account of the de-emphasized authorship of the culture of reprinting.

In result these accounts tend to put forward a decidedly systemic view of literary culture. This view is often not fully spelled out or theorized in detail and instead informs them as a ‘vernacular,’ shared theoretical outlook, a *lingua franca* of sorts. As such, it brims with allusions to and resonances with Bourdieusian theories of literature as a “field,” Luhmannian “systems theory,” or various brands of network- and actor-network theory. Literary culture, in these accounts’ often tacit framework, is a social configuration of practices, objects, and discourses, that is not so much created by individual subjects, be they authors, editors, or printers, as it is generative of different subjectivities. McGill’s reconceptualization of *American Literature [as a] Culture of Reprinting*, then, is a prime example for both, the underlying theoretical assumptions and these assumptions’ mostly tacit nature. Her interest in the foundational role of “distribution,” “iteration,” and “circulation” heavily relies on figurations of the network, but her study hardly ever refers to networks *expressis verbis*, mentioning only sporadically “the material (but often invisible) social networks across which books travel” (*American* 6). The extent to which her thinking is underwritten by network theory, then, surfaces primarily in work that builds on hers, such as Ryan Cordell’s discussion of “Reprinting, Circulation, and the Network Author.” Combining digital humanities methodologies with social network analysis, his study proposes “the network author as an alternative model of antebellum authorship” that allows foregoing the “author as the central organizing trope” and that views literary culture as a conglomerate, an “assemblage” even, of “distinct textual events” (430). Indeed, if these revisionist studies’ most fundamental revisionary impulse for American studies lies in their view on literature as a matter (or a practice even) more of circulation and recirculation of fragmented material in partial, discontinuous public spheres and less as a result of creative origination galvanizing the attention of a cohesive reading public, this view is facilitated from the outset by such a conceptualization, tacit as it may often be, of the literary as a system, a network, or a field.

In reconstructing the fragmented and disorderly information landscape that was the nineteenth century's print culture, many of these revisionist studies choose information overload as a central, disciplinarily mobile organizing theme. This is true, for example, of Maurice Lee's *Overwhelmed: Literature, Aesthetics, and the Nineteenth-Century Information Revolution*, which is firmly situated in literary studies and literary history but which uses its interest in the "nineteenth-century information revolution" to re-perspectivize "the literary" vis-a-vis other, informational knowledge practices in ways that deeply and productively resonate with this study. Lee accordingly looks at how "the nineteenth century witnessed an unprecedented proliferation of information that shaped the content and uses of literature" and how this flood of information underwrites the emergence of "the literary" and "the informational" as two presumably distinct "domains" (4). This act of historicization triggers him to acknowledge that, "for all the talk of interdisciplinarity, the information/literature divide," focalized by his study, "remains powerfully ingrained" (5). A focus on information overload also facilitates work that comes, as it were, from the other side of the disciplinary divide and that self-identifies as media history, such as Ellen Gruber Garvey's *Writing With Scissors: American Scrapbooks from the Civil War to the Harlem Renaissance*. Garvey is interested less in the emergence of the category of the literary and more in the media practices that readers in the nineteenth century turned to in order to stem the flood of information they were faced with. Readers at the time, she argues, "felt inundated by printed matter as cheap newspapers [...] constituted a new category of media: cheap, disposable, and yet somehow tantalizingly valuable, if only their value could somehow be separated from their ephemerality" (*Writing* 3-4). In these accounts, 'information,' introduced via the notion of 'information overload,' thus emerges as a shared interest of this revisionist bent of literary studies, of media history, and of science studies (cf. Rosenberg, "Data" 17; A. Blair), and these accounts often use the concept in ways similar to how my study employs the concept of data. Indeed, Lisa Gitelman and Virginia Jackson accordingly characterize the nineteenth century as that "important moment when the concept of information—[a] close relative of data—finally emerged in something like its present form, as the alienable, abstract contents of an *inform*ative press" (10).

1.3 Method: Reading Through the Data Imaginary

Situating my study inside this ongoing wave of revisionist, historicist inquiry into nineteenth-century US print culture does not only determine its disciplinary location, as described above. This positioning also has a number of methodological implications for how I proceed. I will use the following pages to explore these in greater detail.

As it is with many of these newly revisionist studies, my systemic view on the literary is informed by Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of 'field' and 'field formation' and, to a considerably lesser extent, by Luhmannian notions of systems theory. The latter's value lies merely in how it emphasizes the tendency of socio-cultural systems to spawn subsystems marked by a relative autonomy and by their contradistinction to other subsystems. Seen thus, literature and data historically emerge as "partial systems" of modern, "functionally differentiated societies." As Robert Holub's discussion of this theory's import for literary studies puts it: "[W]ith the advent of modernity, literature [is] accorded its own sphere, and its connections or overlaps with other spheres [are] severed." In other words, as data practices gain prominence in the nineteenth century, the task of simply storing information, storing experience, gets relegated to these practices while the 'literary system' gains increasing autonomy. "[L]iterature as an autonomous or 'autopoietic' system [...] excludes former functions of literary works," leaving the mere storage of experience to data (Holub 148). Like newer, more extensive frameworks, such as Actor Network Theory, this view de-emphasizes the role of individual actors in bringing about the cultural transformations it describes—another aspect that dovetails with my own analytical outlook and my interest in more broadly discursive developments.

The Bourdieusian perspective, in turn, adds another aspect to my study. It is particularly helpful for how it focalizes the economies that drive such processes of differentiation, core among them an economy of cultural capital. As I will repeatedly show throughout the following chapters, conflicting value economies are perhaps the most important source for the powerful ambivalences that emerge at the data-literature divide. In the loosely adapted form in which it has come to thrive in the humanities, Bourdieu's framework thus informs this study in its entirety, but it is most explicitly evoked in chapter 2, where I discuss Fuller's "American Literature" as an extended act of field formation that operates by imagining a lack of (American) literature in face of an unprecedented abundance of writing and publishing in the US (beginning on page 86). Even there, however, I am not interested in developing, or even in lengthily spelling out, a full-fledged theory or in engaging in an extended discussion of Bourdieu's (or Luhmann's) framework. This study is, after all, not one about the applicability of a specific theory but one about a number of social and cultural developments as they inform the outlines of the literary. It is a study not in literary theory but in (a historicist branch of) literary studies.

Like many publications in this 'third wave' of revisionist, historicist literary inquiry, this study, too, has a somewhat ambiguous relationship to the figure of the author and to its role as a "central organizing trope" in literary studies (Cordell 430). My overall interest is in the data imaginary's role for the evolution of a particular form of literariness, and I thus conceptualize the emergence and increasing ossification of the data-literature divide as a cultural, discursive development, which clearly works to de-emphasize the role of individuals and individual authors. At the same time, many of my readings are in fact organized around individual works by individual authors. This may seem like a contradiction, but it is not. After all, I am using the author figure merely to forge an interface between cultural developments and literary history. This is most clearly visible in chapter 3, which is organized around the representative desires of Walt Whitman and which includes a full section (3.2 starting on page 134) on his biography. It does so, however, not to get at who Whitman really was but to work against the tendency, dominant in a lot of traditional (and traditionally author-centric) Whitman criticism, to engage in evaluative, aesthetic criticism.

Two other moments of ambiguity, then, are worth addressing here, not least because they are closely related: One is the role of 'nation' in this study. The historical rise of data and of data practices was, in fact, a decidedly transnational phenomenon, with many examples underscoring the extraordinary mobility across national borders of data sets, of data practices, and of actors in early data-driven forms of knowledge work (cf. Schulten). This transnational quality makes the history of data an ideal subject for transnational inquiry, and both transnational American studies' rise to a "generally accepted and widely used methodology" (Hornung and Morgan 2) and the tendency in revisionist, historicist scholarship to reconsider nineteenth-century print culture as “regional in articulation [but] transnational in scope” (McGill, *American* 1) would have suggested such a line of inquiry. This study, however, striving to unsettle a particular, preexisting, dominant narrative about ‘the literary’ in American studies, engages this narrative by questioning not the national boundedness but the presumably unambiguously ‘literary’ representational desires of those authors that are traditionally, canonically associated with the emergence of US national literature. In other words, it joins transnational American studies’ attacks on long-standing myths about national literature, but it does by asking about literariness, not nationhood.

For the same reason, my selection of case studies and of authors is ‘canonical’ in all the problematic meanings of the word: it lacks texts by authors of color, and it somewhat over-represents men. Again, this immediately follows from how this study engages the field of American studies. Even today contemporary revisionary accounts still work against the notion, deeply ingrained in the field’s vision of itself, that the “American Renaissance” is best described as a flowering of “Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman,” as the subtitle of F. O. Matthiessen’s foundational study has it. By discussing Emerson (in chapter 2) and Whitman (chapter 3), and by focusing on how their work mobilizes and reflects forms of “[e]xpression” that are decidedly not “[a]rt,” my study joins these efforts. It, again, does so not by unearthing or drawing attention to the contributions to American literature by minoritized actors, as more classically revisionist accounts would do, but by problematizing the category of the literary as these towering author figures have come to represent it. For what it is worth, my readings of Margaret Fuller, of Harriet Beecher Stowe, and of Sarah and Angelina Grimké reflect my attempt to offset the male bias in the traditional canon whenever doing so was possible within the confines of my larger argumentative trajectory (sections 2.3, 4.4 and 4.3, respectively). The Grimké sisters, however, are also an example of how the disparagement of data-driven knowledge work, its characterization as less valuable than artistic origination, frequently aligns with structural forms of discrimination, how some “romantic and racialized characters” come to be seen as “stand[ing] outside informational modernity” (Lee, *Overwhelmed* 5), and how certain forms of enormously taxing, crucial knowledge work are considered intellectually inferior in terms that are often gendered (cf. Garvey, *Writing* 240; Golumbia 12). The book they produced together with Theodore Weld, *American Slavery as It Is*, is even today often referred to as "Weld's book." In any event, the most explicit discussion of gender and data in this study happens in my section on Lucius Sherman and Willa Cather (section 5.2, especially the subsection starting on page 335), where I probe into the tensions between two different, colliding liberatory projects of social mobility—one about gender and one about class, one aligned with literariness and one with data-driven inquiry—that end up in a seemingly irreconcilable deadlock in deeply problematic yet richly suggestive ways.

Perhaps most poignantly, however, this study joins the current wave of revisionist scholarship simply by way of its main argumentative and analytic thrust: the question for the outlines of the literary, which it perspectivizes by engaging it through the lens of the data imaginary. After all, bearing witness to how nineteenth-century Americans struggled to proclaim the democratic potential of literature in light of data's egalitarian appeals, or to how they attempted to keep 'storage' an aspect of 'the literary' against powerful trends to separate the two, quickly ends up complicating core questions of American studies. It unveils, for example, that "the emergence of American literary narrative," the consolidation of fictional prose narrative as US literature's dominant genre, and the concomitant narrowing of the term 'literature' (Arac 2), happened alongside and in synchronicity with the increasing cultural presence of data and with the containment of dataesque representational desires in a realm of their own.

In another, more extensive example, reading nineteenth-century American literature through the data imaginary also spotlights how, even within prose narrative, the rise of data came to accompany structural realignments such as the minoritization of a number of individual prose genres—their disparagement as too popular or too much aligned with mass audiences to count as literature proper. I discuss these developments in more detail in chapter 4 (starting on page 244), when I look at, e.g., serial writing and sentimentalism as literary 'dispositions' that end up being thus minoritized. As I will show, this process is closely tied to their narratively depleted (or: denarrativized) quality—a quality that does in fact align them with the symbolic form of data. These moments of synchronicity take on an additional layer of meaning if one conceptualizes narrative as a symbolic form that competes with that of data, a framework I will unfold in more detail in the following section. While previous discussions of data and narrative (or of database and literature) have thus cast the two as “enemies” or as “symbionts” (Hayles, “Narrative”), my interest in the cultural negotiation of the boundary of literature and data prompts me to be interested more in the dynamic processes of contrast and conversion that happen in the liminal border area between the two. This allows me, for example, to reconceptualize abolitionism’s investedness in serial and sentimental writing as a ‘republican reading practice’ precisely because it engages this boundary zone: Both, the more openly dataesque abolitionist date gathering projects and the narratively depleted genres of prose narrative train readers to convert non-narrative material into a narrative form and vice versa. In this example, the much-discussed political efficacy of prose narrative in American culture, a core scene of American literariness that American studies returns to again and again, undergoes a crucial revision. As my study argues (particularly so in section 4.2), it is not merely the power of narrative that allowed abolitionist texts to do cultural work; it is also these texts’ readiness to engage the liminal boundary between data and literature, and their willingness to keep crossing this boundary together with their readers, that makes these texts politically powerful.

This book’s interest in the evolution of the contours of the literary also impacts the selection of primary texts in other ways: A number of these texts stand, in one way or another, on the fringes of the literary. Both Margaret Fuller’s “American Literature” and Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “The Poet” are at least as much texts *about* literature as they *are* literature (cf. sections 2.3 and 2.4, respectively). Similarly, both Stowe’s *A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and Weld, Grimké, and Grimké’s *American Slavery as It Is* are examples of texts that formally test the boundaries of the literary as it is commonly understood (cf. sections 4.3 and 4.4). All four, at the same time, orient themselves toward questions of literariness, and all four, as I will show in detail in the respective chapters, encapsulate rich debates about the outlines of the literary.

This book’s interest in the evolution of the literary vis-a-vis data also prompts me to look into the role the (evolving) discipline of literary studies has played in contouring literariness, and into the role the symbolic form of data has played in the underlying processes of field formation. This prompts me to repeatedly take a decidedly meta-reflexive stance, most extensively so in chapter 5, an extended coda that steps outside of the time frame of the bulk of this study to probe into three different inflection points in the history of American literary studies—points in which the discipline turned to the data-literature divide in order to negotiate its own *modus operandi* and its relationship to society. It similarly informs a longer reflexive passage in chapter 3, where I use a methodological excursion into the digital humanities, a data-driven reading of all seven major editions of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, as an occasion to meditate on the epistemic desires of traditional literary studies vis-a-vis those of the digital humanities. A heightened awareness for how the discipline of literary studies is complicit in bringing about the object, literariness, that I am interested in, however, also triggers me to approach a number of pieces of 'secondary literature,' literary criticism and literary studies scholarships, from a position that is best described as a hermeneutic of suspicion, asking for example for how Whitman criticism has participated in exactly the kind of boundary drawing between literature and data, between "Song" and "Inventory" that the poet's lyricism sets out to subvert (section 3.3).

Understanding criticism as a discourse that participates in enunciating my object of study and that is thus potentially complicit in bringing about the very dynamics I intend to study, simultaneously creates certain sympathies between my own project and a recent wave of 'critiques of criticism.' I phrase this as carefully as I do because my own reading practice is not at all fittingly described by the registers typically associated with this "postcritical" wave (Felski, *Limits* 12). By and large, this book does not feature "surface readings" (Best and Marcus) or "reparative readings" (Sedgwick 123, cf. pages 368 and 378 for a discussion of these critical modalities). In fact, my readings here overall are quite solidly anchored in a 'symptomatic,' close-reading tradition: They try to tease out, again and again, those moments of ambivalence that, I claim, point to underlying tensions in my texts, and to the strenuous work these texts do in order to keep literature and data apart. And yet, there are two locations in which these sympathies for a post-critical disposition show: One is my attention to and appreciation of the visual quality with which some of my texts operate an aesthetic of the dataesque—for example by arranging textual material in tables. In encountering such instances, I have repeatedly decided not to describe but to reproduce these forms. After all, there are visual modes of communication here, and decidedly visual pleasures, that I want to relay not by analyzing or critiquing them, thus transcribing and containing them in the limitingly linear logic of (critical) narrative, but by reproducing these print surfaces in all their suggestiveness.

The same holds for other visual elements in this study that, at first glance, seem to sit uneasily with a literary-studies methodology and interest. My quantitative, data-driven reading of *Leaves of Grass* is a case in point: It largely consists of a discussion of twelve charts, some of which serve a more narrowly argumentative, critical purpose (e.g. Fig. 12, 14, 15, and 16). A subset of these charts, however, is meant not primarily to argue but to translate one aesthetic experience, which Whitman's literary project here pursues, into a different aesthetic and experiential register. The goal therefore is to make, for example, the permutations of lines in *Leaves of Grass* visually experienceable in addition to reading them in a critical fashion (cf. Fig. 10, Fig. 11, or Fig. 8). In the same spirit I have at times included visualizations of the structure of the more unwieldy and critically lesser-known primary texts (e.g. on page 263). Again, my intention here was not only to make it easier for my readers to understand the structure of the texts I discuss but to acknowledge, not just in words but in deeds, the "limits of critique" (Felski)—or the limits of critical articulation in linear, cohesive textual atusform, to spell things out more narrowly. The same impulse also informs a digital companion to this study, online at www.data-imaginary.de/companion, that contains animated and interactive versions of some of these charts, thus acknowledging the value of the ludic as another register, next to the visual and the narrative, of *experiencing* that section's analytic work.

Indeed, writing about different symbolic forms, about different modalities of representation, and about the limitations of the linear, narrative form—which is not only the dominant mode of US literature but also the dominant mode of academic argument—necessarily leaves its traces in different places of one's work. One of these is the overall structure of this study. It is not meant to suggest a teleological progression, an increasing unfolding of the data imaginary over time despite these chapters' loosely chronological order. Rather, each chapter is designed as a comparatively self-contained investigation into one debate or set of debates, each coming with an extensive discussion of the contexts it evokes, the existing scholarship on these contexts, and the methods employed. Arranged more as individual excursions, like petals on a flower (cf. Fig. 1 on page 7), the chapters reprise individual themes and aspects—the catalog, denarrativization, massification, and so on—and they strive as much for the cohesion of iteration, of massification, or of networking as they do for linearly unfolding a point. The graphical index I have included in the (verso) margins of these print pages thus is another expression of this study's attention to different symbolic forms. It is meant not (only) as a gimmick, and not just as a nod toward the nineteenth century's fascination with indexes and indexes of indexes, or toward Whitman's vision of a "World Index" (Rosenberg, "Early" 9; cf. also page 158). It is also meant as a constant material, visual reminder of the limitations of the linear form, and as an invitation to think about this study not just as offering a cohesive, narrative argument that unfolds from the first to the final page (which, of course, it also does), but as a 'collection' of, or a 'container' for, multiply interlinked thoughts, concepts, and words (which, of course, it also is).

1.4 Data and the Data Imaginary

The increasing institutionalization of digital methodologies in academia over the last two decades, and the widespread acknowledgment that digitization is fundamentally altering societies, cultures, and senses of self and community, has led to an increase of academic research into the history of data and to a raised awareness that this history begins before the arrival of computers. Over the past few years, a vibrant and rapidly growing, interdisciplinary body of scholarship has thus started to emerge that identifies data as a 'pattern' or 'form' of modernity (Nassehi). American studies—understood as a culturally inflected branch of literary studies and therefore as invested, as it were, in 'form' and in society —is in a unique position to add to this.

However, detaching the form, data, from the physical device we most immediately associate it with, the computer, comes with risks, and a number of studies on the cultural presence of data before the computer indeed "go too far" in positing "continuity" (Lee, *Overwhelmed* 7). They take on a certain formulaic quality as they look into the mirror of historical inquiry to discover, always pleasantly surprised, in nineteenth-century information practices not just ancestors to but versions of our contemporary ones. No doubt: it is possible to argue that one can trace the beginning of the information age to the Sumerians, or to the sixteenth and seventeenth century, or to the nineteenth (cf. Groes). And there certainly is value in looking at the telegraph as a "Victorian Internet" (Standage), or in acknowledging that "Whitman's vision is also Google-like in its understanding that the interests of others determine what becomes interesting" (Freedman 1598). In all these cases, contemporary experiences with data operate as a metaphor. In the rediscoveries of contemporary practices in past ones, in the realization that 'they' were not so different from 'us,' applying a contemporary concept to understand a past one is enlightening. It is also, almost always, grossly distorting. Acknowledging the pastness of the past, my interest in this study is considerably more historicist. After all, data and data-driven practices *did* enjoy a marked cultural presence long before the computer, and this presence, in all its historical specificity and alterity, is crucial for understanding both: the emergence of a distinctly American notion of literariness, that this book is focused on, and the forms of modernity that form its backdrop.

This twin impulse—to acknowledge the cultural presence of data before the computer and to value historical alterity—informs my terminology and my framework for thinking about data in the nineteenth century. In thus historicizing data, my intention here, as throughout this study, is to think about shifts in the technologies for processing data—the invention of the Hollerith machine, the introduction of transistors, the popularization of personal computers—neither as mere continuity, which would mean assuming an identity between 'their' practices and 'ours,' nor as a chain of periodizing ruptures that mark stages teleologically leading up to data as we know it. Instead, my intention is to use 'data' and its growing cultural presence in the eighteen-hundreds as one of those "points in time and imagination" an attention to which can "set many forms of American speech in motion, so that different forms [...] can be heard speaking to each other" (Marcus and Sollors xxiv). In this sense, my interest in data as a symbolic form and in the history of data as a set of social practices constitutes a focalizing lens, not an interest in itself.

1.4.1 What is Data (and When)?

In the sense in which it matters for this study—as a particular form of storing and transmitting experience that is tied to distinct practices and that is capable of spawning individual socio-cultural institutions—data increasingly emerges in the early eighteenth century, as statistics grow increasingly refined and gain traction. Philosopher of science Ian Hacking traces these developments in particularly rich terms, noticing how the increasingly widespread application of statistics led not only to a sense of "statistical fatalism" but to a decline of determinism and concomitant rise of probabilistic thinking at the beginning of the nineteenth century.[1] It was then that statisticians discovered that probabilities can emerge from large data sets, and that they are remarkably stable for large sample sizes, an effect they referred to as the "law of large numbers." Paradoxically, giving up on strict notions of determinism, on tightly-knit, cohesive logics, allowed for new, seemingly looser, probabilistic laws, that were even more stable than deterministic ones precisely because they did not prescribe rigid cause-effect patterns but mere correlations of probability.[2]

Hacking's work matters for this study not least for how it establishes a relationship between wide-ranging changes in consciousness and what he calls an "avalanche of printed numbers" manifesting in a "flourishing trade in numerical facts" among professionals and amateurs (Hacking, *Taming* 2; viii). Honing in on another one such change in consciousness, Hacking notes that statistics, the data application *par excellence*, are intimately tied to the (imagination of the) nation state. Statistics are, after all, the science of the state, all the way down to the etymology of the word. In this sense, the data practices of statistics are inextricable from the practical, political act of counting and accounting for the citizens, and from establishing modern, biopolitical regimes. At the same time, in how they facilitated accounting for masses of citizens, they speak of a related but more abstract epistemic desire to account for masses and multitudes. In any event, these statistical practices paved the way for thinking about people in the aggregate, as classes.[3]

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[1] "Statistical fatalism" describes the sense the mortality rate 'prescribes' the number of deaths with inescapable certitude. Hacking writes: "If it were a law that each year so many people must kill themselves in a given region, then apparently the population is not free to refrain from suicide. The debate, which on the surface seems inane, reflects increasing awareness of the possibilities of social control, and implications for moral responsibility" (*Taming* x).

[2] This rethinking of determinism is indeed similar to theories of big data, which tend to value correlation over causation. I will return to this point a few pages down (42).

[3] Hacking asks: "[W]ho had more effect on class consciousness, Marx or the authors of the official reports which created the classifications into which people came to recognize themselves?" (*Taming* 3). As Hacking explains, statistics are tied to the emergence of the biopolitical control regimes of the modern nation state not least in how they enable new notions of normalcy and deviance. Cf. also Bouk.

As Hacking suggests, and as John Durham Peters spells out in much more detail, the simultaneity between the rise of the nation state and the rise of statistics is indeed no coincidence, and his reference to Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* underscores how close his account is to my interests here:

> The scale of the modern state presents its managers and citizens with a problem: it is out of sight and out of grasp. It must be made visible. Anderson (1983) quite brilliantly argues that modern nation states are "imagined communities." He shows how novels and newspapers, whose flowering as forms of communication coincides with the rise of modern states in the eighteenth century, provided some of the means by which people could envision a vast community of fellow nationals all intimately linked at a distance. [...] Statistics, like newspapers, novels, and encyclopedias, have the aim of representing entities too large for an empiricism based on the individual's senses. They are a tool for rendering the invisible visible, for making that which one could formerly only imagine into something factual and manageable. (Peters 14)

All four, novels and newspapers as well as encyclopedias and statistics, thus afford their readers what Peters calls "panoramic vision." They give a glimpse at a totality otherwise unthinkable, and this puts readers in a "curious position. They know something that they can never experience for themselves. [...] Statistical data (information) are of course gathered by mortals, but the pooling and analysis of them creates an implied-I that is disembodied and all-seeing" (15). For an Americanist, it is almost impossible to read these lines and not think of Emerson's similarly disembodied and all seeing "transparent eye-ball"—and to wonder more fundamentally about how data here quite unexpectedly modulates the juncture between romanticism and the nation state.

However, in the US even more so than in other countries, the middle of the nineteenth century is not just a time in which data-driven methods of representing reality gain in traction. As Philip Fisher points out, looking at the middle of the nineteenth-century, the period of national consolidation and the lead-up to the Civil War, brings to the fore "the power of rhetorics, incomplete dominance of representation, and the borrowing or fusing of successful formulas of representation" (xv). By engaging the rise of the data imaginary in the context of the literary, my study is interested in data precisely as one such "formula of representation" that was indeed borrowed, fused, and adapted in the socio-textual struggles of the time. As a formula of representation, it is marked by a number of qualities, and four of these are particularly relevant to my study. All four contrast data with narrative, an aspect I will return to in more detail in the next subsection. For now, I will first describe each of these characteristics of data in the briefest terms possible:

Most consequentially, data typically consists of information that is discontinuous and that is not bound together by linear logics of causality. There is no internal, cohesive logic to a collection of data points other than that they presumably all represent a reality that is external to them. This is most easily understood if one thinks of data as mere numbers, but data does not have to be numerical and many of the examples in this study are not. Even these examples, however, often contain data that is discrete. That is, it reflects categories rather than continua; when data is used to represent a continuum, it breaks up this continuum into (potentially many) categories. Much of data's ability to abstract from the concrete stems from this discrete quality, the representation of continua by way of categories. I will repeatedly use the term "morselization," borrowed from the work of Ellen Gruber Garvey, who in turn takes it from Geoffrey Nunberg, to refer to the process of breaking up cohesive, narrative accounts of experience into discrete particles that, in consequence, are more mobile, more accessible, and that more freely combine.

Precisely because it does not follow an internal logic of linear, causal, cohesive development, data is, secondly, typically optimized for random, arbitrary access. After all, data collections are usually not read from beginning to end. Encyclopedias, one possible example of such a collection, order information not by semantic proximity but by alphabet, and population tables, another example, order their content not in ways that are meant to create suspense, to generate a semantic surplus, as it were, but to reduce ambiguity and improve access. As these examples show, efficient, random access can be implemented by how data is stored—and tables, nineteenth-century precursors of today's digital databases, are a prime example of that. It can also be achieved by adding indices to otherwise linear storages. In fact, nineteenth-century information workers were fascinated by the representational possibilities of indices and meta-indices, envisioning ways in which all information might be made accessible by such indices of indices, or even a world index (cf. page 158 below). In any case, the storage of data typically foregrounds access in ways that accentuate and exploit the material's morselized quality.

Similarly, because it is not organized by linear causality, data is well-suited to handle incompleteness. A collection of data does not stop making sense when the ‘beginning’ is missing or when it is overall sparse. In fact, not least because data is usually discrete, one might argue that it is inherently incomplete. The turn to data thus, in almost all cases, entails the acknowledgment that knowledge is always incomplete and expandable, a shift that is structurally similar to that from deterministic laws (that try to account for every occurrence) to probabilistic ones (that try to account for many) in statistics. As Miles Orvell points out, “one of the key patterns” nineteenth-century US culture was fascinated with were forms that facilitated the “containment of an infinitely expandable number of parts in an encompassing whole.” He identifies this principle at work in the encyclopedia, but also in “the gallery, the panorama, and the exhibition hall” (342). The Dewey Decimal Classification system, introduced in 1876, is another prime example of such a system the central intellectual innovation of which was its ability to be infinitely expanded—which paradoxically entails recognizing that any given collection is and will continue to be incomplete.

Finally, all these qualities speak to data’s aggregative drive toward massification. In data collections, more is usually better, not least because there is the assumption that the entries in a data collection are all potentially flawed samples of reality: measurements that merely approximate the real. In this logic, adding more samples allows for averaging out the individual data point’s individual defects. Data, in this sense, is emphatically not about any one individual data point, imagined, for example, as crystallizing meaning in particularly illuminating a way, but about the massification of such points so that the individual matters less.

1.4.2 Data and/as Symbolic Form

All four qualities listed above can be characterized as contrasting data with narrative, and Lev Manovich makes exactly this point in what is likely the most widely referenced discussion of data in literary and cultural studies. In his 1999 “Database as Symbolic Form,” he draws on Erwin Panofsky’s *Perspective as Symbolic Form* to claim that “database and narrative are natural ‘enemies’”—two fundamentally conflicting modalities of capturing, storing, and relaying experience.[4] They are “enemies" because "each claims an exclusive right to make meaning out of the world." In this view, narrative is marked by how it superimposes order on events, it "creates a cause-and-effect trajectory of seemingly unordered items," while "database represents the world as a list of items which it refuses to order" (85). This distinction is crucial to Manovich's take on the matter, but it also underwrites more broadly anthropological understandings of narrative. Indeed, the claim that "man [sic] is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal" (MacIntyre 216; cf. W. R. Fisher 7), so crucial to the narrative turn, rests on exactly this understanding of narrative as a fundamental way of making sense of the world by ordering it; by, in other words conceptually subjecting it to narrative's "cause-and-effect trajectories."

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[4] Manovich’s use of the term “database” is so similar to my use of the term data that I will use the two interchangeably throughout.

Manovich's references to Panofsky's "symbolic form" remain relatively vague, and Panofsky's text does little to narrow down the term's meaning in ways that are productive for such a cultural studies (or: new media studies) perspective. As Manovich uses 'symbolic form,' and as I use it in this study, it constitutes an additional register of classifying significatory practices in addition to the more established ones of medium, genre, or mode. A symbolic form is one way of "mak[ing] meaning," of capturing, storing, and transporting experience that is easy to confuse with—but that should be understood as independent of—medium. In fact, because different media afford some symbolic forms more readily than others, we tend to think of shifts in symbolic forms as shifts in media, which they are not. In consequence, a number of discussions of changes in modes of signification in nineteenth-century culture that read these changes as related to medium could easily and productively be rephrased as being about changes in symbolic form.

As Manovich further explains by drawing on the "semiological theory of syntagm and paradigm" first spelled out by Ferdinand de Saussure and generalized by Roland Barthes, the symbolic form of narrative foregrounds the syntagmatic connection of individual items, events, characters, or formal features, which are thus fully present in the artifact at stake, and it keeps their paradigmatic alternatives absent as mere potential, something that could have been chosen but was not:

> Particular words, sentences, shots, or scenes that make up a narrative have a material existence; other elements which form an imaginary world of an author or a particular literary or cinematic style and which could have appeared, only exist 'virtually.' Put another way, the database

> of choices from which narrative is constructed (the paradigm) is implicit; while the actual narrative (the syntagm) is explicit. (89)

The situation is inverse when experience is stored in a database. Now the paradigm, the full plurality of material is explicit, present all at once for ‘readers’ to interactively choose from, while the narrative that can be constructed from this material is implicit, only latently present as one of many, similarly latent, unrealized possibilities.

Throughout, Manovich here understands “traditional” narrative as inherently linear, a view this study also follows (87). This is obviously not to suggest that narratives are always told in linear fashion. In fact, they rarely are. In narratological terms, the “narrative discourse” of almost all narratives is marked by analepses and prolepses, to name just the two most common devices of nonlinearity in storytelling (Abbott 16). Rather, it is to point out that the symbolic form of narrative so much turns on causality, order, and the meaningful, syntagmatic cohesion of individual events that it projects an underlying logic of linearity. It assumes a world at least potentially ‘in order.’ Accordingly, Manovich’s use of the term “traditional” here is not to distinguish, say, realist narratives from the presumably less traditional (post-/)modernist ones. In terms of fiction writing, both movements have tended to produce “traditional” narratives, which project an underlying, identifiable, and meaningful order of events even if the “narrative discourse” in which these events are relayed might obfuscate this order, and even if some of the more avant-garde versions of (post-/)modernist storytelling might test the boundaries of the narrative form. The counterpart to “traditional narrative,” as Manovich understands it, is the “hypernarrative” or the “interactive narrative”—terms he uses to describe cultural artifacts, such as the database, that, in their material construction, do not offer a single narrative but a range of materials from which “users” (rather than ‘readers’) can then construct different narratives of their own.[5]

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[5] The most intuitive, popular example for such a hypernarrative structure may be the video game, which allows players to construct multiple narratives, each ordered in linear fashion but each different from the others, from a single source. Another one is the choose-your-own-adventure book. For a discussion of these two, along with ‘mind-twist movies,’ as all implementing a “ludic textuality” and as thus situated in between the symbolic forms of narrative and play, cf. Schubert. For a related argument that pits the nonlinearity of, say, modernist storytelling against the nonlinearity of texts that require material interaction, cf. Espen Aarseth’s remarks on what

Manovich develops his view in the context of new media studies, and his primary interest is in how contemporary, often interactive, often visual new media installations are able to foreground database principles by letting viewers choose from a database of material they present. In his view, the postmodern moment marks, finally, database's (tentative) triumph over narrative—the (tentative) endpoint in an epic struggle raging between these two forms for millennia. This assertion is shaped by Manovich's characterization of database and narrative as fundamentally oppositional: "two competing imaginations, two basic creative impulses, two essential responses to the world" (92). Judging from its reception in other scholarship, one core appeal of Manovich's framework indeed seems to be this binarism it projects.[6] Even though he at one point warns that "database and narrative produce endless hybrids" (92), scholars using his framework have again and again been drawn to and have chosen to uphold this structuring binary opposition.

This study, in turn, is more interested in the dynamic processes of contrast and translation that happen in the border zone between database and narrative. It recognizes the appeal of Manovich's distinction and the value of his theorization of database and narrative as symbolic forms, but it also recognizes the ahistorical thrust of a framework built on a Manichean distinction between two fundamentally oppositional realms. Accordingly, I use Manovich's basic setup to ask for the cultural and more narrowly textual processes by way of which material travels between these two symbolic forms, and for how the differences between these forms are shored up, invested with cultural meanings.[7] On the one

he calls "ergodic literature" (1). Whereas both Schubert and Aarseth here position 'play' as a counterpart to narrative, I will regard the lyric as another symbolic form that borders narrative but is different from it further down in chapter 3 of this study (127).

[6] One example that is particularly pertinent for this study is Ed Folsom's discussion of the relationship between Whitman and database (cf. page 135). Folsom uses Manovich's original opposition of narrative and database as two enemies, to which N. Katherine Hayles replies that the term should be "natural symbionts" rather than "natural enemies"—a shift in terminology that changes the affective charge of the relationship but that conspicuously leaves the two forms' categorical alterity in place ("Narrative" 1603).

[7] This particular view heavily draws on the conceptual work done by the narrative liminality working group, a research network funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). This is true of the more general focus on the borders rather than the 'heartlands' of narrative forms, for the interest in the consolidation or transgression of these boundaries, but also for the

hand, this simply acknowledges that the symbolic form of database, offering an archive of paradigmatic materials, affords or even invites interactions that reap from this collection individual, meaningful manifestations: Data only begins to matter once it is engaged, translated, not least, into narrative form. Such translation can also involve other symbolic forms. Manovich already points to the ludic, arguing that many computer games can be regarded as databases of characters and events, and that they thus invite players to engage them ludically (83). Similarly, visualizations of data can take an intermediary position between the 'raw' data and its narrative meaning, often *suggesting* some interpretations of the data more than others.

On the other hand, my interest in troubling the border between database and narrative stems from how I adapt Manovich's framework for this study. I do so primarily by understanding broadly his notion of database to regard 'data' as a symbolic form, a shift more in emphasis than in substance, and by contrasting it not with 'narrative' but with what I call 'the literary.' With this, I do not mean to suggest that narrative and literature are synonyms. Rather I mean to draw attention to the fact that the cultural institution of literature was constructed in opposition to the symbolic form of data and to the cultural institutions that this latter form spawned. Literature, in its modern, institutionalized form that increasingly gained contours in the nineteenth century, was imagined as different from, or even as incompatible with, data, and the rise to dominance of narrative genres in this conception of the literary, especially in the US, might be one effect of this contrast.

Finally, in order to thus focus not on database and narrative as two warring symbolic forms, but on the cultural processes of negotiation that take place in the border zone between them, I regard a given artifact's allegiance to these forms as gradable rather than absolute. A text may thus be dataesque, ludic, or narrative to varying extents. The importance of such gradability surfaces in my frequent use of adjectives rather than nouns (characterizing artifacts as dataesque rather than characterizing them as data or databases) and in my use of nominalized adjectives ('the dataesque,' 'the literary') rather than nouns (data, literature) whenever possible.

use of a vocabulary borrowed mostly from postcolonial studies to think about these liminal areas in-between symbolic forms (cf. Herrmann et al.).

1.4.3 The Rise of the ‘Data Imaginary’

My inquiry into data’s role in shaping the contours of the literary in nineteenth-century America, and my interest in data as a symbolic form, then, does not attempt to simply identify (trans)historical formal properties and reading these through the critical lens of a contemporary technological terminology. Rather, this study acknowledges that, in the nineteenth century as much as today, data matters for how it mobilizes cultural imaginations: how people think about data, how they think about their world through data, what they associate with this form, and what representational desires they express through it. Data, in this view, matters for the cultural work the symbolic form does, and this cultural work is being afforded by its formal qualities, but it is in no way exhaustively explained by them.

It is this loose web of historically contingent, grown, cultural meanings, associations, and investments that the term ‘data imaginary’ is meant to capture. While the main goal of this book is to explore the contouring of literariness—a process that I regard as one facet of this cultural work of data—doing so will also compel me to map the data imaginary as a cultural presence in nineteenth-century America. I will do so by querying, again and again, into the cultural investments and representational desires my individual primary texts express as they draw on data as a form.

As I will thus show in more detail throughout this study, the data imaginary is a site of deep-seated ambivalence that continues to this day. On the one hand, data is frequently associated with a bureaucratization of society, and with the “control revolution” in ‘Western’ societies around the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century (Beniger).[8] Here, the sense that data, by way of its formal qualities, thrives on massification and aggregation and that it thus diminishes individualism turns it into a potent cultural signifier, a unifying trope for bringing together critical sentiments regarding large-scale social organization, mass culture, and those panoptic control regimes that are based in a distinction between normalcy and deviance. This critical stance has surged in the last two decades for a range of cultural and historical reasons, particularly so in the humanities and in social circles associated with them (see 5.4 for a more in-depth discussion of this take on data as a crisis discourse), but its roots obviously reach back into the nineteenth century. After all, the very terms in which this discourse phrases its rejection of data—as rationalist, as utilitarian, as technocratic, as oriented toward mass rather than toward the individual, and so on—deeply resonate with romantic critiques of modernity.

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[8] To James Beniger, the nineteenth century was marked by a fundamental crisis of control, in which the explosive growth of productivity overloaded established feedback and control mechanisms and new information technologies were needed to make sure that information flows could keep up. Cf. also Nicholas Carr’s description of this crisis (193).

This critical discourse has as its mirror image a more positive one that, too, continues to enjoy great cultural currency. David Golumbia, in his *Cultural Logic of Computation* sardonically refers to this positive vision of data as an "upbeat 'democratization of information'" discourse (5), and this phrasing already gives away one of its key features: The positive vision of the data imaginary turns on the association of data with democratic egalitarianism and with informational transparency. In its current incarnation, this surfaces in the claim that big data marked the "end of theory," in the tenet that "information wants to be free," or in the recent popularity of data-driven journalism, to name just three examples.[9] This discourse, too, has its roots in the nineteenth century, where it is underwritten by the opposition between democracy and aristocracy. In this view, data's formal properties, its foregrounding of mass and its equalitarian uniformity, are seen to correspond to the egalitarian ideals of (direct) democracy, both metaphorically and literally. This association is further boosted by the naive sense that data reflects reality plainly and objectively, that it delivers 'pure facts,' as opposed to narrative whose internal logics and emotional valencies more readily allow for manipulating distortions. In this view, narrative can easily cross over into both 'ideology' and fiction, but data presumably cannot.

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[9] In an article in *WIRED* in 2008, Chris Anderson argued that in the age of big data, information "at the petabyte scale" made increasingly "obsolete" the scientific method to "hypothesize, model, test." In place of the scientific method's assumption of laws of causal interrelatedness, "dimensionally agnostic statistics" sufficed: "Correlation supersedes causation, and science can advance even without coherent models, unified theories, or really any mechanistic explanation at all." On "information wants to be free" and hacker ethic, cf. Rockwell and Berendt. On data journalism, and particularly on its genealogical roots in Progressivism, in turn-of-the-century social science, and in its "mania for 'data collection'" cf. C. W. Anderson (2). On this general stance, note Gitelman and Jackson's observation that the "very idea of objectivity as the abnegation, neutrality, or irrelevance of the observing self turns out to be of relatively recent vintage. Joanna Picciotto has recently suggested that 'the question raised by objectivity is how innocence, traditionally understood to be a state of ignorance, ever came to be associated with epistemological privilege'" (4; cf. Picciotto 1).

Views of data as a particularly democratic form thus turn on (and further culturalize) an epistemic bifurcation in which facts and opinions form a binary. For democracy to work, this logic dictates, citizens must be able to agree on facts, expressed by data, and they must be willing to tolerate differences in opinion, which are more narrative—based in but different from facts/data. It is this connection between data, democracy, and objectivity that facilitates a plethora of positive associations around data. It draws a straight line from the abolitionists' use of data to argue against slavery simply by exposing it "as it is" (cf. section 4.2, and page 235 and following in particular) to social reportage and data-driven muckraking journalism of the Progressive Era all the way to contemporary forms of data journalism.

With early data applications, such as statistics, reaching back further, the middle of the nineteenth century thus constitutes a key inaugural moment in the history not so much of data, which is older, but of the data imaginary as we know it. Geoffrey Nunberg accordingly points out that it was then that the meaning of "information" fundamentally changed, taking on its "abstract sense" as a substance of its own (111). This shift, Garvey summarizes Nunberg's argument, transforms information from being seen as "the productive *result* of the process of being informed to a *substance* that could be morselized and extracted in isolated bits" ("Facts" 91). A similar observation is made by James W. Carey, who credits the telegraph with achieving, for the first time, the separation of "communication from transportation" (3), thus making it possible to imagine pure information as a kind of substance, data, that can be sent through wires. Encapsulated in these shifts in the meaning of the words 'information' and 'communication,' then, is the acknowledgment that the middle of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of a newly imagined, immaterial yet tangible cultural object: abstract information, which was detached from its material carriers and from specific circumstances, which was characterized by its morselization and standardization, which was remarkably mobile, and which thus formed a substance in its own right. It is here, in this reification of information as an abstract, immaterial 'thing' that exists independent of its carrier media, that the data imaginary begins to truly take shape.

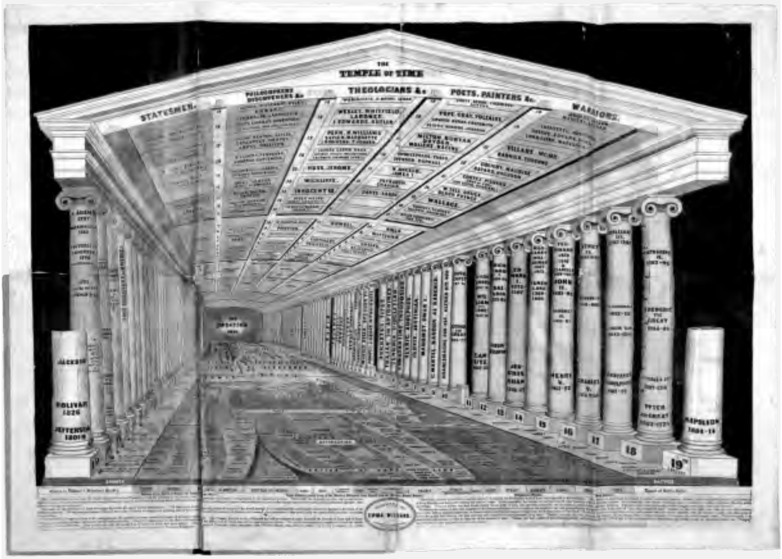
THE TEMPLE OF TIME
STATESMEN
PHILOSOPHERS DISCOVERERS &c
THEOLOGIANS &c
POETS, PAINTERS &c
WARRIORS
JACKSON
BOLIVAR 1826
JEFFERSON 1801
NAPOLEON 1804-14
17
18
19th
EMMA WILLARD

Fig. 2: Emma Willard's Temple of Time

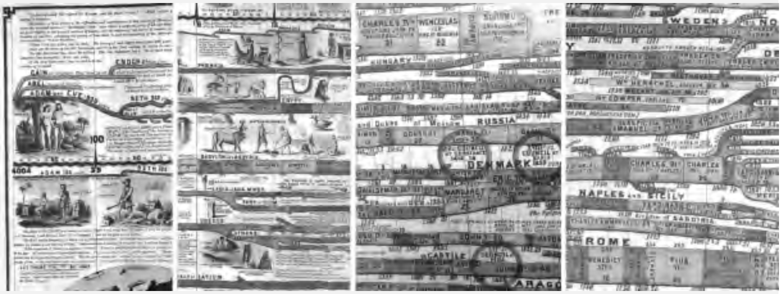

Fig. 3: Increasingly Troubled Linearity in Adams's Chronological Chart

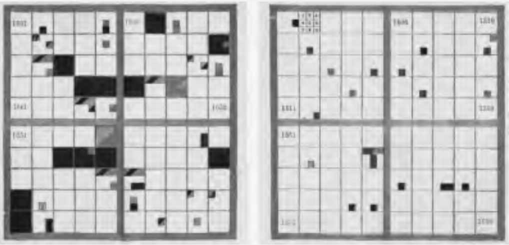

Fig. 4: Spatializations of Time in Peabody's Chronological History

Many accounts of these historic processes favor a mechanistic, teleological base-superstructure model in which technological change directly triggers conceptual transformations, and Carey's link between the telegraph and this reification of abstract information is a prime example of this. However, as intuitively convincing (and as well-established) as this line of thinking is, a look at the broader print-cultural context in which these changes took place in the mid-eighteen-hundreds complicates such straightforward models. Countless examples suggest that the symbolic form of narrative was undergoing considerable strain at the time, perhaps because ever-increasing flows of information as much as an ever-growing, ever-diversifying, and ever-integrating society brought its limitations to the fore: As much as narrative's cause and effect chains excel at making meaning of the world, as much as narrative thrives on creating coherence, the form does not capture multifaceted informational plurality well. Both visual and textual artifacts and practices at the time illustrate how early information workers struggled with this problem, and how they were looking for novel ways to store information differently so that it retained its rich, open, suggestive incoherence to some productive degree.

Experimental visualizations of history exemplify this particularly well, even though history, of course, is a genre of information that would lend itself well to narrativization. Artifacts such as Emma Willard's 1849 *Temple of Time* (Fig. 2), Sebastian C. Adams's 1876 *Chronological Chart of Ancient, Modern and Biblical History* (Fig. 3), or Elizabeth Palmer Peabody's 1856 *Chronological History of the United States* (Fig. 4) give ample evidence of attempts to 'recount' history in nonnarrative form.[10] In these accounts, the distant past, of which little is known and which is relayed in myth, often appears orderly, the sparseness of events lending itself well to project linear progressions onto them. The present, however, with its masses of information, grows increasingly muddled, not yet contained and perhaps uncontainable in linear narrative without discarding most of its specifics. Marked either by a vivid visual sense of chaotic informational excess or by an excessive ordering in highly abstract terms, these charts' decision to opt out of the linear form signals a crisis of narrative triggered by an overabundance of information. In how these books and broadsides spatialize information in more than one dimension, they reflect a growing sense that there is simply too much to know and too much to relay for it to be contained in simple, linear, narrative form.[11] These visual responses to information overflow are often visually appealing, but they are troubled in terms of their effectiveness, expressive more of a problem than of a solution. In a slightly different context, Hacking speaks of a "silly season" and "a zany intellectual ferment," a "whole series of conceptual confusions, false starts, and crazy responses" ("Nineteenth" 455), and these terms apply equally well to many of these attempts at nonlinear visualization. The nineteenth century did indeed have its beautifully silly seasons as it searched for representative formulas and forms that were less constricting than the narrative one.

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[10] Many of these accounts were produced for educational purposes and often came with elaborate instructions on how to read them and how to use their denarrativized form for interactive, gamifying learning activities.

Even in a more narrowly textual and less visual realm, nineteenth-century US culture at the time kept experimenting with and searching for representative formulas that were decidedly nonlinear and nonnarrative and that instead capitalized on a new and growing fascination with morselized, mobile, nonlinear information. Prime examples among these are almanacs, scrapbooks, and journals. Almanacs, loose, heterogeneous collections of diverse materials comprising entertainment and instruction, were the most widely circulating of the three, and they enjoyed explosive popularity at the time. They typically contained calendars and astronomical data, "weather prophecy" (K. Anderson 10), lists and tables with 'useful information' from measurements to court dates, a wide variety of other practical and instructional information, often along with short pieces of narrative fiction, poems, or songs. Many of them also contained blank pages to be filled by the readers, thus capitalizing on the interactive appeals of this fragmented form. Often geared toward a rural or lower-class audience, almanacs were part of an important and massive body of popular, mass-produced, and nonliterary reading materials that crucially aided cultural integration and nationalization.[12]

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[11] Cf. also the nineteenth-century discourse on daguerreotypy and on how the excess of detail captured by a daguerrotype was contrasted against the (welcome) informational depletion of a painting in which only those elements remained that were intended by the artist. In these early photographs, the information overflow of massified detail certified lifelikeness, but it also diminished artistic value. See page 138 below for more on this.

[12] Cf. Zboray, who, in a chapter on "Numeracy, the News, and Self-Culture," notes that literacy in the young republic was high, but that the use of reading skills was clearly classed: especially middle and lower classes were expected and encouraged to read nonfiction, instructive literature and to

Scrapbooks emphasized interactivity even more, encouraging their 'readers' to cut out newspaper scraps and collage them on their blank pages for future reading. In several publications on the topic, Ellen Gruber Garvey describes this practice of curating newspaper scraps as the creation of a 'pre-computer' "database," arguing that the morselizing process of cutting out these shorter fragments freed them of their boundedness, both contextual, logical and material, and that it transposed them into a form that was optimized for random access and information retrieval.[13] This, Garvey contends, constituted a "new mode of understanding [that] might be called informatic" ("Facts" 99). Scrapbooking indeed thrived in the nineteenth century, doubly signaling a moment of information overflow: the information readers encountered in newspapers was too varied and too voluminous to be stored as is, and printing had become so cheap, and paper-based information so widely available, that readers could afford to throw away the largest part of it.

Finally, the practice of journaling flourished in US romanticism and among the transcendentalists in particular. As a form of life writing, the journal celebrated an associative, fragmentary style in which experiences were not submitted to a coherent order, integrated into a single narrative, but instead stood side by side in loose assemblage. In this

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"[cultivate] habits of numerical analysis" that, for example, moved "the farmer [...] from a qualitative to a quantitative appraisal of life." The kinds of data reading that Zboray summarizes under the term 'numeracy' were meant to advance the "embourgeoisement" of rural and lower-class populations (*Fictive People* 124). This shift toward "a quantitative appraisal of life" is also documented in Koenen, who identifies another genre of decidedly nonliterary reading and writing—late nineteenth and early twentieth century mail order catalogs—as contributing to the "extension of modernization, Americanization, homogenization and consumerism to the Midwest" (205). Koenen's revisionist interest in the role of consumer culture in print here dovetails with my own revisionist inquiry in the role of nonliterary texts.

[13] Garvey also characterizes newspaper clipping services as early database providers (*Writing* 242). Cf. also the related practice of Grangerizing, the practice of expanding books by adding other print material to them, at times by rebinding them and almost always by ripping apart other books to obtain the material to insert. In a discussion of Grangerizing, Michael Macovski points out that the eighteen-hundreds saw a "propensity for annotative forms, such as marginalia and prefaces," an "increasingly dialogic and overtly *interactive* nature of textual praxis during this era" (146; 147). Macovski ties "the era's passion for collecting in general—and for book-collecting in particular" to a larger Romantic desire for collecting (146).

sense, the journal was a “multitext in search of form,” as Leonard Neufeldt writes. This “search of form,” he adds, is also expressed in the “many metaphors” writers like Henry David Thoreau resorted to in order to describe their journalizing, among them “gleaning, harvesting, gathering, collecting, throwing together, storing, preserving, and [...] anthologizing,” all verbs that express a desire to store rather than to order experience (120). Thoreau for his part insisted that “[m]ere facts and names and dates communicate more than we suspect” (239), thus highlighting the value of morselized, nonnarrative information. And Lawrence Buell summarizes the more broadly transcendentalist storage desire: “[T]he journals of Emerson, Thoreau, and Alcott—like much of Transcendentalist writing—aspire to an encyclopedic quality, to take in the whole range of human experience, which inevitably they fail to do” (*Literary* 279). I read these three textual practices, almanacs, scrapbooks, and journaling, as dataesque for how they opt out of the linear, syntagmatic logic of narrative and instead foreground the paradigmatic storage of individual, morselized pieces of information.

These new visual and textual forms were certainly facilitated by developments in print technology and by a cheapening of print as “print-capitalism” (B. Anderson 52) flourished in the US, but they took place in and gained their cultural traction from a larger socio-historical and cultural context that prized data and nonnarrative, dataesque principles of representation as uniquely suited to textualize the young nation. After all, the confluence of national expansion and improving networks of communication meant that Americans were not only growing more diverse, regionally, socially, politically, but that they also became more aware of these internal differences. As Patricia Cline Cohen observes, already in the first decades of the nineteenth century Americans felt that “statistical thought offered a way to mediate between political ideas based on a homogeneous social order and economic realities that were fast undermining homogeneity.” In Cohen’s view, a “compulsive” tendency to count and measure had existed even earlier, but now “the compiling of figures and facts became [...] the common mode of reportage that both reflected and promoted a novel way of thinking about society and state” (35). Democratic aspirations to mediate between different political factions and the patriotic project of asserting a national identity here went hand in hand:

> Inventories of descriptive facts about society were touted as providing an authentic, objective basis for ascertaining the common good. Complete possession of the facts, it was hoped, would eliminate factionalism and allow government to rule in the best interest of the public. Further, collections of social data were thought to constitute the proper scientific proof that the new experiment in republicanism did indeed benefit all citizens. (35)

The visual and textual examples above illustrate this increased fascination with a "[c]omplete possession of the facts" and their "collections." As my readings further down in this study will show in greater detail, the later decades of the century doubled down on these ideas, as culturally salient texts kept "reflect[ing] and promot[ing]" this novel way of thinking about nation and society by way of data.

In fact, throughout the nineteenth century, Americans undertook widespread efforts to popularize the use of data and to turn it from a "learned specialty" into a popular practice. As Daniel Boorstin writes, "[o]ne by-product of democracy was an unprecedented popular diffusion of statistics" and a "new kind of number consciousness [that] captured the public mind" (188). Again, four brief examples can shed some additional light on this.

One such example is the *Statistical Atlas of the United States* regularly published by the Department of the Interior. It not only contained tabular, numerical "descriptive facts about society" (Cohen 35), but it visualized these data collections either by entering them into geographic maps or by coming up with novel visualizations, techniques of displaying data many of which are still in use today. In their orderly aesthetic, these graphics visually make tangible a national body the immensity of which would otherwise have been hard to fathom and the complexity and diversity of which was certainly out of the reach of narratives (cf. Fig. 5). Data here was marshaled to help imagine the national community, and the *Statistical Atlas* thus served a dual purpose: to perform this act of national self-imagination, but also to popularize the underlying data operations and the underlying modes of "quantification and statistical thinking" (Dorson and Schober 5). As the preface to the 1890 *Statistical Atlas* concludes, the "presentation of the results of the Eleventh Census" was meant to "fulfill its mission in popularizing and extending the study of statistics" (Gannett 3).

The *Statistical Atlas* was based on the official census returns, and the decennial census, unsurprisingly, was another important social institu-

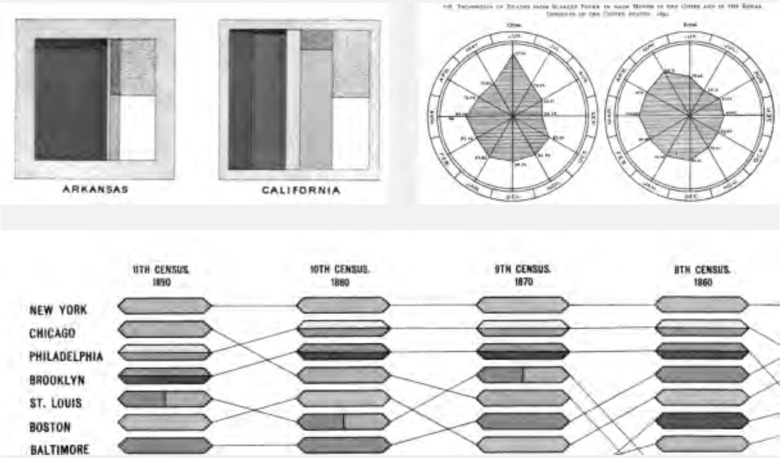

Fig. 5. Sample Illustrations: Employment per State (1870 Census) and Mortality per Month (1890 Census), Most populous cities (1890 Census)

tion that both expressed and invigorated the link between US national identity and a growing "number consciousness." This is true of the early rounds, when questions over how to count enslaved people and which questions to include in the survey underscored the political nature of something as 'objective' as a simple head count (cf. section 4.2 for more on the relationship between the census, data, and abolitionism). It is also true of later rounds, when the sheer mass of data threatened to outrun the Census Bureau's capabilities to process it. Faced with a veritable big data crisis, the department publicly called for proposals for more scalable methods of data processing, which led to the invention of the Hollerith machine.[14] The machine not only laid the foundation for what would later become the computer company IBM, it also moved to the center of widespread public fascination as countless newspaper articles reported on how "Uncle Sam Has [a] Record Of All His Children" and how "with the help of eminently practical machines [...] some fifteen young ladies can count accurately a half million of names a day" ("Counting"). These articles express a profound fascination with mass, with the (ac)countability of the population at scale, and with the possibility of representing the entirety of the national body by way of a gigantic, electro-mechanically processable collection of data.

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[14] It seems all the more fitting that this first automated census, which marked a whole new level in the project of capturing the totality of the nation in data, is also the one that noted the closing of the frontier (and that was thus immortalized in Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis). The total (ac)countability of the national body, this coincidence suggests, entails the vanishing of the West and of the frontier.

However, there is another, even earlier site at which Americans practiced this link between collecting data and envisioning the nation: meteorology. Beginning in the eighteenth century already, keeping weather diaries was a common practice expressive of an underlying fascination with observing, collecting, and analyzing data. It was the institutionalization and nationalization of the weather service around 1850, however, that captures the link between the nation and this realm of data collection particularly well.[15] Under the auspices of Joseph Henry, the Smithsonian Institute began an orchestrated process of gathering weather information from a network of weather stations, and it compiled this data into a weather map that was an object of profound public fascination. Like the statistical cartography of the *Statistical Atlas*, these maps indeed offered what Peters calls "panoramic vision," but they dramatically elevated it by offering near real-time updates. As the *Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution* for 1858 explains it:

> An object of much interest at the Smithsonian building is a daily exhibition on a large map of the condition of the weather over a considerable portion of the United States. The reports are received about ten o'clock in the morning, and the changes on the maps are made by temporarily attaching to the several stations pieces of card of different colors to denote different conditions of the weather as to clearness, cloudiness, rain or snow. This map is not only of interest to visitors in exhibiting the kind of weather which their friends at a distance are experiencing, but is also of importance in determining at a glance the probable changes which may soon be expected. (32)

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[15] Stanley A. Changnon gives a particularly concise history of the development of meteorology beginning with eighteenth-century recordings of weather data by Benjamin Franklin and others, an early interest in how the weather might have impacted soldiers in the war of 1812 that "led to the first organized effort to measure the weather" (206), and a phase of institutionalization and nationalization of the weather service around 1850 after Joseph Henry had become head of the Smithsonian and began putting together a "nationwide network of weather stations" (207).

Looking at the weather map, the visitors to the Smithsonian indeed "know something that they can never experience for themselves" (Peters 15)—a sense of the weather on a geographic scale that transcends any individual's experience. Notably, as the report establishes, a core attraction of this was not simply knowing about the weather but knowing about "the kind of weather which [...] friends at a distance are experiencing," thus using abstract data to indeed imagine community across geographic expanses.[16] Again, this kind of data-driven weather knowledge was not a so much a "learned specialty" (Boorstin 188) as a broad, popular occupation. T. B. Maury's "Weather Prognostics by the People," aiming "to explain the entire *modus operandi* of the national weather-signal system" (768) to readers of *The Galaxy*, "one of the more important magazines of the period" (Mott, *History* 33), exemplifies well this effort at popularizing weather data.

Finally, there is one uniquely US-American obsession with data and statistics that cannot be omitted from even such a brief review: baseball. This is even more true considering how well it exemplifies the nexus between national expansion, data, and narrative that is central to this entire section. By the 1860s and '70s, the national league had grown too big for managers to witness all games first hand. One response to this growth was the development of "a highly sophisticated means of evaluating players: baseball statistics" (143). As Warren Goldstein explains, baseball statistics thus marked the modernization of baseball from "a self-disciplined, fraternal craft into baseball labor, a form of work organized, directed, and disciplined by a management accountable to a board of directors" (146). This professionalization and, in a way, bureaucratization of baseball, however did not limit its popularity or its function as a signifier of national identity. On the contrary, contemporaries highlighted the "systematic and, to a certain extent, scientific" quality of the game as one factor that made it "such an attractive feature of our American sports and pastimes" (Chadwick 9). Baseball indeed developed a "tendency [...] toward extremes of quantification" (Guttmann 143; cf. also Schwarz and Gammons) and this may well be seen "as fundamental to the game's preeminence in the nineteenth century" and as one of the reasons for baseball being the American game *par excellence* (Goldstein 143). Publications such as *Beadle's Dime Base-Ball Player* accordingly

[16] On the need for "family and friends" who were "separated by wide distances, engaged in often different economic pursuits, and surrounded by different communities," cf. Zboray ("Letter" 31).

instructed their audiences on how to keep a box score, the canonical form of reducing a full game to a brief of set numbers, and newspapers soon began publishing games in this form, as a table of numerical information,[17] trusting that their readers would then turn these lines of numbers back into a more evocative, narrative form in the process of reading.

In very different ways, all of these examples imagine national cohesion by way of the inherently incohesive form of data. They assume a deep connection between this symbolic form and the national identity of the young republic, and one facet of this connection is the often tacit association of data with democracy. Moreover, in different ways, all of these examples turn on a widespread cultural fascination with two complementary processes: the denarrativizing and renarrativizing of experience—one process that turns reality into numbers, statistics, charts, to capture plurality in ways that narrative cannot; and one that then turns these dataesque representations (back) into concrete, narrative accounts in the process of reading. In how these two processes accentuate the readers' agency, their own making-sense of the data, denarrativization and renarrativization came to form part of the grammar of democracy, and nineteenth-century Americans celebrated them as they celebrated the republic. Seen thus, it is impossible to not also see how the representative powers of data enter into a competition with literature, similarly imagined as a representative system that could introduce "the expanding republic [...] to itself" (Loughran 361). Put in the briefest of terms, this study looks at how this competition played out in individual sites of such competition.

* * *

We are accustomed to a widespread, culturally ingrained narrative about the relationship between literature and national identity. In this narrative, literacy—understood here as the ability to read 'literature' in today's, narrow meaning of the word—was at the heart of a vibrant, coherent national print culture that allowed Americans to imagine the community of the nation. This story has great explanatory power, and even greater appeal. It is also a story that has met with renewed skepticism in American studies over the last few decades.

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[17] In fact, box scores were printed in newspapers earlier, as early as the 1858 article "The Great Base Ball Match" in the *New York Herald*, but the widespread use of this form came later.

By investigating the co-evolution of literature and data around the middle of the nineteenth century this study joins a wave of revisionist efforts to interrogate and complicate this account from a literary studies perspective, a perspective uniquely suited to think about form. It does so by probing into four different core debates in US culture's negotiation of the social role and the political efficacy of literature. In all four of these debates, data figures as a perceived rival in literature's aspiration to represent the nation to itself. It is this perceived rivalry—expressed in attempts either to contrast data and literature or to borrow representational strategies from data for literature—that plays an important role in defining, shaping, and articulating the contours of the literary at the time, and that thus forges conceptions of literariness that are still dominant today. The notion of a 'data imaginary' is crucial for this analytic angle. It focalizes the associations and representative desires the symbolic form of data was invested with culturally, and it helps understand the data-literature divide as a deeply contested site fraught with ambivalences: marked by contradictory desires as to what textual representation and print culture are supposed to do and how they are supposed to integrate into society. Looking at nineteenth-century American culture through the analytic lens of the data imaginary thus brings to the fore the contouring of the literary as one important facet of the cultural work that the category of data does.

2 “America Is a Poem in Our Eyes”: Democratic National Literature and the Data Imaginary

2.1 Meet the Transcendenta-Lists

“Things, facts, events, persons, days, ages, qualities, tumble pell-mell, exhaustless and copious, with what appear to be the same disregard of parts, and the same absence of special purpose, as in nature” (Whitman, “English”). Thus observes an anonymous reviewer of the first, 1855 edition of Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, honing in on one of the characteristic qualities of the volume, a seeming lack of design and of selection in the poems’ endless catalogs. The assessment is part of a joint review of *Leaves* and *Maud and Other Poems* by the British poet Alfred Tennyson, published in the same year. It is (re)printed in, and here quoted from, the 1856 edition of *Leaves of Grass*; and it was written by Whitman himself (Price 59). Notably using a catalog, it expresses a good deal of (highly strategic and heavily overdetermined) ambivalence about the catalog form that dominates *Leaves*, a form that it chastises for an “absence of special purpose,” thus dismissing it as insufficiently refined to fully qualify as good poetry; but one that it also, positively in the logic of romanticism, likens to nature.

In comparing Whitman and Tennyson, the review does not constitute simply an attempt to lift the former, a hitherto mostly unknown journalist and school teacher with one self-published book on the market, to eye level with one of the foremost, highly acclaimed contemporary British poets at the time. Rather, it participates in a complex and extensive effort by Walt Whitman to manufacture his book’s success through elaborate inter-, meta-, and paratextual performances.[18] These performances illustrate the degree to which ‘literature’ here presents itself as already in the advanced stages of ‘field formation’: marked by boundaries to other fields of cultural production and enabled and propagated, among other things, through self-reflexive textual descriptions of itself. Whitman’s self-inscription into this emerging field accordingly does two very different kinds of work: it claims for *Leaves* a quality of literariness, of belonging to literature, because it can be discussed in relation to other pieces of literature whose status and stature are more reliably established—in this case, the poetry of Alfred Tennyson. At the same time it works to perpetuate and maintain this field by engaging in a discussion of literary value, a discursive practice asserting, affirming, and delineating the field.

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[18] The second edition of *Leaves* is notable for its extensive paratextual material serving the volume’s and its author’s self-fashioning, and the reprinted review, originally published in the *Phrenological Journal* of Whitman’s friends Orson Fowler and Samuel R. Wells, is part of this. In an extensive section, called “Leaves Droppings,” the second edition not only contains real and fake reviews but also, famously, an unauthorized reprint of a letter Emerson sent to Whitman upon reading the first edition.

Importantly, this demarcation of literariness is facilitated here by another demarcation: that of nationality. By comparing *Leaves* and *Maud*, the review projects the differences between the two texts on classed, political differences tied to a presumed national character, aristocratic vs. democratic. Poetry, it claims, “to Tennyson and his British and American eleves is a gentleman of the first degree, boating, fishing, and shooting genteelly through nature, admiring the ladies, and talking to them in company with that elaborate half-choked deference that is to be made up by the terrible license of men among themselves.” As it asserts about Tennyson specifically, “[t]he spirit of the burnished society of upper-class England fills this writer and his effusions from top to toe” (“English”). By thus tying poetic refinement to stereotypes of a decadent, European aristocracy, the review, despite all its conspicuous ambivalence about Whitman’s merit, emphatically positions the discussion of these two poets’ work as a discussion of two competing national literatures, national characters, and political and social programs; it denies ‘Americanness’ to Tennyson’s “American eleves”; and it associates the “absence of special purpose” in Whitman’s poems, their perceived lack of artfulness, with the young, democratic nation. In doing so, the review not only bolsters Whitman’s standing. It also taps into a long-running and loaded discussion its contemporaries will have recognized right away: the question of whether the United States are at all able to form a national literature on par with the literatures of Europe, and with British literature in particular. Inching toward the first centennial of political independence, cultural independence was still being felt to be tenuous at best, and writers and critics during the ‘American Renaissance’ vigorously pushed for and agonized over the possibility of a distinctly American national literature. It is this self-reflexive vigor around exactly this question, after all, that led F. O. Matthiessen, coining the term in the 1940s, to look for the beginnings of American literature in the 1850s.[19]

In these debates, in reviews and essays, this emerging national literature-to-come is typically portrayed as being in the process of emerging, a dim and ambiguous state of half-presence. The review's ambivalence —its undecidedness as to whether Whitman's catalogs constitute a poetic success at imitating "nature" or a failure to project any "special purpose"— accordingly mirrors this larger sense of ambiguity regarding the existence and viability of a genuinely US-American national literature, different from its European counterparts but on par with them. It is tempting to read this ambivalence as expressing an 'actual' twilight condition, a historical situation in which a distinct national culture was in the process of forming, half present but not yet fully born. As will become clearer in the following, the critical perspective of this study prompts me to favor a different explanation: the ambivalence the review expresses as to the merit of Whitman's catalogs, as well as the larger ambivalence around the existence of an American national literature, point to conflicting ideological constraints, of politics and of art, that it finds impossible to resolve. In light of these constraints, a 'democratic national literature' can only be imagined as liminal: at once present and absent, forever in the process of becoming.

Indeed, the review's acknowledgment, both tacit and explicit, of the "first-class" quality of Tennyson, his affiliation with the "best of the school of poets," displays a telling ambivalence around the "burnished" qualities and the "dandified forms" of critically acclaimed literary productions. In order to engage in a 'felicitous' discussion of literariness, an affirmation of the field, the review apparently has to acknowledge the formal finesse, the polish, of the British poems; and even in expending energy to disparage them, it cannot help but acknowledge their standing as sufficiently elevated as to be worthy of attack. Working to hail a new, democratic poetry, the review is thus caught between two conflicting economies of value: politically, it sides with Whitman's poetic project, which it forcefully aligns with visions of modernity and democracy; yet it does so in a framework of literary value in which the 'feudal' qualities of British literature are the norm against which all literary innovation has to measure up. The review, even as it works to appreciate the rawness of Whitman's, "as in nature," ends up praising this coarseness inside a system of values that is tilted toward refinement.

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[19] Cf., for example, Matthiessen's assertion that the writers he investigates "commented very explicitly on language as well as expression," coupled with the observation that "[t]he one common denominator of my five writers uniting even Hawthorne and Whitman, was their devotion to the possibilities of democracy" (vii, ix).

It is no accident that the review so decidedly turns on Whitman's poetic catalogs as the prime object of its (faux) criticism, nor that it then uses catalogs to highlight what it sees as *Leaves*'s (perhaps questionable but decidedly manifest) stylistic peculiarity. After all, catalog rhetoric was central to US romanticism's project of establishing a US national literature, which it imagined at once as 'democratic' and as being on-par with European national literatures—the presumed standard bearer of literariness at the time. Catalog rhetoric, as I will argue in more detail below, held this appeal because of its liminal position in between data and literature. Notably, catalogs afford both: the paratactic, morselized, massified, and infinitely expandable storage of discrete information, data; as well as a stylization, as literary, of this information and of its underconnectedness. In US romanticism's recourse to the data imaginary, the former set of (decidedly dataesque) affordances came to be valued as 'democratic'—promising to store and transmit experience without regard for hierarchies and without any kind of selectiveness; the latter—a formal complication of the text, a marked deviation from everyday speech—in turn came to be seen as a moment of literariness.

Notably, the two underlying representational desires, for total, unfiltered storage and transmission of experience and for this experience's refinement into rare, elevated form, stand in unresolvable conflict—not because they are in themselves, ontologically irreconcilable but because they are each made meaningful by value economies that ultimately are incongruent and that operate not least by contrasting themselves against one another. As I will argue in detail below, the transcendentalists turned to the catalog, a device in between literature and data, to resolve exactly this representational problem. Their use of catalog rhetoric thus frequently points to both: the presence of this conundrum of conflicting value economies in the young republic's vision of a national literature, and the felt need to resolve it in a quest for making this national literature democratic. Put differently: Catalogs promised to alleviate some of the evaluative and ideological tensions that made it difficult to imagine a democratic national literature, and they did so because of their promise to bridge the widening chasm between literature and data. My readings below will consciously seek out moments in which catalogs are employed to this effect, and it will focus on those moments in which this effort fails. After all, it is in these moments that the boundary work American culture engaged in around literature and data becomes most starkly visible.

This chapter thus explores a site of particularly poignant, conspicuous self-reflexivity—of literary authors talking about the literary; a site at which, in envisioning a future national literature, in reflecting on its literary value and its democratic appeal, and in elaborating on their own role in witnessing or furthering its eventual emergence, the transcendentalists engaged in a discourse that aimed to bring about the object it presumably only wanted to describe. To be clear, saying this is not to suggest that the transcendentalists founded American literature and to thus reproduce the logic by which the early phases of American studies associated this small, elite group (mostly) of white men with the 'birth' of US national literature. Quite on the contrary, it is to focalize the complex, wide-ranging, and stylized performative acts with which this group advanced a particular understanding of literariness and of national literature—in ways that eventually secured their own, favorable role in it. In consequence, the processes of field formation, which form an important conceptual background to this study throughout, become visible in this chapter with particular poignancy. After all, the primary texts I will read below spend considerable energy on shoring up two highly elusive boundaries: that of the nation and that of literature, and they justify one border by way of a recourse to the other. This process is a key element within the larger cultural enterprise of demarcating and validating literature as a social and cultural institution in its own right in the US at the time.

The following pages will engage these questions in three larger sections: an extended conceptual discussion and two primary text readings. In the opening, conceptual section, I will first unfold this study's understanding of the relationship between catalog rhetoric and the symbolic form of data to make two interrelated points: One, that the transcendentalists' fascination with the poetic catalog resonates with their more general interest in knowledge practices and encyclopedias, and, two, that there is considerable formal overlap between how catalogs operate and how data does. Looking at the poetics of catalog rhetoric, I will then position catalogs as an emphatically liminal device, situated between literature and data and affording both the storage of information, and the formal stylizing of such storage. Closely reading some catalogs, and some existing catalog readings, I will argue that this liminality shows in how poetic catalogs invite radically different forms of readerly engagement: a superficial skim reading, a skipping-over the particulars, as one does when browsing data sets for information, and a ‘paranoid’ form of close reading in which any aspect of the catalog is able to signal an artistic will to form. This liminality, I will show in a final subsection, also informs the culturally ingrained perception of catalogs as a decidedly ‘democratic’ form of textuality. Beginning in the nineteenth-century and continuing all the way to contemporary criticism, catalog rhetoric’s refusal to select or to order its items hierarchically has come to be seen as symbolizing democracy. This association has been used to explain catalog rhetoric’s success in US romanticism, but it is also, as I will show, a deeply conflicted one.

Building on these conceptual considerations, the chapter’s second section will then focus on a single primary text, Margaret Fuller’s 1846 review essay “American Literature: Its Position in the Present Time, and Prospects for the Future.” In it, Fuller hails an American literature to come by rejecting the existing texts as either insufficiently American or insufficiently well-written, frequently collapsing these two criteria into one another. Not least in terms of genre—a critical, canonizing discussion of other authors’ texts’ worthiness of being called ‘literary’ or ‘American’—the essay vigorously engages in the boundary performances of field formation that I am interested in throughout this study, and in this chapter in particular. I thus use a first subsection to discuss these processes in greater detail. In Fuller’s view of the fraught state of American national literature, the forces of the market and the resulting need for popular, commercial success keep holding back the development of an independent American literary style that can compete with that of Europe—which leads her to sympathize with a system of aristocratic tutelage. This obviously is a problematic point to arrive at, less than a century after political independence has been achieved. As I will argue, Fuller’s contention that American literature does not yet exist but is on the cusp of being born thus constitutes an attempt to evade an ideological double-bind of sorts: burdening the envisioned US national literature to-come with the irreconcilable demands of being both democratically egalitarian and literarily excellent, she cannot imagine it as anything but potentiality. It is in light of this conflict, then, that her essay turns to catalog rhetoric, and I will read two of her catalogs in detail, devoting one subsection to each, to explore this dynamic further. In both cases, catalogs mark key moments in her essay, moments at which she ascertains the potential for America to produce great literature, but in which this potential nevertheless continues to be fragile, threatened, insecure, and, of course, unrealized.

Finally, I will use a third section to read Ralph Waldo Emerson's "The Poet," an essay that both describes and performs a new, transcendentalist literary practice. This practice, Emerson imagines, will result in the founding of an independent US national literature that is not only on par with but that surpasses its European counterparts. The text never uses the word 'democracy,' but it is deeply invested in envisioning literature, and language more generally, as inherently democratic. I will accordingly use a first subsection to explore this Emersonian vision of democratic language in more depth, and a second subsection to link this vision of democratic language to the data imaginary. As I will show, Emerson's notions of language as transparent, as morselized, and as massifiable all resonate with the symbolic form of data, and with the representational desires this form is typically invested with. These resonances, in turn, again point to the extent to which the dataesque came to be associated with democracy in nineteenth-century thought. Based on these two subsections' preliminary work, I will then hone in on two particularly telling catalogs in Emerson's essay. Both these catalogs are in the service of his larger project of envisioning a literary practice that poeticizes everyday, American materials from which a genuinely American national literature, in his eyes, will have to grow; both see the morselization and massification of these materials as core elements of such a practice; but both also struggle to value these materials vis-a-vis the more venerable, European ones. In different ways, both catalogs, I will thus argue, try but fail to bridge the chasm between dataesque and literary textualizations of the world: they value the democratic potential of a dataesque storage of experience, but they also acknowledge the value economy of literariness.

Together these three sections will argue that catalogs emerged as a favored literary device in US romanticism not in spite of this device's dataesque quality but at least in part because of it. Counter-intuitively, catalogs' compatibility with the rising data imaginary did not diminish but enhanced their aesthetic appeal and thus their use in literature. After all, their ability to capture pluralities of impressions and to store and relay them in particularly underconnected a form directly links them to the symbolic form of data, a form that seemed particularly adept at textualizing the new, diverse, and sprawling nation. Moreover, the perception of the catalog as a democratic device turns on a vision of dehierarchization that the symbolic form of data is particularly compatible with. Thanks to both the aesthetic engagements they invite and the projections of democratic egalitarianism they allow for, these dataesque poetic catalogs thus emerged not simply as a widely-used device but, more broadly, as a formidable vehicle in US romanticism's pursuit of a democratic national literature. To writers in the nineteenth century, they thus constituted a privileged site at which to reflect on the outlines of such an aesthetic, cultural, and political project and to thus articulate the outlines of literature as a social and cultural institution.

2.2 National Literature and the Poetics and Politics of Catalog Rhetoric

As Lawrence Buell notes in a chapter in his *Literary Transcendentalism*, the catalog, the "reiteration of analogous images or statements in parat-actic form," is one of the defining features of romanticism in America, setting it apart from the European versions of the movement (*Literary* 166). Seeing an important connection between US national literature and this particular form, he notes that the drive toward the "enumerative" constitutes "that aspect of the grammar of Transcendentalism which most differentiates it from all the British romantics except Blake" (167).[20] To substantiate his argument, he points to the way that the form permeates the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Herman Melville, and Walt Whitman. As he explains in an essay on the same topic, "[i]t has been noted that among his contemporaries Whitman was by no means the sole maker of poetic catalogues. Emerson, Thoreau, and even Melville also used the device; indeed, the paratactic and reiterative qualities of Emerson's and Thoreau's prose are so strong that in places they are indistinguishable from Whitman's verse" ("Transcendentalist" 331). To Buell, the catalog is not merely a stylistic quirk, an influence of Emerson (or, by proxy, Thomas Carlyle) that happened to propagate through these authors' social networks. Rather it "expresses a particular way of looking at the world, one which has its roots in transcendentalist idealism but was shared with Emerson and Thoreau by Whitman and, to a lesser extent, Melville."

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[20] Buell extends this to the twentieth century: "the catalogue has since also become a staple technique in twentieth-century American poetry from Hart Crane to Roethke and Ginsberg" (*Literary* 167).

While this section, along with my reading of Emerson's "The Poet" below (page 102) will suggest connections between this "way of looking at the world" and the rising data imaginary at the time, my larger interest here will be in how the dataesque quality of the poetic catalog, and this rhetorical device's resulting liminal status in-between data and literature, has made catalog rhetoric such an attractive device for articulations of American national literature. This question will be at the heart of the two primary readings below, of Margaret Fuller's "American Literature" and of Ralph Waldo Emerson's "The Poet," and it will be at the center of the more general discussion of catalog rhetoric in this section.

Accordingly, this section will proceed in four steps. In a first subsection, I will discuss a number of methodological implications of reading nineteenth-century transcendentalist catalog rhetoric as a device liminally situated between literature and data. In one version or another, these implications hold for the entirety of this study and for its interest in the role of the data imaginary in shaping notions of literariness emerging at the time. Still, the transcendentalists' affection for catalog rhetoric constitutes an opportunity to discuss these methodological implications in particularly tangible terms, and this is what this first subsection will do. These methodological considerations result from my understanding of catalog rhetoric as a dataesque form of textuality, and the second subsection will accordingly discuss the affinity between data and the poetic catalog, an affinity that stems from both forms' shared distance to narrative and from their integration with knowledge practices. As I will show, the poetic catalog's cultural productivity and appeal hinges on its liminality, its standing between data and literature, and I will accordingly use a third subsection to explore this aspect of liminality in more depth. Specifically, I will argue that catalog rhetoric affords two complementary forms of engagement, one that is closer to the storage and retrieval of bare information and one that is marked by an interest in and an assumption of a will to form. Where other studies have typically tried to contain this ambiguity, to read catalog rhetoric as either a violation of norms of literariness or as veiled formal finesse, this subsection will highlight the productivity of seeing it as both. After all, as the fourth subsection will show, this liminality is an important factor in the cultural meanings that catalog rhetoric came to express in US romanticism, among them first and foremost the sense that poetic catalogs can signal ‘democracy.’

2.2.1 Methodological Implications

Reading US romanticism’s infatuation with the poetic catalog through the rising data imaginary comes with several important benefits, among them the benefit of historical awareness. After all, US romanticism, as this study argues, took place against the backdrop of the increasing cultural presence of data practices, which was felt more acutely, was practiced more vigorously, and was embraced more widely in the United States than elsewhere. In a cultural moment that routinely and increasingly turned to data and data practices to capture the vast and expanding nation, data offered a working model of how to represent an increasingly complex, pluralist, and contradictory social and material reality. It makes sense that literary productions emanating from this cultural moment would eagerly borrow from this model. While other studies have noted romanticism’s indebtedness, and the romantic catalog’s closeness, to other socio-textual practices thriving at the time, such as scrapbooking, journaling, telegraphy, or daguerreotypy, an interest in data not only highlights these systems’ commonalities—they all thrive on the denarrativization and morselization of experience. It moreover places the romantics’ fascination with the catalog at a historical and cultural moment at which these practices’ functions were being ‘sorted’ and being sorted out to serve distinct social and cultural purposes—a process that entailed forming the historically contingent literature-data divide that is the subject of this study and that continues to regulate how we view literature, and how we do literary studies, today.

Focusing on the emergence and cultural institutionalization of this divide, then, has a number of methodological implications that concern this chapter but that also resonate throughout the entirety of this study, making this first full chapter a particularly opportune moment to elaborate on them some more.[21] These concern how my study uses (some) secondary texts, they concern my own use of the term ‘literary,’ and they concern several moments of complicity between the transcendentalists’ project of founding a national literature and the academic projects analyzing them. I will discuss all three in turn:

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[21] I will return to many of these points in even more detail in the context of my reading of Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* where I justify my use of a computational ‘distant reading’ as one strategy to circumvent some of the methodological difficulties outlined here. Cf. page 183 for more on this.

Historicizing the poetic catalog vis-a-vis data teases out and embraces the device's liminality in ways that will force me to read some critical engagements with catalogs 'symptomatically,' i.e. as primary texts that are implicated in and symptomatic of the dynamics I am interested in rather than as secondary text that can be trusted to speak about these dynamics. After all, precisely because it is half-aligned with the social functions and formal requirements of data and half-hospitable to literary engagements, the poetic catalog is marked by an in-betweenness that more narrowly literary-studies engagements typically try to contain (or ignore) rather than to explore. Accordingly, many studies tend to obscure the device's historical embeddedness, along with its dataesque quality, by reading it as curiously untimely. They identify it either as a device before its time—a proto-modernist device, a premature use of collage before the technique was invented in the visual arts and then imported into literature—or as harking back to the epic of the Greek classics and, typically, the lists of ships in Homer. Of course, these contradictory associations, this 'double-untimeliness' that de-historicizes the device, all the more emphatically points to its liminality: if the catalog gets read at once as premodern and as too modern for the moment of its success, it might not have a fixed place in the history of literary forms but sit at the margins of literariness altogether. The fact that both associations are still being made points to the strength of the desire, in literary studies scholarship and criticism, to contain the catalog and its liminality in genealogies of literature, genealogies that notably come with considerable cachet (of the venerable or the avant-garde, respectively), rather than to acknowledge its co-embeddedness in other cultural practices of symbolization—particularly that of data.

Acknowledging, as I do, the poetic catalog's liminality—its being at once 'mere' storage and 'literature'—then also draws attention to the 'nonliterary' qualities of literature more generally, among them the 'encyclopedic' use of literature for 'mere' information storage. Doing so in consequence troubles the boundaries that enclose some textual practices in the realm of the literary while relegating others to other, decidedly nonliterary textual systems and cultural domains. It draws attention to the role such symbolic 'othering' plays in defining literariness *ex-negativo*. Literature here gets defined as being *not* about simply segmenting, storing, or communicating experiences, but about, for example, imaginatively processing and/or formally refining them. Literariness, this view maintains, is a matter primarily of form, and of formal refinement, finesse, or complication, and objects can be identified as literary or nonliterary depending on whether they show traces of having been subjected to such a will to form. This perspective informs many, if not most, discussions of the poetic catalog, and in many cases catalog rhetoric thus provides an insightful limit case that makes palpable the difficulties, the inherent tensions and, ultimately, the historical contingency of such demarcations. This troubling of the boundaries of literariness that catalog rhetoric performs matters because, in the debates around a US national literature, the boundaries of literature and of nation are negotiated in relation to one other.

The troubled boundaries of literature and nation, and the desire and perpetual necessity to shore them up, thirdly provides a scaffold to discuss moments of complicity between a literary project dear to nineteenth-century US romantics, the project of founding a national literature, and the academic projects investigating them—literary studies and American studies. After all, both are invested in the existence of a distinctly American, distinctly literary body of writing. This study traces this complicity mainly in two places: One is, unsurprisingly, the boundary work that both the practitioners of literature and the scholars investigating them engage in. This boundary work demarcates and calls into being 'literariness' by setting it off from other textual and knowledge-organizing practices. It cordons off and imbues with social meaning and prestige one form of knowledge work at the expense of others. More so than in other chapters, where the primary texts under discussion, wittingly or unwittingly, are situated on the fringes of the literary, associated with 'minor' dispositions (cf. page 244), the authors discussed here aspired to canonicity—an aspect brought into sharp relief by the debates around national literature, and one reflected both in the texts themselves and in their later reception in literary studies. Many academic catalog readings accordingly spend considerable energy on discussing the literary merit and poetic quality, or lack thereof, of individual catalogs, and in doing so they hone in on the work these catalogs do apart from providing information storage.[22] While they superficially simply engage in an act of criticism, these adjudications draw and affirm the boundaries that constitute literariness.

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[22] For an in-depth discussion of these dynamics in the context of Walt Whitman cf. page 166.

The second moment of complicity between the romantics and the scholars investigating them concerns the association of the poetic catalog with democracy, a connection already evoked at the time (and one that informs, for example, Whitman's self-review above), but one that literary criticism in its discussion of the transcendentalists, and American studies in particular, was eager to uncritically adopt. Intent on finding in "the American mind" an endemic love for democracy and egalitarianism (cf. e.g. Santayana, *Genteel Tradition* 4; H. N. Smith, *Virgin Land* 4), the early phases of American studies faithfully reproduced the very self-stylization with which a small cultural elite invested its own literary and cultural project, imagining it as the literary equivalent to a political system, democracy, that prized egalitarianism. Put in these terms, the inherent contradictions of such a project become immediately visible, and I will show that the poetic catalog promised to resolve and, in any case, helped smooth over these contradictions both for the transcendentalists and for the scholars looking to them for a template of a democratic national culture.

But of course, while the willingness to embrace catalogs might distinguish American from European romantic writing, not all American romantics loved and used the catalog.[23] Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, or James Fenimore Cooper are all not known for their use of the device, as are many others; and even some of the "more important figures during the most vigorous years of the movement" (Buell, *Literary* 6), who obviously partook in the close communicative ties of transcendentalism, are missing from Buell's catalog of catalog authors.[24] Accentuating the distinctly 'American' quality of these authors' catalogs, as Buell does, therefore runs the risk of reproducing the generaliz-

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23 For all the focus on how European and American romanticism differed, it bears noting that this was a truly transnational movement involving artists that were often internationally interconnected and mobile. While romantic projects were often invested in presumed, projected national identities and origins, and while Romanticism's co-occurrence with the formation of many 'Western' nation states has emphasized this connection, this chapter, as should be clear by now, interrogates rather than subscribes to this connection between forms and national characteristics.

24 Buell variously names "Emerson, Thoreau, Alcott, Fuller, Parker, and Bartol" (*Literary* 166) and "Emerson, Thoreau, and even Melville" (Buell, "Transcendentalist" 331).

ing logic with which these authors tied their catalog poetic to the project of forging a national literature. It partakes in rather than interrogates the self-stylization of this small group as founders of all of American letters, and it elevates this distinguishing formal property, loaded with all the positive qualities of being 'democratic,' to a marker of a distinctly US-American (literary) quality. In the following I will try to counter this and similar moments of complicity between literary formation, national formation and literary studies—not by suggesting revisions to the canon of catalog authors, which would leave the underlying logic intact, but by using my interest in the blurriness of the boundary between literature and data to focus on and lay bare such moments of complicity between the transcendentalist project and the scholars discussing it.

2.2.2 The Storage and the Story: Catalogs as Data

Whitman's anonymous reviewer persona already gives one important first hint as to the contact zones between data and catalog rhetoric. It casts the new poetry it imagines, and that it praises *Leaves* for implementing, as being particularly direct and nonselective and as resonating more with notions of storage and transmission than with refined, literary representation. According to the review, "[t]he theory and practice of poets have hitherto been to select certain ideas or events or personages, and then describe them in the best manner they could, always with as much ornament as the case allowed. Such are not the theory and practice of the new poet" (372-73). Instead, the promise of this new poetry is "the direct bringing of occurrences and persons and things to bear on the listener or beholder, to re-appear through him or her" (373). This new poetry, according to the description, is marked by two important, interrelated properties: one is its lack of "ornament" and its ('democratic') refusal to "[select]" individual, possibly 'representative' occurrences for their ability to signify matters beyond themselves. The other is its desire to capture, store, and relay experience to the recipient in a way that is so "direct" that it retrieves and reproduces the unrefined, coarse, unorganized original experience. This model opts out of the representative logic that also underwrites the fabula/sjuzet (or discourse/story) dichotomy of narrative, in which one, the sjuzet (or discourse), represents the other, the events that make up the underlying fabula (or story). By applauding how Whitman's poetry constitutes a "direct bringing of occurrences and persons and things to bear on the listener," the review positively imagines catalog rhetoric as sidestepping such a logic of representation. Rather than containing a processed version of reality, the poems are imagined (and lauded) as containing the unprocessed, raw data of experience.

A "reiteration of analogous images or statements in paratactic form, in prose or verse" (Buell, *Literary* 166), catalogs thus emphatically opt out of the symbolic form of narrative not only by undercutting its representational logic; they also do so formally by way of their paratactic organization: Rather than generate meaning by constructing a causal or temporal development, they simply offer individual items side by side. Even a catalog as simple as the one cited at the beginning of this chapter, Whitman's "[t]hings, facts, events, persons, days, ages, qualities," is a case in point. It is made up simply of an enumeration of individual items, the selection of which is thereby marked as somewhat arbitrary: individual examples could be left out (or more items added) without much consequence for the segment's overall meaning, and the underlying construction is, in theory, infinitely expandable by adding more suitable items. In this sense, the catalog merely stores a highly scalable number of items in a more or less arbitrary assemblage,[25] and it does not bring them into any meaningful, modulating interaction. By merely offering them up in paratactic fashion, it assumes no syntagmatic relationship between them, no development or teleological progression, and no sense of closure. In the example given, the facts, events, or persons have nothing to do with one another apart from all appearing in *Leaves of Grass*.

This affinity between the poetic catalog and the storage of information is well apparent even in cases that are not as straightforward as Whitman's catalogs cited above, and it is often expressed in the attribution of catalog rhetoric as 'encyclopedic.' This association between the catalog and the encyclopedia is made so frequently, it is an association apparently so ready, that it hardly ever gets developed in great argumentative detail.[26] It rests on how both catalog and encyclopedia constitute discontinuous, parceled, indexable information storages in which individual articles are grouped together without impacting one another: An encyclopedia is usually not read from the beginning to the end, and readers do not expect the entries under 'Y' or 'Z' to resolve problems, conflicts, or tensions introduced in the entries, or 'chapters,' under, say, 'A' to 'G.' It, in other words, does not implement a narrative organization of experience. But evoking the encyclopedia typically also serves to highlight another aspect: transcendentalism's relationship to knowledge and knowledge gathering and -organizing more broadly. As Buell notes, the movement is endowed with a more general encyclopedic thrust manifesting itself in a fascination with collection and knowledge: "Ellery Channing compiled a large dictionary of odd usage; Theodore Parker had a passion for weaving bits and bushels of arcane information into his sermons and his conversations; Cyrus Bartol, in his essays, would sacrifice all clarity for a string of apothegms; Thoreau was a passionate collector of facts, sayings, and names." (Buell, *Literary* 169).[27] All these examples, to which the practice of journaling, en vogue among the transcendentalists, could be added as another one, are governed by an impulse toward knowledge work: an impulse to grasp the world by collecting information about it and by storing this information in potentially infinitely expandable forms.

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[25] As a storage device it can hold between zero and an infinite number of elements. Somewhat arbitrarily, I will regard as a catalog in the following any paratactic arrangement of three or more items.

[26] Buell gives as an example the "encyclopedic treatment of sea subjects," (*Literary* 167) in *Moby-Dick*. Generally, though, he seems to struggle to align Melville with the other catalog authors. The same goes for Belknap who points to the cetology chapter on the etymology of 'whale' but who

In result, the form that Buell credits with constituting "one of the defining features of romanticism in America," the poetic catalog, is deeply intertwined with data practices. Formally, it evokes the dataesque storage of experience not in meaningful, causally related chains but in containers of similar, paradigmatically interchangeable information. In terms of the content it affords, it speaks to the transcendentalists' interest in knowledge and knowledge practices at least as much as to a desire for literary expression.

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generally takes long to get to talking about the catalogs in his Melville chapter. On Melville, cf. also Lee, who opens his book by reading the school Usher and the Sub-Sub-Librarian as two information workers (*Overwhelmed* 1).

[27] Cf. also Lewis Mumford's contention that "Almost all the important works of the nineteenth century [...] respect the fact [and] are replete with observation" (191-92).

2.2.3 The Liminal Poetics of the Poetic Catalog

Discussions of the poetic catalog often liken catalogs to lists to underscore the formal simplicity of this design pattern. These comparisons tend to emphasize the ‘practical,’ utilitarian qualities of the latter, often by relating them to shopping lists or (ancient) commercial inventories, which then gets contrasted with the more ‘artistic’ aspirations of the poetic catalog, evidenced frequently by pointing out the importance of the poetic catalog for the epic or the unexpected formal complexity of a given individual instance.[28] This framing underscores the poetic catalog’s liminal position between two very different uses of text. A minimalist, utilitarian use as bare information storage, and a more aspirational use as ‘literature,’ with the latter becoming increasingly coded as decidedly non-utilitarian as of the early nineteenth century.

This ability of catalog rhetoric to evoke two complementary cultural uses of textuality does not only point to the underlying similarities between these two uses, obscured by our ideological investment in their separation—our culturally ingrained desire to view them as ontologically, categorically different; it also follows from how symbolic forms relate to one another liminally. The poetic catalog’s primary allegiance is to the symbolic form of data, and this allegiance clearly shows in how the catalog foregrounds information storage, in how it revels in discontinuity, in dynamics of massification, and in how it frustrates closure. At the same time, however, poetic catalogs are full of latent narrativity, and they often invite deeply narrative engagements—especially so if they occur in contexts that suggest intentions beyond those of merely storing information. Their use in literature thus capitalizes on the liminal border between narrative and data.

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[28] A particularly suggestive case in point is Belknap, who evokes the interchangeability of list and catalog in his book’s title already. The preface of *The List: The Uses and Pleasures of Cataloguing* then points out that “[m]any of the lists we use in everyday life are utilitarian” (xii). Note how the title also already evokes the duality of (practical) use and (aesthetic) pleasure. Cf. also his assertion that lists can “function as an envelope, a receptacle inside which various things are loosely contained or sorted, filed, and stacked with managerial efficiency” (76). I will discuss this association in more detail in my reading of Whitman’s catalogs below. On his catalogs as (stemming from) envelopes, for example, cf. the use of envelopes in his poetic process, page 152 below. On the telephone directory, cf. 78 below.

Notably, many transcendentalist authors acknowledged and actively sought out this in-betweenness, and reflected on its value in their extensive theorizations of literariness. As Emerson writes in one of his reflections on the form, a good poetic catalog has to simultaneously tease and frustrate the reader's desire to pin it down. The most potent means for that is a play around categorical closure, and many poetic catalogs accentuate their literariness by carefully violating an emerging sense of unity while still promising some degree of coherence and conceptual closure.[29] As Emerson puts it: "A too rapid unity or unification and a too exclusive devotion to parts are the Scylla and Charybdis" of the poetic catalog (qtd. in Belknap 230).[30]

While the catalog refuses a syntagmatic production of meaning, simply by including some and omitting other items, it does suggest that these belong to a shared 'class.' After all, in order to be included, the items must have something in common, and they must have been selected based on some principle. In the case of Whitman's (reviewer's) catalog, this class could be characterized by the following features:

- is plural
- tumbles pell-mell in Whitman's poems
- is somewhat abstract

But apart from that, the principle of selection governing the catalog ultimately remains unclear. Precisely because it projects a sense of (infinite) expandability, an understanding of the features that regulate inclusion and exclusion necessarily stays tentative and precarious: any additional item could change the reader's understanding of the principles that regulate this particular catalog. Since the precise outlines of the class of items included thus remains obscure, the use of a catalog (in place of or in addition to a description) suggests that this class of items is better exemplified than explained. Expressed in more general terms, the catalog suggests a principle of inclusion and exclusion the exact parameters of which remain tacit.

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[29] Contrary to what Emerson suggests here, this promise is at least partially not a matter of design but of context. Poetic catalogs can rely on literature's "hyper-protected cooperative principle." Readers are willing to give literary texts a far greater benefit of the doubt when it comes to violating superficial, formal order (cf. Culler, *Literary* 25).

[30] Cf. also Lawrence Buell's phrasing of catalogs as marked by "total openness and a sense of unpredictability" (*Literary* 170).

This, in turn, gives the catalog the ability to more generally signal the limits of narrative representation, i.e. of sequential, coherent, explanatory, causal structures. Melville's "brilliantly" adapted use of catalog rhetoric in his chapter on the "The Whiteness of the Whale" is a particularly strong example of this (Buell, "Transcendentalist" 334). In its entirety, the chapter consists of one large catalog, with some of the individual items inside it being catalogic as well. All items in the main catalog attempt to convince the reader of the terrifying quality of whiteness, making the terror of whiteness the overarching category organizing it. Yet, despite its eponymous quality, this category is declared to be inexpressible: The entire chapter is built around, opens (and frequently returns to) the narrator's inability to sufficiently express the terror of the whiteness of the whale. As he points out, the catalog's central category, whiteness, is impossible to "[put] in a comprehensible form" (Melville 185), so that he can only offer a range of associations that will nevertheless be incapable of fully expressing the "nameless terror" of the whiteness of the whale (189). The narrator explains the big-data principle of mass-exemplification over explanation, notably by way of a verb that is taken from the quantifying practices of bookkeeping:

> [H]ow is mortal man to account for it? To analyse it, would seem impossible. Can we, then, by the citation of some of those instances wherein this thing of whiteness —though for the time either wholly or in great part stripped of all direct associations calculated to impart to it aught fearful, but nevertheless, is found to exert over us the same sorcery, however modified; - can we thus hope to light upon some chance clue to conduct us to the hidden cause we seek?" (190)

In other words, by collecting (merely "[citing]," not "[analyzing]", interpreting, developing, or discussing) a multitude of isolated, unconnected instances, "stripped" of context, in which the "*same* sorcery" is thought to operate, this 'sorcery,' though unnameable, is expected to become palpable, indeed, "account[able]." The procedure the narrator describes is strikingly similar to that of a 'naive' discovery of meaningful correlations in large data sets that continues to thrive in the contemporary data imaginary.[31]

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[31] Chris Anderson's 2008 article on "The End of Theory" is one of the early, particularly visible discussions of how in an age of big data, large data sets allow statistical correlations to emerge 'naively,' i.e. with out a hypothesis guiding the analysis. Cf. also page 42 (n. 9).

The pervasive feature of the chapter, expressed in its overarching catalog as well as in the smaller ones (e.g. 185; 193), is its overall encyclopedic logic in which a mass of particulars does significatory work by example in ways that an explanation, or a more narrative development, apparently cannot. By bringing together a wide range of instances in which whiteness can be seen as terrifying, long stretches indeed read as if Melville had simply copied instances of whiteness from an encyclopedia,[32] and the narrator openly confesses that the chapter's motivating principle primarily is a desire for including masses of information: he justifies two thirds of its contents simply by saying: "But there are other instances," before continuing to list them (189). In the totalizing logic of data in which each item of information has the same worth and their massification and storage, not the selection of significant outliers and the exploration of connections and relationships, is the crucial task at hand, the mere fact that these "other instances" exist is reason enough to include them. The notion of the 'encyclopedic,' so frequently evoked as a shorthand for the poetic catalog's dataesque storage quality, does not simply denote a particularly simple mode of organization, discontinuity instead of a narrative arc, or a particular kind of content, factual information. Rather, it speaks to the aesthetic effects encyclopedic, catalogic texts can have—effects that work differently from how literature is typically thought to work.

Indeed, the idea that a writer would include more and more instances of a phenomenon simply because "there are other instances," as adequate as it is for reference works, runs counter to all understandings of art as showing the most poignant, most evocative instance, the pregnant moment. It also runs counter to to visions of the artist as the one selecting it.[33] As contemporaries of the transcendentalists already complained in fairly graphic language, the catalogs, in turn, simply "discharge the undigested" material in the readers' laps, asking them to figure out what speaks to them, and how (James, qtd. in Price 59).

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[32] Of course, as Melville scholars have pointed out, Melville did rely heavily on encyclopedias in writing *Moby-Dick*, among them the *Penny Cyclopedia* also used by Walt Whitman (Bryant 98; Folsom, "Counting" 166).

[33] Cf. Marie-Laure Ryan for a discussion of the pregnant moment, via Lessing, as a source of narrativity (*Narrative Across* 25). In Lessing's distinction of the modus operandi of the visual arts and of literature, visual arts need to identify a moment of utmost potential narrativity. Note, in this context, that Whitman was deeply fascinated by Lessing's argument, which he encountered in an article by in J. D. Whelpley that he heavily annotated (cf. Whitman, "Lessing's Laocoön [Marginalia]").

At the same time, the silence around the organizing category, along with the liberation from the tight interconnectivity of narrative, allows for and invites other forms of patterning on behalf of the reader, and these patternings, in turn, often result in another set of strong aesthetic effects. This is particularly true for literary texts, which come with a heightened expectation of an underlying will to form and are thus particularly inviting of projections of formal order. Accordingly, and especially so in the context of poetry, a catalog can entice readers to justify the particulars of its construction by way of the rhythmic or phonetic patterns it forms, or by the typographic arrangement that it appears in.[34] In both cases, catalogs trigger the readers' reflex to perform pattern recognition. The same reflex invites readers to discover in (or project onto) longer catalogs patterns of categorical clustering. While the effect is more pronounced for more extensive catalogs, it already holds for the short catalog in Whitman's review: Once one looks in detail at the "[t]hings, facts, events, persons, days, ages, qualities," the similarity between "days" and "ages" as temporal categories stands out, begging the question if the first four items also share additional qualities; or if maybe two inanimate objects, two items related to action, and two items related to time are here followed by one more abstract, overarching one; and so on.[35] Speaking more generally, catalogs invite the projection of categories, either static ones that control the entire assemblage, or evolving, sliding, or shifting ones that allow for a segmentation, or for a sense of continuous (albeit noncausal, nonnarrative) development despite the discontinuous quality of the form.

Especially if they occur within more narrative text, catalogs also generate strong aesthetic effects by how they modulate temporality and interrupt the narrative development of the surrounding material. This pausing of the narrative's teleological thrust often resonates with a visual logic: a slowing down, a halting into a snapshot photograph frozen in time, or a panoramic panning and zooming. Precisely because catalogs feature a certain extent of paratactic interchangeability and conceptual overlap between items, they entail a degree of repetition, a halting of development, an interruption of a syntagmatic forward motion, that turns them into a deviation from the flow of the surrounding text. In a temporal dilation that is akin to ‘bullet time,’ a cinematic special effect popular in the 1990s, a catalog pauses whatever narrative, imaginative, or argumentative development it is inserted into, to circle, inspect, interrogate, perspectivize, complexify, modulate, qualify, isolate, or expand the object, image, sentiment, aspect, or property it is interested in (as in this sentence just now). For the transcendentalists, many of whom were fascinated by the new representational possibilities of daguerreotypy, this visual, photographic logic the catalog evokes was rich with overtones of unmediated representation, of a lifelikeness and immediacy that more narrative representations might find difficult to replicate.

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[34] Buell's reading of Emerson discussed below is a case in point.

[35] I come back to this dynamic in my reading of Emerson's "The Poet" below (102).

Lastly, catalogs afford narrative engagements precisely because they so emphatically present themselves as seemingly nonnarrative. This aesthetic effect shows in how readers tend to regard catalogs, implicitly or explicitly, as a form of denarrativized content, lifeless, ‘dried-up’ material that has to be ‘rehydrated’ and turned back into a narrative. In consequence, many readings that aim to justify a given catalog’s literary quality end up overlaying it with a developmental logic that connects its individual elements, a notion of syntagmatic interconnectivity typically found in narrative.

Buell’s reading of a short catalog poem by Emerson is a particularly telling example of this desire to turn a catalog ‘back’ into a more narrative form. In this passage, he aims to show that a seemingly random list of impressions collected in a short poem is more profoundly organized and more artistically valuable than might seem at first:

> The world is a Dancer
> it is a Rosary
> it is a Torrent
> it is a Boat
> a Mist
> a Spider’s Snare
> it is what you will.
>
> Clearly there is a shape to this “arbitrary” list: syntactical parallelism, and the device of shortening the clauses to “a Mist” and then lengthening them again, into an all-inclusive assertion. The procession of images also has a sort of logic: the dancer and the rosary suggest stylized movement, *unleashed* in the next line by the torrent on which the boat *floats* and

> which *turns* to the mist that *congeals* into the spider's web. (*Literary* 171 -emphasis mine)

To explain the logic he sees in the catalog, and to value it as being more than merely arbitrary or impressionistic, Buell not only appeals to the typographic structure on the page, the shortening and lengthening of clauses, but he turns the catalog's individual entries into a narrative by adding verbs that describe their (presumed) functional relationship. This turns the poem's storage of discrete impressions, nouns, objects, into events and thus, ultimately, generates a narrative that has coherence and order. When he concludes that, "to change the present order of the items would weaken the whole effect," he adjudicates the catalog's literary value as dependent on how necessary its form is for its effect. But he does so based on an effect generated not by Emerson's catalog or by his own reading of it, as would be the case in any critical assessment. Buell determines the catalog's value based on an effect generated by the *narrativization* of the items in it.[36] This desire to turn the storage into a story, and the questionable plausibility of such a conversion, highlights the catalog's quality as a form of information storage, its closeness to the symbolic form of data, its inherent potential narrativity, and the liminality of these symbolic forms that invite trafficking between them.

In their seeming lack of design, and in simultaneously suggesting and denying the existence of ordering principles, catalogs, then, typically afford either of two complementary forms of readerly engagement: they facilitate both a 'paranoid' reading guided by a "tactic of suspicion" (Ricoeur, *Freud* 26),[37] in which, paradoxically, the invisible quality of the design is an important indicator of its (hidden) presence; and they allow for a superficial skim reading, a skipping-over the particulars, as one does when browsing data sets for information, a 'distant reading' of sorts. In how the emergence of the literary field sorted textual practices, the former became closely associated with literariness, and the latter with other, utilitarian information practices. Yet, in the catalog rhetoric of US transcendentalism, both associations coexist. As Kenneth Burke puts it, evoking as a foil the phone book, a standard textbook example of a nonliterary text: the "random samplings" that make up "poetic surveys and catalogues [...] do impart a note of exhilaration" to a given text, "even though one inclines to skim through them somewhat as when running the eye down the column of a telephone directory"—a practice of data retrieval, not of literary engagement (97).

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[36] It is not my goal to discuss the extent to which Buell's narrative is 'actually' inscribed in this list, or the extent to which this can then justify the sequence. Surely the spider's web could also go with the torrent, by way of their concentric forms, and the boat, assuming that it is rowed, with stylized movement. Similarly, the "device of shortening the clauses [...] and then lengthening them again" seems just as praiseworthy (or as arbitrary) as a 'device of alternating length' or one of 'increasingly shortening the clauses' (with the spiderweb in the second position) would have been.

[37] On a (tangentially) related note, Ricoeur's remarks about narrative "emplotment" as a means of an "[inverting] of the effect of contingency into an effect of necessity" speak to the felt contingency of catalogs and to the affinity between interpretation and an (*a posteriori*) inscription of narrative order that comes to look as if it had been there, as necessity, prior to its discovery (Ricoeur, *Oneself* 142).

This ability to afford two opposing forms of readerly investment—close readings and distant readings, readings for poetic intricacy and readings for information—thus again points to the in-betweenness of the catalog as a textual device. It also highlights the extent to which literariness is not a quality of some objects that clearly, categorically separates them from others. Rather it is the effect of a set of social practices of reception that can find 'literary' qualities in objects that afford but that do not at all foreground them.

2.2.4 "Democracy in the Aggregate": Politics of 'Democratic' Catalogs

While these affordances of aesthetic engagement facilitate the poetic catalog's integration into the literary, it is its promise to alleviate the ideological tensions around a democratic US national literature that explains its attractiveness at this historical moment. This promise stems from the widespread perception that the form itself was inherently 'democratic,' an impression that was explicitly, emphatically expressed during romanticism already but that continues to dominate contemporary (literary studies) discussions of this device.

In these discussions of the poetic catalog, the presumed 'democratic' quality of catalog rhetoric usually springs from two sources: from how its formal qualities metaphorize a particular, egalitarian version of direct democracy—an assemblage of individuals that together form a (more or less perfect) union without any single entity aspiring to 'represent' the members of the collective—and in how it democratizes literature by shifting (some parts of) the poetic process from the author to the reader. These observations dominate the discussion of the transcendentalists' use of the catalog until today. They were made in particularly exemplary a fashion in a much-cited review of *Leaves of Grass* by Edward Dowden, published in 1871.[38] Echoing the language and argumentative thrust of Whitman's self-review cited above, Dowden observes that "the literature of an aristocracy is distinguished by its striving after selectness," turning the catalog poet's refusal to select into an inherently democratic practice. He goes on to explain the relationship between the catalog and democracy as follows:

> No single person is the subject of Whitman's song, or can be; the individual suggests a group, and the group a multitude, each unit of which is as interesting as every other unit, and possesses equal claims to recognition. Hence the recurring tendency of his poems to become catalogues of persons and things. Selection seems forbidden to him; if he names one race of mankind the names of all other races press into his page; if he mentions one trade or occupation, all other trades and occupations follow. A long procession of living forms passes before him; each several form, keenly inspected for a moment, is then dismissed. Men and women are seen *en masse*, and the mass is viewed not from a distance, but close at hand, where it is felt to be a concourse of individuals. Whitman will not have the people appear in his poems by representatives or delegates; the people itself, in its undiminished totality, marches through his poems, making its greatness and variety felt. (Dowden, "Poetry of Democracy")

In ways that are prototypical of how later critics have frequently lauded the catalog as a particularly democratic device, Dowden identifies a structural similarity between the formal qualities of the catalog—its lack of hierarchization, its inclusiveness, its embrace of particulars—and the principles of egalitarian, direct democracy. Indeed, the same sentiment is then expressed by Buell, who notes that the catalog "seems an inherently 'democratic' technique. It has vista, as Whitman would say. It suggests the vast, sprawling, loose-knit country which America is. It also adheres to a sort of prosodic equalitarianism: each line or image is of equal weight in the ensemble; each is a unit unto itself" (*Literary* 167).[39] Acknowledging that "these associations were first fully exploited by Whitman," he concludes that "catalogue poetry [is] political action" in ways that are so deeply 'American' that the catalog emerges as a vernacular expression of democracy in literature.[40] Ed Folsom takes a similar view, observing that the relationship between the individual and the mass, constitutes "the central conundrum of democracy—how to honor both the one and the many, the 'single solitary individual' and the 'En-Masse'" (Folsom, "Counting" 155).[41] Dowden's claim that, in a democracy, every unit "possesses equal claims to recognition," Buell's notion of the catalog's "prosodic equalitarianism," and Folsom's "central conundrum of democracy" are instances of critics' readiness to see and embrace this connection.

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[38] As Leypold explains in his discussion of the "rhetorical seductiveness" of "the democratic-style theory of *Leaves of Grass*" (89), Dowden "introduces to Whitman's reception the idea that the democratic voices of New England Brahmins are not democratic in style (an argument that became commonplace to twentieth-century Whitman studies, while Whitman hardly ever used it himself)" (98). It is worth noting, however, that Whitman's own paratextual description of his poetic heavily turns on characterizing his contemporaries, American or not, as not sufficiently emancipated from the 'aristocratic' style of Europe.

In Dowden's review, the connection between the formal qualities of the catalog and the political system of democracy is established perhaps most explicitly in the observation that "the people appear" in Whitman's catalogs not "by representatives or delegates," two terms taken directly from the realm of politics, with "representatives" obviously fulfilling a special, dual function, suggesting both textual representation by symbol and political representation by an elected official. But the passage also introduces an important additional twist: When Dowden claims that, thanks to the catalog's form, "the people *itself*, in its undiminished totality, marches through [Whitman's] poems," his (figurative!) insistence on language that is not figurative engages in a rhetorical association that is central to the data imaginary: the suggestion that other symbolic forms,

[39] Cf. also Robert Belknap's reference to Hayden White when he notes that the catalog "may demonstrate what Hayden White terms a 'democracy of lateral coexistence.' This proposes that there is an equivalence of valuation or weight between one item and the next" (86).

[40] Buell's evocation of the "loose-knit country which America is," however, also points in another direction: the catalog's felt hospitality toward the project of founding a US national literature by textualizing a country marked by its sprawling, nature and diversity.

[41] Folsom's "en-masse" quotes Whitman's "One's-Self I sing" from the "Inscriptions" section of the 1881 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Cf. also Folsom and Price's comments on democracy as the central focalizer in the introduction to *Re-Scripting Walt Whitman*, that casts Whitman's work as beginning "a dialogue about democracy, poetry, love, death, and the endless permutations of life" (Folsom and Price ix).

such as narrative, constitute distorted, subjective, mediated methods for conveying reality and that data, in turn, is particularly "undiminished," direct, nonrepresentative, and 'raw.' The promise that the dataesque language of the poetic catalog was particularly democratic, then, jibes with a more general conception that the symbolic form of data—allowing information to flow freely, undistortedly, undiminishedly, and objectively—facilitated the kind of democratic public sphere necessary for rational, informed, and public reasoning and decision making.

But, of course, "the people itself" do *not* march through Whitman's poems and the catalogs, too, constitute only another form of textual representation; albeit one that trades the cachet of narrative—coherence, meaningfulness, and selectiveness—for a different set of appeals—totality, flexibility, accessibility, and the fantasy of an unmediated, unadulterated access to reality as it really is. Despite his enthusiasm for the democratic catalog, Dowden then notably struggles to argue the unqualified literary success of the device. Immediately after the passage quoted above, he couches his praise and sees a telling need to explicitly deny that merely "[w]riting down the headings of a Trades' Directory [was] poetry." Apparently, the form that derives its value from being practical and utilitarian casts doubts on the literariness of the text it occurs in, thus triggering Dowden to reaffirm the boundary between (artistically autonomous) literature and (socially embedded, commercial) data.

There is a second, similarly ambivalent dynamic of democratization—exemplified in Dowden's review but underwriting many critical engagements with the presumably democratic quality of poetic catalogs: the idea that catalogs shift the location of poetic work, that they de-emphasize the role of the poet (and in turn elevate that of the reader). Dowden imagines that, "if [the poet] names one race of mankind[,] the names of all other races press into his page," and in this phrasing, the author is curiously powerless, positively unable to subject the material to proper authorial control.[42] A similar concern for authorial control dominates many discussions of the poetic catalog. At the same time, of course, the silence around the category that organizes the catalog, responsible for many of the aesthetic effects outlined above, signals that poetic work here has not simply disappeared, but that it has indeed shifted its location. Put differently, the poetic catalog accentuates the role of the readers to whom is now left the task of actively parsing the catalog for this markedly absent element, to speculate what, e.g., “persons, days, ages, qualities” have to do with one another, or to gather from an alleged but “nameless” likeness between “the White Steed of the Prairies” and “the desperate White Hoods of Ghent” the essence of the terror of whiteness. Catalog rhetoric, in other words, shifts some of the poetic work from the author to the reader, and the catalog’s diminished role for author-ity goes hand in hand with an increased importance of readerly activity, a shift of power within the reception of the text that, again, allows for catalogs to be read as a particularly participatory, egalitarian, democratic device.

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[42] A closer reading of Dowden's quote, omitted here for reasons of space and argumentative tightness, would point out how the idea that "the names of all other races *press* into his page" hints at the worries over information overflow, and how the "undiminished totality" points at the desire for massified totality I diagnose as a general aspect of the data imaginary.

There is yet another, even more ambivalent, facet to the democratic appeal of the poetic catalog. In addition to the perceived similarity between the paratactic form and democratic egalitarianism and to the dethroning of the author, the poetic catalog also constitutes a device that is particularly easy to deploy in order to complexify a given text. While the device’s interruption of the narrative development, its denarrativized/denarrativizing quality, may make it appear crude, it simultaneously signals a moment of deliberate difficulty, a form of textual resistance to the reader looking for pleasure, and this form of readerly frustration can then come to signal the kind of ‘seriousness’ required for a truly literary work within the parameters of literariness forming during romanticism.

Two (contradictory) reviews of Melville’s work by Van Wyck Brooks exemplify this latter aspect particularly well. Reviewing *Moby-Dick* in 1922, Brooks laments Melville’s failure at “large composition” visible in the narrative depletion when the author, in his words, “forgets his story, [and] loses himself in the details of cetology” (“Melville’s” 169).[43] In a complaint that dominates much catalog criticism, the text’s encyclopedic catalogs are seen as obstructing the narrative development and coherence of the “story,” and thus as a sign of a lack of organizational prowess on behalf of the author and as detrimental to the overall literary value of the text. A year later, however, Brooks revises his opinion to now defend the catalogs precisely on the grounds of their disruptive, nonnarrative quality:

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[43] Notably, he applauds Melville’s ability to produce individual, unconnected elements, calling him “an artist of miraculous power in the minting of a phrase, a paragraph, a sudden, sharp, momentary episode” (169).

> The book is an epic, and an epic requires ballast. Think of the catalogue of ships in Homer, the mass of purely historical information in the *Aeneid*, the long descriptions in *Paradise Lost*: how immeasurably these elements add to the density and the volume of the total impression, and how they serve to throw into relief the gestures and activities of the characters! This freight of inanimate or partially inanimate material gives *Moby-Dick* its bottom, its body, in the vintner's phrase; and I am convinced that Melville knew exactly what he was about. ("Moby-Dick" 388-89)

Notably, then, in Brooks's revised opinion the catalogs are reevaluated in light of the book's qualification as an epic, and thus as a text that prequalifies as 'serious literature' by way of genre.[44] Now the elements that prevented a pleasurable read, the "mass of purely historical information" and the "freight of inanimate or partially inanimate material," are an indicator of the difficulty that, in the economy of literary criticism, constitutes a form of value. Once catalog rhetoric is seen to mark literary complexity, it is no longer in competition to narrative design but disrupts it in ways that, expressed here in strikingly material terms, add to the "density and the volume" of the book. Once the text is considered an epic, and thus a candidate for inclusion in the national canon, the quality of being 'heavy' more than compensates for the damage the catalogs do to the book's narrative design, the author's forgetting, of all things, his "story."

In this logic, catalogs, especially catalogs of dry facts or catalogs whose internal structure is not easily made sense of, add a kind of 'weight' to literature in multiple senses: The facts they contain 'anchor' the text in the material realities of its day and in the geographic, cultural, social, and political realities of the nation they are taken to represent. They discursively survey segments of the world on which the text, read as national literature now lays claim by seeing them as characteristically belonging to this nation.[45] They, moreover and quite straightforwardly, slow down the reading process and intensify the work the text demands of its readers, both associated with then-solidifying norms of literariness.[46] Along the same line of thinking, they constitute a complication that hints at an artistic project not easily understood, and they do so not least by way of the tease around a hidden structure outlined above. Once they are not skim read, once they are imagined as an important literary element, once they are marked as literary by social or by textual context, genre, they invite exactly the kind of deep reading that is commonly associated with literariness. Brooks's appeal to the author is indicative of that: Because the meaning and the design of the catalogs are questionable and fleeting, because they have to be defended against the implicit allegations of being mere projections or 'over-readings'—in other words: because the catalogs can be both, a failure or an expression of a will to form—Brooks calls upon the author to vouch for them.[47] Since the artistic value of the catalog is difficult to convincingly argue (on the reception side), it is more easily posited (on the production side). In this view, *Moby-Dick*, stripped of its encyclopedic, tedious qualities, would simply be a (potentially even popularly appealing), pleasurable sea novel rather than the somewhat inexplicable, puzzling, and difficult 'work' it is (in this line of thinking, valued as).

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[44] Notably, Brooks does not explain why an epic would require ballast. This particular assertion is assumed to be obvious, and the quick pivot to ships (that *do* require ballast) helps smooth this over.

[45] Cf. Anne Baker for observations on the connection between the surveying gaze of transcendentalism and "symbolic control and possession" (82). In Baker's interest in the visual, the transcendentalists' catalogs do not play a role, but the resonances between her notion of gazing and the surveying gaze's implementation in catalogs is obvious.

Notably, Brooks's 1920s criticism of the catalogs' deficiencies and his later decision to read such deficiencies as a marker of greatness, is not his alone. In another one of his anonymously published self-reviews, Walt Whitman seems to suggest the exact same logic in advertising his poetry by emphasizing the difficulty of his catalogic style:

> . . . Walt Whitman is a pretty hard nut to crack. His involved sentences, . . . his kangaroo leaps as if from one crag to another, his appalling catalogues, (enough to stagger the bravest heart,) his unheard of demand for brains in the reader as well as in the things read, and then his scornful silence, never explaining anything nor answering any attack,

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[46] Cf. Melville's own image of "blubber." Belknap accordingly quotes from a letter Melville wrote to Richard Henry Dana, according to which the "material of his book was literally and metaphorically 'blubber'" (147).

[47] Of course, the other figure of authority here, the vintner, is just as telling. Discussing the "body" of the wine is a connoisseur's practice. It takes practice, it expresses habitus, and in how it is primarily about nonverbal qualities, it is notoriously difficult to fully agree on and ultimately impossible to provide evidence for. Brooks' wine metaphor, his turning to matters of taste in every meaning of the word, points at the tension between claiming a democratic appeal of literature and valuing it as the kind of great literature worthy of constituting national letters.

> all lay him fairly open to be misunderstood, to slur, burlesque, and sometimes to spiteful innuendo; and will probably continue to do so (qtd. in Allen, *Solitary* 435)

Arguing not via ballast, the epic, and national appeal, but still suggesting the same evaluative logic in which difficulty becomes a marker of (literary) excellence, the self-review only superficially criticizes the dissociated "leaps" of the "appalling catalogues." More importantly, it ties these difficulties to the readers' bravery of heart and to the poet's "demand for brains in the reader."[48] Here, too, the difficulty of the text and the refusal to signify (on behalf of the text and of the author in his "scornful silence") become markers of a particular kind of literary greatness.

Indeed, in Brooks's argument about the value of *Moby-Dick*, the lack of an explanation for the opacity of the encyclopedic catalogs, the author's silence and the opacity of the text, are crucial for his bluntly and unspecifically asserting that Melville "knew exactly what he was about." This insistence on a deeper yet unexplained artistic project also is important for another rhetorical reason: in turning to the writer's interiority, it answers to a tacit concern that such denarrativizing complication might be an inferior literary tool. If merely throwing in "details of cetology" can give "bottom [and] body" to a book, the catalogs threaten to emerge as an almost mechanical stock device, capable of complexifying any piece of literature. It might be precisely this ease of (ab)use that prompts Buell to observe that parataxis "has not often been studied as a literary form" because it "is in itself a rudimentary device, and easily abused" (166). While this ease of abuse might be another 'democratically' egalitarian aspect of the catalog, such egalitarianism runs counter to the horizon of values guiding Brooks's argument in his revised opinion of *Moby-Dick*.[49] After all, such a stock device, as effective and as democratizing as it may be, subverts the economies of literary value. By insisting on Melville's secret knowledge of "what he was about" (and by highlighting the author's "scornful silence" in Whitman's case), the value of

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48 Note how Waskow falls for this praise *ex negativo* when he refers to Whitman, the anonymous author of the text, as "his own best critic" (242).

49 This tension was established in romanticism already. After all, the transcendentalists cherished the poetic catalog as a ready-made device for adding "body," "density," and "volume" to a text at a time in which American culture already prided itself on its prowess in mass production and in standardized, replaceable parts.

the catalog is detached from its aesthetic value—a realm that, as Brooks's case shows, is subject to heavy revision—and is instead tied to the presumed greatness of the author that, once established as such, can vouch for the quality of the text.

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The poetic catalog's promise to resolve—or at least suspend—the ideological tensions around a democratic US national literature thus stems from the device's deeply liminal status: its position in between two realms of social practice, information storage and literature, that were increasingly seen as fundamentally, categorically different at the time. The discourse on the US national literature-to-be then tapped into this in-betweenness. It did so at a time when the difference between data and literature began to be increasingly invested with meaning, casting them as two categorically distinct ways of textualizing the world. In this constellation, catalogs accentuate the difference between data and literature precisely by promising to bridge it. If, as I claim, the tensions around a democratic US national literature have to do with a felt incompatibility of democratic egalitarianism and literary excellence, the catalog's in-betweenness between data and literature, its position on the fringes of literariness, thus allowed for projecting onto it the qualities of both literary excellence and egalitarian information storage. I will use the next two sections to explore such projections in more detail.

2.3 "First-Rate Literature": Fuller's "American Literature"

Margaret Fuller's 1846 essay "American Literature: Its Position in the Present Time, and Prospects for the Future" constitutes a particularly early critical discussion of the state of American national literature (cf. Birns). Following on the heels of Emerson's "The Poet," which I will read in in detail below (102), it exemplifies the transcendentalist discourse on the US national literature-to-come. As romanticism in its American as well as in its European inflections generally tended to do, this discourse intertwined the question for the boundedness of the literary with that for the boundedness of the nation, and it quickly became a fixture in the young republic's public discourse—Walt Whitman's self-review, cited at the beginning of this chapter, is only one among countless examples testifying to how pervasive this discourse was. Fuller's essay is another one, but it is one that explores the underlying tensions in much greater depth.

"American Literature" combines a discussion of the conditions of publishing in the young republic, five pages of the essay's twenty-two, with a significantly more extensive review and criticism of individual authors and works, that makes up the rest. This review is roughly grouped into different genres of writing, and in adjudicating on, including, and omitting individual authors and contributions from this survey, it engages in an act of canonization befitting the underlying double project of field formation: To decide what is good literature and to decide what is American literature here are inseparably intertwined. The 'genres' the review covers only partially correspond to those considered 'literary' genres today, a fact that underscores the extent to which the meaning of 'literature' was in a process of transitioning from a generically loose term encompassing all writing toward referring to more narrow understandings as 'creative' or 'imaginative' writing of artistic value and formal finesse.[50] Accordingly, literature, for Fuller, encompasses "history," "ethics and philosophy" (127), "that large department of literature which includes descriptive sketches, whether of character or of scenery" (128-30; 137), poetry (130), drama (134-36), and periodical formats such as magazines (138), reviews (138), and journalism (139-42).[51] In each of these sections, she names and critically discusses individual authors, or individual works, typically by weighing their achievements and shortcomings in ways that suit her underlying thesis: There are promising beginnings, but there are hardly any fully convincing works of American literature yet. A truly American literature, the review asserts again and again, is for now only half-born, caught in a liminal state of becoming: a literature that is destined to arrive but that is still to come.

In fact, this contention—that an American national literature will emerge but does not yet exist—is a set piece in the larger discourse on

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[50] The *OED* dates the first use of literature in the sense of a "written work valued for superior or lasting artistic merit" in 1852.

[51] Of course, the 'classical' genres of poetry, drama, and fiction are easily recognizable in the list, as is journalism, but there are more curious categories delineated either by subject matter (history, ethics and philosophy) or by publication venue (magazines, reviews). The inclusion of "ethics and philosophy" in fact allows for Emerson to appear twice in the list, albeit pseudonymously as the "Sage of Concord" in the first rubric (128).

American literature during romanticism and beyond, and the participants in this discourse often are notably invested in this twilight state: a national literature about to emerge, present and absent at the same time. In consequence, the sense that American literature was in the process of being born proved remarkably durable for a remarkably long time. Even half a century later, Whitman could still count on the debate being at the top of American readers' minds. His 1891 essay "Have We a National Literature" still asks the "terrible query" (338) of whether there is "distinctively any such thing" as an American national literature, and it extends it into an indefinite future, adding: "or can there ever be" ("Have We" 332).[52] As much as this discourse is invested in the emergence of an American literature, it seems to be more invested in the process of this emergence than in its results.

Importantly then, Fuller's text diagnoses this absence of an American literature at a historical moment already marked by an unprecedented amount of textual production, and the process of canon formation in which her essay engages is, like all forms of canonization, a response to an overabundance, not to a lack: Only in a culture of textual superabundance does a canon become necessary as an instrument to identify, from the mass of potentially relevant texts, the ones that are worthy of being read and preserved (Straub 1). Both these observations suggest that Fuller's review engages in a complex rhetorical performance, an imagination of a process of perpetual emergence, in which the possibility for a distinctly US-American national literature is asserted by deferring its presence.

In the following, I will use this seeming contradiction as an entry point to argue that "American Literature" works through a problem that shaped the nineteenth-century discourse on US national literature more generally. Specifically, I will use Fuller's essay to show that this moment of ambiguity—the sense that US national literature is both present and absent at the same time—constitutes an attempt to escape the ideological double-bind sketched above: burdened with the impossible demands of being at once egalitarian and excellent, US national literature can only be imagined as potentiality. It is here that Fuller's text dovetails with the poetics of catalog rhetoric outlined above, a device that hosts literary and nonliterary engagements alike. Fuller's text, notably, is not a piece of catalog writing proper, but catalogs mark key moments in her essay at which she ascertains the potential for America to produce great literature.

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[52] Indeed, so fixed are the parameters of and contributions to this debate, and so important Fuller's essay's role in it that, in this text Whitman can invoke it with a casual, somewhat dismissive (and not entirely correct) reference and still trust his readers to know which contribution he is referring to. Cf. my "'Songs' and 'Inventories'" for a more extended discussion of "Have We a National Literature."

2.3.1 Massified Economies of Value

Crucially, Fuller's lamentation of a lack of American literature comes at a moment of unprecedented abundance: the 1840s are a period in which American literary production and circulation explode, with dramatic consequences for the economies of value, both monetary and artistic, organizing the literary market. The resulting 'surplus economy' forms the enabling condition for broader discussions of literary quality, and Fuller's essay, too, is underwritten by a concern not for a shortage of American literature but for the cultural ramifications of such surplus production: a concern that 'quality' is drowned out by the sheer mass of printed matter. This, too, is a crisis, but it is a different crisis than the one the text articulates. After all, the essay's main thrust, in keeping with the genre requirements of the literary review, is to guide and ultimately restrict readerly attention to a canon of select texts. While the essay claims to want to bring about an American national literature, to further the literary landscape and make something absent present, its very process of instructing the reader on the often lacking quality of the texts under review, of rejecting some works as inferior and others as not 'American' enough, follows the opposite trajectory: in face of overabundant textual production it pursues an artificial shortage of textual circulation for the sake of an increase in value.

Fittingly, economic considerations form a permanent subtext throughout the five expository pages of the essay, making a sudden appearance even in contexts where the essay presumably wants to speak about artistic value, not the economy of writing, printing, or circulating literature. A case in point is Fuller's characterization of the efforts necessary to bring about an American literature. These "noble" efforts can "cheer into blossom the simplest wood-flower that ever rose from the earth, moved by the genuine impulse to grow, independent of the lures of money or celebrity" (125). As much as the contrast between the modest, natural, organically American growth of a flower and these ulterior motives is, “money” and “celebrity” constitute a jarring intrusion into the ‘bucolic’ metaphoric field of botany. This intrusion is not an exception; rather the essay keeps slipping back and forth between its professed concern for literature as a disinterested pursuit of beauty and its awareness of the economies that underwrite it. Imagining the historical moment of its writing as one of particular artistic promise, the wee hours of an American literature to come, it, in another example, claims that “the spirit of truth, purely worshipped, shall turn our acts and forbearances alike to profit, informing them with oracles which the latest time shall bless” (125). While this sentence in itself is concerned strictly with the immaterial rewards of inaugurating a new literature, it is immediately followed by a paragraph that links literature’s “dim and struggling state” to the “exceedingly pitiful” “pecuniary results” of writing for a literary market, a market that fails to sustain its authors. The context thus marks the meaning of “profit” here as dual, referring to the artistic and immaterial promise of a literature-to-come when it is explicitly evoked, but setting up the essay for a discussion of the material, “pecuniary” conditions of the literary marketplace. In this, it does not suggest a Janus-headed compatibility the word has to two categorically, essentially distinct cultural realms. Instead it underscores that these two concerns, these two presumably different economies, cannot be disentangled at all.

Indeed, the paragraph following this concern for “profit” is filled with a remarkable amount of affective engagement, which marks it as a crucial site in the essay’s discussion of literariness in face of the massification of print. In the paragraph, Fuller protests:

> From many well known causes it is impossible for ninety-nine out of the hundred, who wish to use the pen, to ransom, by its use, the time they need. This state of things will have to be changed in some way. No man of genius writes for money ; but it is essential to the free use of his powers, that he should be able to disembarrass his life from care and perplexity. This is very difficult here ; and the state of things gets worse and worse, as less and less is offered in pecuniary meed for works demanding great devotion of time and labour (to say nothing of the ether engaged) and the publisher, obliged to regard the transaction as a matter of business, demands of the author to give him only what will find an immediate market, for he cannot afford to take any thing else. This will not do ! When an immortal poet was secure only of a few copyists to circulate his works, there were princes and nobles to patronize literature and the arts. Here is only the public, and the public must learn how to cherish the nobler and rarer plants, and to plant the aloe, able to wait a

> hundred years for its bloom, or its garden will contain, presently, nothing but potatoes and pot-herbs. (126)

Fuller's argument here ventures into truly conflicted territory. Wishing back a time of textual scarcity, a time when the country "was not so deluged with the dingy page" and in which writing was not "a matter of business" ultimately ends up wishing back a feudal, pre-democratic time in which "princes and nobles [would] patronize literature and the arts"—a startling outcome indeed. The remarkable emphasis, underscored by the essay's only exclamation point, with which Fuller asserts that "[t]his will not do!" then fulfills a double function. It surely expresses a deep frustration over a surplus market of literature, and about the discrepancies between what this market wants and what authors of renown would want it to want. But it also serves to override the moment of hesitation and ambivalence the conclusion surely must have triggered. After all, the essay that set out to summon a coming American national literature here ends up wishing back aristocratic times.[53]

Of course, Fuller is by no means alone in imagining the economies of literary value as independent of, or even opposed to, those of monetary value and the market, and she is not the only one to do so at a historical moment in which money-driven textual circulation thrived. Rather, romantic discourses on both sides of the Atlantic were heavily invested in Kantian aestheticism with its vision of an 'autonomy' of art, understood as a quality that placed art and literature outside of the commodifying forces of the market. When Fuller suggests that true literature "[grows] independent of the lure of money or celebrity" (125), this assertion aligns her with these preexisting, dominant discourses; discourses that notably imagine literature as removed from market and society at a time when cheap printing and an expanding, educated urban middle class facilitated an unprecedented circulation of literature and enabled its unprecedented integration into, rather than its distance from, society. These broader, transnational discourses and their visions of artistic autonomy underwrite the emergence of the literary field and the solidifying and institutionalization of the data-literature split this study is interested in. Expressed in Bourdieusian terms, they project an alternative economy based on the circulation of cultural capital, an economy that reifies literariness as a quality of (only some) textual objects, and one that produces the (economically) necessary scarcity of truly literary objects in face of the material overproduction of readable matter.

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[53] I will discuss such flirting with aristocracy in more detail in my discussion of Emerson's "The Poet" on page below below (112).

The ease with which Fuller's review can tap into these discourses is evidence of their pervasiveness, but in the context of the US antebellum's discussion of national literature, they come with the particular liabilities expressed in how Fuller's longing for "immortal poet[s]" becomes entangled in visions of feudal tutelage by "princes and nobles" and in a premodern form of textual circulation in which "only [...] a few copyists" reproduce art for the few. Speaking in more general terms: In the modern value economy of the emerging field of literature, one that "cherish[es] the nobler and rarer plants," the print market's reliance on popular acclaim as a precondition for economic viability is necessarily problematic.[54] Criticizing it, however, involuntarily flirts with the 'European' aristocratic structures, and discussions of literariness thus had to navigate two conflicting ideological configurations. One is the political ideology of the young republic, in which the public is trusted to make important political decisions on its own behalf; the other is the ideology of literary value. Here the public cannot be trusted to pick its own books.

This conflicted constellation then resurfaces again and again throughout Fuller's essay. It is a crucial element in a more abstract ambiguity the essay harbors toward massified abundance, an unresolved love-hate stance toward mass and plurality, and I will use the next two subsections to discuss this ambiguity in more detail. In both cases, this ambiguity is expressed in short catalogs that position a sense of sprawling abundance as running contrary to visions of literary refinement. These catalogs, at the same time, tie this abundance to US national identity, and they thus work to both express and contain it in stylized form.

2.3.2 The Absent Presence of "That Which Has, as Yet, No Existence"

Most crucially, the conflict around the 'aristocratic' overtones of literary excellence keeps the essay from imagining its eponymous "American Literature" as presence. Invested in imagining a national literature that can be both democratic in an egalitarian sense and excellent, two inherently incompatible demands, it can only imagine US national literature as un/existing in a perpetual moment of emergence, an ambiguous state in between presence and absence.

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[54] This skepticism around economic success and popular acclaim was less pronounced in other fields of knowledge circulation. For example, as Donald E. Scott notes of the lecture circus of the 1840s and 1850s, a lecturers ability to draw mass audiences and to live off the fees was signaling quality to the audience. The lectures, of course, were not 'literary'—meant to instruct not please (cf. 807).

This begins already with the opening one-sentence paragraph, the apologetic acknowledgment that "[s]ome thinkers may object to this essay, that we are about to write of that which has, as yet, no existence" (122). The complex temporal layering of this gesture is remarkable. It anticipates an objection by future readers against the essay, which, at the moment of being imagined, is not yet written. After all, the sentence explicitly hails from a moment at which the author is still "*about* to write." In this condition, being spoken of but not yet being written, the essay itself, then, mirrors its object: a genuinely American literature, which also "has, as yet, no existence." Standing at the beginning of both the writing and the reading of the essay, a veritable threshold, the sentence demonstrates how an absence and the anticipatory reaction to something before it exists—the paradoxically manifest quality of being spoken of while having "as yet, no existence"—enables a text, the essay itself, to come into being. At the same time, of course, this enabling assertion of having "no existence," for both the essay and American literature, is a verbal performance: By the time that "thinkers may object," the essay is indeed already written; and its object, American literature, similarly exists at least in some sense. This is why the essay's second sentence already needs to define it out of existence. It does so by asserting that "books [...] written by persons born in America [...] do not constitute an American literature" in and of themselves. Rather than being American by way of their authors' nationality, texts need to display a particular quality of Americanness to qualify as American literature. The essay, however, is unable to fully spell out this quality of Americanness. With no successful examples to point to, literary Americanness remains an elusive category. Together, these two opening sentences, then, exemplify the modus operandi of Fuller's text: it heralds the coming of a truly American literature by arguing out of existence whatever American literature already exists.

This is particularly remarkable considering that the essay's own presence, along with that of literary journals, reviews, and magazines it speaks of, gives evidence of the rich textual and metatextual ecosystem at the time. After all, Fuller's diagnosis of a lack of American literature comes at a moment of a distinct flourishing of sorts. As Richard H. Brodhead explains referencing William Charvat, the antebellum was a transitional time when an “expansion in the market for fiction began to make it more practicable for an American to take up a career solely as a writer, but also when cultural separations among different kinds of audiences and interests a writer might appeal to had not yet been well-established” (19). Accordingly, as Nina Baym points out, the 1840s were indeed a turning point at which “the publishing scene changed dramatically” due to a sharply increasing abundance of printed matter—a transformation that also showed in the review system. Reviews, that had before served also to distribute the content of books that otherwise were not in circulation became more “essaylike” and concise (19), dropping their longer, descriptive parts in favor of short, evaluative assessments. In this sense, Fuller’s diagnosis of a crisis, a lack of a genuinely American and genuinely worth-while, literature takes place within an exploding industry of textual production, and her essay’s lamentation of the lack of Americanness is, in a seeming paradox, made possible by the very vitality of publishing in America at the time—a vitality that showed, among other things, in an entire industry of metatextual production busying itself with the description of the texts that were in circulation but that were already too numerous to be actually, properly read. Her extensive discussion of the review journals, and her investment in the importance of these journals’ work for bringing about the kind of literature she longs for, point to this historical moment.

Indeed, it is in her discussion of the review journals, and of their relative success in America, that a number of the points made so far becomes palpable. As part of a longer discussion of the publishing landscape of periodicals in the US, Fuller singles out the review journals as a rare success:

> The Reviews are more able. If they cannot compare, on equal terms, with those of France, England, and Germany, where, if genius be rare, at least a vast amount of talent and culture are brought to bear upon all the departments of knowledge, they are yet very creditable to a new country, where so large a portion of manly ability must be bent on making laws, making speeches, making rail-roads and canals. They are, however, much injured by a partisan spirit, and the fear of censure from their own public. This last is always slow death to a journal ; its natural and only safe position is *to lead* ; if, instead, it bows to the will of the multitude, it will find the ostracism of democracy far more dangerous than the worst censure of a tyranny could be. (138)

The passage contains many of her essay's operations in condensed form: In ways that resonate with her overall argument, she lauds the reviews primarily for their potential of furthering the future development of American literature, again valuing beginnings over presence, potential over achievement. She applauds the review journals by dismissively comparing them to the journals in Europe, indicating that Europe continues to be the yard stick against which American culture needs to measure up. At the same time, she remains tellingly unspecific as to what the review journals' exact shortcomings are. After all, her remarks gesture merely toward the general intellectual climate in Europe, the thriving of "all the departments of knowledge," than to the work of the reviews themselves. In consequence, the exact deficits of the American (as well as the precise qualities of the European) journals remain unclear; a reminder of the elusiveness of the presumed differences between such invented entities as nations are.

This difficulty of naming the qualitative differences between the US and Europe, apart from a vague and general sense of inferiority in light of the "vast amount of talent and culture" in the latter, then leads to a remarkable argument in the second half of the paragraph, a return of the appeals of feudalism. In a context that treats the reviews as a synecdoche for American literature generally—they are "able" but they still "cannot compare"—democracy emerges as the main enemy of a more successful literary development. What innocuously begins by pointing out a "partisan spirit" quickly becomes a chain of associations leading from the "public" to "the will of the multitude" to "the ostracism of democracy." Seventy years after the declaration of independence, Fuller's essay suggests that "the worst censure of a tyranny" might still produce better review journals, and, by extension, a better national literature, than democracy can.

Notably, it is a short but highly canonical poetic catalog that facilitates the transition between the more evaluative part of her argument about the merit of review journals in different countries and the more openly political one about the value of a "tyranny." Characterizing the US as "a new country, where so large a portion of manly ability must be bent on making laws, making speeches, making rail-roads and canals," the catalog makes an argument that formed a touchstone of the debate over a perceived American literary inferiority.[55] It suggests a rivalry between practical concerns and artistic ones, claiming that making the new country habitable and building a nation had simply taken up too much energy to produce great literature. So well-established and ready is this view that Fuller actually makes it twice in the essay, using a catalog in both cases. Earlier on, she had already argued that a genuinely American literature "will not rise till [...], the physical resources of the country being explored, all its regions studded with towns, broken by the plow, netted together by railways and telegraph lines, talent shall be left at leisure to turn its energies upon the higher department of man's existence" (124). In both these cases, the immediate, material concerns of making the country habitable are an ambivalent site, and the catalogs accordingly attempt to overcome or resolve this ambivalence: They mark an American exceptionalism of sorts, and the catalog's panoramic gaze brims with a palpable fascination with these material developments and their sprawling, busy nature. At the same time, these material developments are in competition with a presumed artistic development of the "higher departments of man's existence." The catalogs thus manage to express such material abundance as unbounded and uncontainable, but they do so in stylized form.

Pointing to the need to make the country inhabitable (for a white, modern, colonizing settler society) is more than an excuse for a lack of widely acknowledged literary achievements. Rather it taps into a larger discursive constellation. As Günter Leypold points out, in the nineteenth century the "enlightenment emergence of a 'disinterested' sphere of 'aesthetics'" had led to a sentiment that "recognizes the importance of literary intellectuals" but that does so only "at the risk of demoting them to the private domain. Emerson's complaint, in 1837, that American intellectuals are 'addressed as women' and thus 'virtually disfranchised' by society's 'practical men,' indicates the anxieties of social irrelevance (and questioned masculinity)" caused by this (90-91). Accordingly, Fuller's paragraph on the review journals layers four sets of binaries: the somewhat inferior US reviews versus their European counterparts, Americanness versus European nationalities, practical endeavors versus aesthetic ones, and democracy versus tyranny. The catalog on the qualities of America is crucial to mediating these binaries. It suggests a much longer, potentially infinitely expandable list of practical concerns of which it only contains some few examples, and it ties this list both to the realm of the nonliterary and to the national identity of the United States. As is the case in many of the transcendentalist catalogs, the breadth of this survey evokes a busy, sprawling nation, one whose myriad occupations cannot be fully given and one whose busy-ness might indeed better be captured by data samples than by an attempt to describe it in full. Even though the overall context acknowledges that these occupations run contrary to artistic endeavors, the stylization of these different practical occupations in a catalog suggests a certain poeticity—a point that Emerson more fully develops in his “The Poet” (cf. page 118 below in particular).

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[55] Note also how the catalog aligns political and juridical writing with practical concerns rather than literary production. They already belong to established fields in their own right and thus do not qualify for inclusion.

Without evoking data explicitly, the dataesque form of the catalog thus allows for a remarkable operation here: it acknowledges that America, occupied with practical concerns as it is, might be incapable of worthwhile literary production for now, and it fittingly expresses this condition in a presumably nonliterary form: a mere list. But the catalog also invites a reading for its casual patterning, such as the paratactic repetition of “making” in each of its clauses, suggesting a raw potential for literariness in the material itself.

2.3.3 Boundary Practices: Literature and Nation

The essay’s central rhetorical operation, its calling into being American literature by arguing its absence in face of its unprecedented circulation, relies on several operations of exclusion. Most fundamentally, it (mostly tacitly) excludes a range of textual production as not literary; it, secondly, excludes a number of literary texts as either lacking in quality or lacking in Americanness—this, after all, is what the extended review section does. Like all processes of boundary drawing, these acts of exclusion bring into being the object they presumably only describe, an object of inherent elusiveness save for the boundaries that enclose it. In Fuller’s essay, as in US-romanticism’s discourse on the possibility of a US national literature in general, the efforts of tending to and cultivating the boundaries that demarcate ‘literature,’ however, keep mirroring the efforts of tending to and cultivating the other, equally arbitrary, boundary at stake: that of the nation.

One such act of boundary drawing is already visible in the catalog above, and it illustrates well the pervasive implicit and explicit effort to solidify the meaning of ‘literature’ in the essay. By grouping the ‘practical’ textual systems of “making laws” and “making speeches” with other narrowly practical, economic, engineering, and building concerns, these systems are identified as distractions—material and intellectual efforts that subtract energy from the endeavor of producing literature. At the same time, history, ethics, and philosophy, arguably of comparably practical quality and considered nonliterary today, emphatically are part of Fuller’s catalog of ‘literary’ genres. Moreover, scripture and science, two other textual systems in circulation at the time, are entirely absent from her consideration. They feature neither as literary practices, nor as textual genres opposed to it. Observing this obviously is not to suggest a particular arbitrariness on Fuller’s part. Rather it is to read from her essay the contingency with which textual practices get grouped together now and then, some of them being considered literary and others not—a contingency that requires permanent efforts at boundary setting, efforts that explicitly name these boundaries or that implicitly evoke and naturalize them, efforts that frequently denote the object at stake not positively by the qualities it has but negatively, merely by way of a presumed difference, a boundary, it has with others.

This is also true for the dramatic and telling opening assertion of the essay: “[I]t does not follow,” Fuller explains after brief preliminary remarks, “because many books are written by persons born in America that there exists an American literature. Books which imitate or represent the thoughts and life of Europe do not constitute an American literature” (122). In its apodictic force, and in differentiating between mere authorship by people of a particular birthplace on the one side and an authentic literary Americanness on the other, it establishes the latter as a textual quality. In the following pages, however, the essay remains remarkably unclear as to what an ‘original’ rather than imitative, American quality would consist of. It uses Great Britain as a foil against which to imagine Americanness, but the metaphorical language it uses to describe Britishness, the lack of an analytic vocabulary to argue literary quality, along with the undeniable acclaim of British culture, keep undermining this project.

In part, these difficulties stem from the analytical vagueness with which the essay necessarily adjudicates the texts under review. Predating the full-fledged academization of literary criticism / literary studies, the essay cannot rely on the categorical stability of a discursive system that rests in itself. This shows, for example, in the difficulties it has in locating the conceptual site at which the Americanness of American literature is supposed to be found, or in explaining how such national autonomy is supposed to manifest: The observation that “an original idea” or “fresh thoughts” are lacking suggests that this is foremost a matter of content (122), but the essay later suggests that “national ideas” are required primarily because these ideas then “[crave] to be clothed in a thousand fresh and original forms” (124). Ideas, in this view constitute the ‘soul’ of forms. Without them, “all attempts to construct a national literature must end in abortions like the monster of Frankenstein, things with forms, and the instincts of forms, but soulless, and therefore revolting” (124).[56] The review section has similar difficulties of precisely naming what is missing in a given text. When Fuller writes of William Prescott that the “richness and freshness of his materials” generate “a sense of enchantment” but that he “possesses nothing of the higher powers of the historian, great leading views, or discernment as to the motives of action,” these observations effectively transport value judgments, but they do not project a categorical system in which either literary quality or Americanness could be reliably discussed.

This problem gets further exacerbated by the perceived need, apparently, to couch the criticism of Great Britain. The essay accordingly backpedals on some of its more forceful critical points by insisting that the disparagement of British literature and character “does not apply to Shakespeare,” and by acknowledging that, for all the limitations of the “insular” British spirit, readers “in later days” learn to “prize the peculiar greatness [...] which has enabled English genius to go forth from its insular position and conquer such a vast dominion in the realms both of matter and mind” (123). Clearly the existing parameters of literary quality, and the discursive parameters of literariness, which necessitate an acknowledgment of Shakespeare despite his Britishness here, get in the way of asserting any authentic American literary qualities.

In response to this problem of separating Americanness and Britishness, the essay again turns to catalog rhetoric to describe the American side.[57] It first characterizes British culture as having “the iron force of the Latins, but not the frankness and expansion," as having produced a literature that is, "[l]ike their fruits," in need of "a summer sky to give them more sweetness and a richer flavour [sic]," and as generally marked by "a reminiscence of walls and ceilings, a tendency to the arbitrary and conventional" and an "insular" quality with a "consequent need to concentrate and intensify her life" (123). This "insular" quality is contrasted with the American geography in another short catalog: Americans, the essay claims, are

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[56] Cf. also her later observation that many great American books had been produced before the time of her writing but that most of these books had been “except in their subject matter, English books” (127).

[57] Here, as throughout, the essay employs an organic, horticultural metaphoric framework: Fuller later observes that American culture only needs to “harrow the soil and lay it open to the sun and air. The winds from all

> a mixed race, continually enriched with new blood from other stocks the most unlike that of our first descent, with ample field and verge enough to range in and leave every impulse free, and abundant opportunity to develope [sic] a genius, wide and full as our rivers, flowery, luxuriant and impassioned as our vast prairies, rooted in strength as the rocks on which the Puritan fathers landed. (123-24)

Again, the catalogic drive of the passage, its paratactic enumeration of qualities, does little to make tangible what an American literature would look like—if anything, the way in which the more manifest differences of climate, geography, and environment keep pressing into the foreground here involuntarily highlights the difficulty of projecting these 'natural' geographic differences onto cultural differences in the literatures of these two nations. However, the catalogic form effectively associates an American (literary) character with a sense of vastness, abundance, and plenitude, precisely because it resists coherent argumentative closure: the catalog takes data samples from the prairies and rocks, but it does not even attempt to describe the geography that is imagined as enabling American literary autonomy.

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Engaging with Fuller's "American Literature" then brings to the fore a telling conceptual slippage that transforms the problem of Americanness into that of literariness (and vice versa). At first glance, the title and the opening postulates Americanness as the central quality of interest. Yet, throughout the entirety of the essay's following pages, the discussion of the individual works' and authors' merit primarily turns on their perceived lack in literary quality. Obviously, this is in keeping with the

quarters of the globe bring seed enough, and there is nothing wanting but preparation of the soil, and freedom in the atmosphere, for ripening of a new and golden harvest" (125).

genre requirements of the review essay, but it also curiously transforms the problem at stake: asking if US writers are American enough, it keeps saying that they are not literary enough. The essay's imagination of a potential, future American national literature is thus engaged in a tightly-interwoven double-exclusion—it dismisses, in one operation, all literary works under review as not sufficiently American and as not sufficiently literary. Together, these exclusions leave no piece of American literature remaining, but they draw a boundary that serves to call into being the object they circumscribe, albeit as an absent one.

The above reading of Fuller's essay thus brings to the fore two radically different models to explain the prevalent discourse on the absence of a national literature in antebellum America: In one, openly advanced by the essay, there really was no American literature to speak of, and the discourse on its absence simply describes this empirically true fact; to accept this answer one has to subscribe to two essentialisms: that of national literatures as being inherently, categorically distinct, and that of literary value being a quality manifest in some works and missing in others. Obviously, and as should be abundantly clear by now, this study does not subscribe to these essentialisms but rather interrogates them for the discursive work they do. It views both the imagination of national distinctness and the imagination of literary distinctiveness as operations that bring about the objects they pretend to observe. Seen thus, Fuller's essay bears all the signs of these discursive operations. By speaking of American literature's absence, it is engaged in permanent, intertwining efforts of reifying, of making seem essential, two highly socially contingent, artificial constructs: national identity and literary value.

The moments of conceptual slippage and of contradiction in Fuller's "American Literature" point to the tensions this project entails. The essay's two eponymous categories, Americanness and Literariness, keep bleeding into one another, and the worries over a lack of literary production keep revealing an underlying concern over an overabundance of texts and of literary circulation. The essay's textual, argumentative struggles thus lay bare how romanticism's notions of literariness, notions that the essay necessarily draws on, conflict with dominant political ideologies of the young republic. This is most obvious in the case of the 'democracy' of the market that, in Fuller's view, cannot be trusted to sustain literary excellence, thus raising suspicions about the general trustworthiness of the public. On perhaps a somewhat more abstract level, the essay's struggles point to an ambivalence around a mass-vs-excellence dichotomy, which also speaks from its concern with a lack of American literature at a moment of its unprecedented proliferation. Mass, here, indeed is doubly coded: as positive in the realm of political participation, and as negative in the realm of literary value. Similarly, practicality, a value the young republic generally prides itself on, comes to be suspect in the realm of literature-as-art.

These argumentative struggles, vividly illustrated by Fuller's essay, are by no means unique to her text. Rather, they are bound up with the project of field formation that the essay engages in. Calling into being the literary field necessarily entails an othering of a range of textual and information practices, some of which resonated more strongly with the dominant, national ideologies of political independence, pluralism, egalitarianism, and democracy. These other(ed) practices would have lent themselves more easily to advancing the United States' cultural independence from 'European' traditions: As I argue throughout this study, new textual forms and practices that turned on the symbolic form of data stood increasingly ready to perform the kinds of world-making and world-ordering traditionally entrusted to those forms and practices that were now being grouped together as 'literature.' As this chapter argues, the poetic catalog's success in US romanticism is tied to this particular discursive constellation. Catalog rhetoric here constitutes an attractive stylistic device because it promises to resolve or at least suspend some of the tensions and contradictions around imagining a national democratic literature; tensions that show, among other places, in Fuller's text.

2.4 Catalog Rhetoric and the De/Valuing of Mass: Emerson's "The Poet"

Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay on "The Poet," published in 1844, two years before Fuller's review, is particularly pertinent in this context for a number of reasons: it explicitly and positively spells out the poetic project of transcendentalism; it ties this poetic vision to US national identity and to the problem of a (yet-to-be-founded) US-American national literature; it envisions, as a core quality of this new poetic project, an ability to capture in a surveying gaze the vastness, plurality, and diversity of the United States; and, even though it makes no direct references to democracy, it imagines this national literature as distinctly democratic—an aspect that then spawns conceptual difficulties around the relationship between artistic exceptionalism and democratic egalitarianism. Most importantly, the essay heavily relies on paratactic catalog rhetoric that I read as resonant with the data imaginary, and this rhetoric, repeatedly showcased throughout the text, not only describes but already demonstrates the new poetic America presumably is waiting for. Using extended catalogs, "The Poet" ties the new US national literature-to-come to democracy and to a particular version of democratic modernity, thus situating the catalogs, and the dataesque logic they operate, at the fault line between art and egalitarianism.

Of course, "The Poet" is also worth a closer look for the influence it has frequently been credited with: Among other things, it allegedly brought a "simmering, simmering, simmering" Walt Whitman "to a boil" (his words, relayed by John Townsend Trowbridge), thus triggering the writing of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*.[58] But the connection between Whitman's catalogs and Emerson's vision of a transcendentalist poetic, a connection synecdochical of how Emerson's role for the 'American Renaissance' is often conceptualized, goes beyond the former's acknowledgment of Emerson's influence on him. It is typically traced to two passages in "The Poet": the assertion that "[b]are lists of words are found suggestive, to an imaginative and excited mind" (Emerson, "Poet" 188), a sentence often used to explain the workings of catalog rhetoric; and the assertion that the US currently lacked a literature appropriate to the new nation, that there had yet been "no genius in America" who appreciated the poetic potential of American society and culture, or who realized that "America is a poem in our eyes" (196)—a lack that numerous authors, among them certainly Whitman, were obviously eager to fill.[59] This connection between a promised, inherent poeticity of America and the lack of a national literature fulfilling this promise, and, more so perhaps, the cultural meanings this connection came to be invested with, testifies to the eagerness (and success) with which the transcendentalists branded their own work as foundational of American national literature as democratic literature.

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[58] Folsom and Price provide a particularly nuanced discussion of the question of the foreground of *Leaves of Grass*. They offer two possible answers to the question of what caused Whitman's transformation into a poet: "some sort of spiritual illumination" or an "original and carefully calculated strategy" to model his voice after a template such as the one Emerson envisions here (Folsom and Price 22).

[59] The Preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves* makes many intertextual references to "The Poet," among them the assertion that "[t]he United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem," a claim almost verbatim 'borrowed' from Emerson (iii).

In the following pages I will read Emerson's attempt to showcase a pioneering literary practice through its resonances with the nineteenth century's emerging data imaginary by focusing on his use of catalog rhetoric. To do so, I will first explore the link between the new poetic Emerson envisions and democracy. Other than Fuller does, Emerson hardly ever addresses head on the differences between political systems, or the relative advantages of aristocracy and democracy. His essay, however, is very much invested in these questions—in tracing an endemic, vernacular poeticality in everyday (American) life, and in an understanding of language that democratizes the poetic process, and it meets with similar conceptual impasses as Fuller does, impasses that again pinpoint the cultural work his essay is trying to do. In a second subsection, I will then explore in greater depth the links between the democratic language theory the essay proposes and the data imaginary, and I will do so by focusing on three characteristics—transparency, morselization, and massification. All three are crucial to the transcendental poetic Emerson envisions, but all three also resonate with the symbolic form of data. Based on these two subsections' preliminary work, I will then use a third subsection to hone in on two particularly important catalogs in the essay. Both these catalogs, I will argue, attempt to overcome the existing, and at the time widening, chasm between dataesque and literary textualizations of the world. They identify in the dataesque logic of the catalogic storage of experience a distinctly democratic potential, but they are also invested in the value economy of literariness. Accordingly, here, as in Fuller's case, the tensions that these catalogs register, tensions they contain but do not resolve, speak not only of a conceptual fissure but of the desire to find forms of cultural expression, a new national literature, to bridge it.

2.4.1 Democratic Literature, Vernacular Poeticality, and Democratic Language

Emerson's essay aims to outline a transcendentalist poetic, to cast it as the basis of a decidedly new form of literature, and to propose this new literary project as a template for a US national literature—which he, like

Fuller, describes as being on the cusp of emerging.[60] The essay form allows Emerson to much more openly perform some of the poetic features he imagines this national literature-to-come to have, which obviously raises some tongue-in-cheek questions as to the role he imagines for himself in this process, but which also makes it a particularly productive text to interrogate in the context of this study.[61]

Throughout, “The Poet” envisions this new poetic project by developing a more general theory of language and symbols as inherently democratic. As I will show in the following, this theory acknowledges that symbolic practices, among them language, must necessarily be “fluxional,” marked by an inherent instability, precisely because the connection between signifier and signified is conventional, and because meaning is thus a matter of pluralistic diversity: what is a good symbol for one person might not work at all for another one. In light of this, the essay turns to a dataesque practice of massifying symbolization, using a host of interchangeable data points that indicate a shared meaning rather than relying on a single, ‘best,’ symbol, and it explains and exemplifies this solution to the pluralism of language using catalogs. Doing so, however, it runs into similar impasses as Fuller’s essay above, impasses that are indicative of the tensions between this dataesque model of democratic poetry and the standards of literary excellence it nevertheless subscribes to.

Notably, Emerson’s essay never uses the word ‘democracy,’ a truly present absence considering the text’s overall thrust and the cultural and political context it inserts itself in. However, it eloquently envisions a love of symbols as an endemic, vernacular quality in all humans, and it uses this, along with a more general romantic distrust of all kinds of ‘learned’ knowledge as an effective scaffold to cast its vision of literature as ‘democratic’ without ever using the word. Indeed, from its first lines on the essay is heavily invested in developing a distinctly egalitarian vision of this new national literature-to-come: It begins by creating a foil against which this new literature stands out, and the terms in which this opening bluntly attacks the literary establishment effectively paints the image of an ‘aristocratic’ class of literati: The majority of the essay’s first paragraph is accordingly devoted to attacking the “esteemed umpires of taste,” those people “who have acquired some knowledge of admired pictures or sculptures, and have an inclination for whatever is elegant” but whose “cultivation is local” and whose “knowledge of the fine art is some study of rules and particulars, or some limited judgment of color or form, which is exercised for amusement or for show”—people, in other words, whose actions are “proof of the shallowness of the doctrine of beauty” (“Poet” 183). The target of this tirade are not simply critics but also the “men of poetical talents, or of industry and skill in metre,” who excel in formal finesse rather that in “true” poetic vision (185). In its attack on formal education and on art as a performance for the sake of meaningless “amusement” or to generate social capital, “for show,” the essay aligns this kind of refined, dismissively “fine art” with the mechanisms of distinction that mark socially stratified societies, thus creating a space and a need for a different, less formally refined yet more inclusive, democratic and egalitarian art.

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[60] The fact that Emerson, like Fuller, begins his discussion of American literature by noting its absence despite the unprecedentedly thriving literary production at the time underscores how pervasive this rhetorical move was.

[61] This holds for many of the transcendentalists, and for the romantics more generally: the self-reflexive interest of these movements in language and in the possibilities of literary representation speaks to their historic situatedness at a cultural moment in which literature increasingly emerged as a somewhat autonomous cultural enterprise in itself, but it also always suggests a certain self-interested investment.

This notion of a ‘true art’ to-come then clothes an epistemic project —art is here meant to make the world more intelligible—in prophetic language. The true poet, in Emerson’s description, is able to lift the individual above the “clouds and opaque airs in which [we] live,—opaque, though they seem transparent,” and he does away with the “noise” of life. Good poetry, to Emerson, brings readers to a vantage point from which to “see and comprehend [their] relations” and to understand “what [they are] doing.” The imagery combines spiritual metaphors, a lifting above the clouds, with a very concrete, socially grounded concern for interpersonal relations, a, for lack of a better word, ‘modern’ worry over the individual’s ability to navigate everyday life, to understand “what [one is] doing.” The two-tiered quality of this concern, spiritual on the one hand and concrete and modern on the other, returns one sentence later: “To reach this point of total vision is better than my birthday: then I became an animal: now I am invited into the science of the real.” The two points of reference, the religious overtones of birth and rebirth and the notion of a “science of the real,” correspond to the imagined temporal self-positioning of the romantic poetic project of transcendentalism: it is imagined as a new poetic, modern in its appeal to a “science of the real,” but it harkens back to the classics; it is as much a vision of a new poetry to come as it is aligned with a nostalgic vision of the masterpieces of the past.

Within this configuration, Emerson's text uses the binary opposition between 'true art' of transcendental power and a 'studied' adherence to "rules and particulars" to claim a widely spread, common poetry in American everyday life, and to align this vernacular poeticality with true poetry. In doing so, it identifies symbols as the crucial category of poetry and claims that poetry in this wider sense is a much more common activity. In this view, "men of every class" have the ability and the desire for "the use of emblems." In fact, even if people deny their own lyrical streak, even if they "fancy they hate poetry, [...] they are all poets and mystics" nevertheless (188). This widespread, egalitarian ability of everybody to be a poet shows in how people use symbols in their daily interactions. Emerson explains, notably in catalog form and with a notable choice of verb in the first sentence, that many public rituals are based on symbols:

> In our political parties, compute the power of badges and emblems. See the huge wooden ball rolled by successive ardent crowds from Baltimore to Bunker hill! In the political processions, Lowell goes in a loom, and Lynn in a shoe, and Salem in a ship. Witness the cider-barrel, the log-cabin, the hickory-stick, the palmetto, and all the cognizances of party. See the power of national emblems. Some stars, lilies, leopards, a crescent, a lion, an eagle, or other figure, which came into credit God knows how, on an old rag of bunting, blowing in the wind, on a fort, at the ends of the earth, shall make the blood tingle under the rudest, or the most conventional exterior. (188).

It is the universal, classless ability by common people, "men of every class," to use and understand symbols that gives legitimacy to Emerson's project and that thus casts it as a democratic endeavor standing in opposition to the learned meter and formal intricacies of the "esteemed umpires of taste." If symbols point to transcendent truths, and if everybody is a symbol operator, true poetry can emanate from and instruct and uplift anybody. This is where the transcendentalist vision of art is its most democratic—without ever explicitly saying so.

The conspicuously 'democratic' features of this poetic project, however, go beyond the widespread, universal ability to operate symbols in conventional, everyday rituals. Rather, Emerson's vision is underwritten by a more general theory of language as in-itself inherently democratic. The essay thus insists that

> all symbols are fluxional; all language is vehicular and transitive, and is good, as ferries and horses are, for conveyance, not as farms and houses are, for homestead. Mysticism consists in the mistake of an accidental and individual symbol for an universal one. The morning-redness happens to be the favorite meteor to the eyes of Jacob Behmen, and comes to stand to him for truth and faith; and he believes should stand for the same realities to every reader. But the first reader prefers as naturally the symbol of a mother and child, or a gardener and his bulb, or a jeweller polishing a gem. Either of these, or of a myriad more, are equally good to the person to whom they are significant. Only they must be held lightly, and be very willingly translated into the equivalent terms which others use. (195)

While this description of language as subject to permanent change, as “fluxional,” and the insistence on the arbitrary, “accidental” nature of all symbols might seem obvious to today’s contemporary (post-linguistic turn) reader, its egalitarian approach to the value of symbols has substantial consequences in the context of poetry. If all symbols are “individual,” if they all are “equally good to the person to whom they are significant,” it becomes much harder to discuss (or to assess, and far more, to agree on) a poem’s value or a poet’s achievement.[62] Put differently, if the symbolic meaning of the “morning-redness” is subjective, (poetic) communication between different individuals becomes inherently questionable, and, even more troublingly perhaps, choosing the universally best poetic image ends up an impossibility.

Notably, Emerson here uses a catalog both to explain and to exemplify the problem. His assertion that “the first reader” might prefer one symbol, another reader another one, and a third reader a third one suggests that all three symbols, the mother, the gardener, and the jeweler, have some shared kernel of meaning or function in common that allows for their interchangeability in the first place. This is the point Emerson quite obviously wants to make. However, while his argument and the items’ paratactic arrangement imply that they are interchangeable and that choosing one is simply a matter of preference, it is very difficult (if not impossible) to pinpoint this shared conceptual referent that all three images equally denote.[63] The pluralism of language that Emerson identifies positively now also keeps him from naming what these symbols have in common. It makes perfect sense, then, that Emerson never spells out what the three images are supposed to signify and instead leaves it to his readers to interpolate the (a?) correct signified from the only partially congruent yet interrelated indications he provides. Simple representation, the passage both asserts and demonstrates, does not work: all the author can do is hope that the redundancy of offering three images, three partial meanings, will lead different readers of his text to arrive at sufficiently similar understandings of what these three have in common. In the logic of the democratic poetic the essay summons, there obviously is no way of saying, in any singular and universal way, what these images signify, given the fluxional and multi-perspectival quality of language; but a proliferation of individual images, the massification of which the catalog allows for, promises an alternative, somewhat viable form of signification.

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[62] The conceptual difficulty can be seen in a minor logical glitch: The example Emerson uses ends up illustrating the opposite of what the text describes: In the Jacob Behmen example, the suggestion is that the meteor might not “stand for the same realities to every reader,” that, in other words, one symbol might have multiple meanings. The examples that follow, however, illustrate the reverse: that multiple symbols might signify the same principle or idea.

This, then, is where Emerson's use of the catalog most emphatically resonates with the symbolic form of data as outlined above: The example he gives demonstrates that poetic meaning cannot be evoked by picking the one perfect symbol but by giving a collection of massifiable data points that all indicate different measurements of the same principle: As short as his catalog is, its form and its context both suggest infinite expandability. Accordingly, the three images he gives do not constitute a precise, exhaustive description or denotation of some single principle. Not even in their plurality do they constitute a successful description of anything in particular, but they signify as mere samples, more or less arbitrarily chosen from "myriad more" similar points. Precisely because there is no single right symbol, and because a symbol cannot be trusted to evoke the same signified for a diverse, pluralist audience anyway, a host of data points needs to be mobilized in order to achieve an approximation of communication. In the logic of the database and of big data, a massification of information, an increase of informational redundancy, emerges as the only way to overcome the inherent and literally un-fixable instability of language—a quality that is positively connoted as one facet of its democratic appeal but one that simultaneously threatens to undermine a text's significatory and poetic work. The three interchangeable symbols, forming a minimal catalog in Emerson's text, thus speak of the essay's concern with the (im)possibility of democratic poetry at the same time as they exemplify the poetic principle of paratactic replaceability and massified, dataesque indication that it suggests as a remedy.

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[63] Mother and gardener might suggest nourishment or future growth, but the jeweler does not fit this meaning; a broad sense of 'polishing' (or: education) could bring together the mother and the jeweler but would leave out the gardener;

Emerson's turning to the logic of the data imaginary then has two important consequences for his argument. It further aligns his poetic with democracy, but it simultaneously questions the authority of the poet. In line with the essay's overall democratic and egalitarian thrust, and as described above (page 82), this principle of paratactic exemplification partially shifts the site of poetic creation from the poet to the reader. Now the poet's task is no longer to identify the one best image. All that poets can do is offer to their readers a database of symbols that, together, triangulate an approximate meaning—if the text's readers, now shouldering a categorically larger task than before, interpolate them. Fittingly, this reorganization of poetic work is expressed in a shift in ownership. As Emerson explains, even if a poet manages to "[say] something which is original and beautiful," he "knows well that it is not his; that it is as strange and beautiful to him as to you" (196). While the passage does not suggest that the readers now own the poem, it speaks to a universality of poetic inspiration that stems from things "strange and beautiful." In imagining such universality, it reprises the earlier notion of the potential for poetic expression in "men of every class," and this universal ability, and the shared ownership of the poetic process, and of expressions that are "strange," "original," and "beautiful," is the foundation for the catalog's ability to do communicative work and, more importantly, function as poetry. The dataesque catalog, in other words, here allows Emerson to spell out a vision of a democratic poetry.

Still, the moment of egalitarianism and the possibility of enlarged readerly work the catalog rhetoric facilitates naturally constitute a threat to the author-ity of the poet. This problem makes its first appearance with Emerson's claim that "poets and philosophers" were "not more intoxicated with their symbols than the populace with theirs" (188), but the question nags throughout the entirety of his essay: if poetry is truly egalitarian and democratic, what then is the social function (and the social standing) of the poet?[64] Beginning with the title, "The Poet," and quickly returning in the description of "the birth of a poet" as "the principle event in chronology," the text is at least as heavily invested in proffering the poet's exceptionalism as it is in positioning poetry as a universal, democratic, equally-distributed, endemic faculty.

This tension resurfaces with particular poignancy in at least three places: The first one is a discussion of inspiration and asceticism that I will return to later. The second one is the text's contradictory relationship to the classics and to Homer in particular. On the one hand, it greets "Homer, Chaucer, Shakspeare [sic], and Raphael" as "the rich poets" who "have obviously no limits to their works, except the limits of their lifetime" (197). On the other hand, it imagines that truly inspired poetry, the poetry yet to be written, will diminish Plutarch and Shakespeare and make it so that even "Homer no more should be heard of" (186).[65] Indeed, after imagining a new, American poetry and the poet creating it, the essay bluntly concludes that "when we adhere to the ideal of the poet, we have our difficulties even with Milton and Homer. Milton is too literary, and Homer too literal and historical" (196). Clearly, the text here is torn over how to assess the classical literary achievements. A third moment at which this tension between poetic excellence and democracy resurfaces is visible in one of the essay's more enigmatic images, the notion that the true "genius" poet would look at America with "tyrannous eye" and would thus be able to appreciate the uniquely poetic quality of the young nation. In an essay that so emphatically rejects all aristocratic, feudal overtones for the purpose of heralding a truly democratic, egalitarian poetry, enlisting tyranny as a positive template to accentuate a poet's command of vision is indeed surprising. In partly undoing the anti-aristocratic, egalitarian thrust of the essay, the metaphor's flirt with poetic author-itarianism speaks to the larger dilemma of American literature at the time, which I have also traced in Fuller's text above: a desire to simultaneously break with and be accepted into the ranks of European literature. It certainly speaks to the difficulty of fully overcoming a hierarchical, 'aristocratic' conception of literary excellence.

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[64] Again perhaps taking a cue from Emerson, Whitman tackles the same conundrum in his Preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves*. His claim that the poet "is a seer [...] the others are as good as he, only he sees it and they do not," ends up casting an even starker light on the contradiction between the poet's heightened individuality ("he is individual," "he is complete in himself," "[h]e is not one of the chorus," "he does not stop for any regulation . . . he is the president of regulation") and his being "as good" as "the others" (iii).

[65] The passage tells the story of how "genius had appeared in a youth who sat near me at table." In a bout of inspiration bordering on madness, he "had left his work, and gone rambling none knew whither, and had written hundreds of lines." In Emerson's telling, it remains unclear whether this mass of textual production represented successfully—the young man "could not tell whether that which was in him was therein told"—but the poetic value of this uninhibited eruption of "hundreds of lines" is clear: "We sat in the aurora of a sunrise which was to put out all the stars. Boston seemed to be at twice the distance it had the night before, or was much farther than that. Rome,—what was Rome? Plutarch and Shakspeare were in the yellow leaf, and Homer no more should be heard of" (186). It is tempting, of course, to read a story of a young man's (incomprehensible, yet prolific) poetic production as allegorical of the young nation, but these overtones remain just that: overtones.

2.4.2 Transparency, Morselization, and Massification

There are at least three other places in which Emersonian language theory—as "The Poet" describes it and as it underwrites the poetic project the essay outlines—interfaces with the data imaginary: an emphasis language as mere transmission, marked by directness and completeness, rather than on refined expression; a vision of language as morselized, which values the role of individual words or other fragmentary units of meaning-making over the role of syntagmatic chains of such units; and an appreciation of massification as one way of turning into poetry the presumably unpoetic materials that the young nation has to offer.

In line with its democratic thrust, the essay imagines the poet's work of articulation as one of radically simple transmission: "The poet has a new thought: he has a whole new experience to unfold; he will tell us how it was with him, and all men will be the richer in his fortune" (186). Poetry, in this vision of immediate, direct, quasi-telegraphic transmission, is not the process of refining experience or language, or of selecting or mediating experience in particularly powerful or polished a form, but of offering as total and as transparent as possible an interface to transcendental truths. Accordingly, the same ideal of directness informs one of Emerson's more famous descriptions of the poet's work: the best poets, he states, "resemble a mirror carried through the street, ready to render an image of every created thing" (197). While the visual overtones of the passage have frequently been read as indicative of the role of photography (or daguerreotypy) for the transcendentalist project, the ideal of (possibly) reflecting “*every* created thing” also resonates with the importance of massification and total storage in the data imaginary (and thus with the idea of “myriad more” data points quoted above). The poet’s distinguishing quality, here, is not selectiveness, an ability to choose the most significant outlier event that then represents the whole, but bandwidth, the ability to capture and transmit all.

Moreover, while the image of the ‘mirror’ at first glance might seem to suggest a proto-realist desire for representation (and has frequently been read thus by critics focusing on its photographic quality), it also needs to be read in relation to the general transcendentalist (and, in particular, Emersonian) interest in transparency, most famously expressed in the (notably opaque) idea of the “transparent eyeball” in *Nature* (4). Using the trope of transparency explicitly, “The Poet” asserts:

> We are symbols, and inhabit symbols; workmen, work, and tools, words and things, birth and death, all are emblems; but we sympathize with the symbols, and, being infatuated with the economical uses of things, we do not know that they are thoughts. The poet, by an ulterior intellectual perception, gives them a power which makes their old use forgotten, and puts eyes, and a tongue, into every dumb and inanimate object. He perceives the thought’s independence of the symbol, the stability of the thought, the accidency and fugacity of the symbol. As the eyes of Lyncæus were said to see through the earth, so the poet turns the world to glass, and shows us all things in their right series and procession. (189)[66]

In ways that impact the meaning of the mirror above, the essay’s other visual metaphor, that of transparency, also does not suggest the visuality of realist representation, a transparency in which the text ultimately becomes invisible, transparent, to reveal, without distortion, an opaque world underneath. In the transcendentalist notion of transparency Emerson describes, both language and world alike are symbols, and the poet’s

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66 It is not incidental, of course, that Emerson here uses a catalog—“workmen, work, and tools, words and things, birth and death”—to address the symbolic quality of everything. And again the catalog obstructs any simple understanding of what these different emblems are symbolic *of*. Note also that, curiously, it is the thought’s *independence* of the symbol that facilitates such transparency. Because of this independence, Emerson’s framework here relies on the redundancy of symbolization. If symbols are ‘accidental’ and ‘fugacious,’ massified collections of symbols can better signify “the thought” than any single, presumably correct one can.

task is to make these symbols transparent, thus revealing an underlying, transcendental truth.[67] The work of poetry thus is not that of a re-presentation of an existing world but that of a 'de-presentation' of this world in order to facilitate a seeing-through to the underlying order.

In a second resonance with the data imaginary, and despite the above passage's recourse to a "right series and procession," words that could be taken to imply syntagmatic interrelatedness,[68] Emerson's understanding of language is fundamentally anti-syntagmatic throughout the remainder of the essay, foregrounding the morselized quality of individual words rather than the meaning-making of longer syntagmatic chains: As the text insists, "the poet is the Namer, or Language-maker" (190), a view that turns language-making into a strikingly non-grammatical project. Language-making here is not about cojoining, about systems, and about syntagmation, but about parceling out. By "naming things" the poet is "rejoicing the intellect, which delights in detachment or boundary" (190). Naming, here, is a work of categorizing, of relating names and things, not of relating names to names or things to things. As Emerson explains, because the "poets made all the words [...] language is the archives of history," and in these archives the individual words stand notably alone and unconnected. In metaphors that accentuate the morselized quality of individual symbols and the value of masses of morselized information, the essay continues: "Language is fossil poetry. As the limestone of the continent consists of infinite masses of the shells of animalcules, so language is made up of images, or tropes, which now, in their secondary use, have long ceased to remind us of their poetic origin" (190). In this vision of language as an inanimate, fossil collection of infinite masses of dead shells, meaning does not arise from syntax or concatenation but simply from masses and masses of individual words.

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[67] Cf. Harold Bloom's assertion that "Emersonian Transcendentalism [...] is the program of attaining this transparency, which is the peculiarly American mode of the Romantic epiphany or privileged moment. Immanence and transcendence are both spatial concepts; the Divine is either *in* the world or above and *over* the world, but the Emersonian transparency gives us the Divine as being found *through* the world, which is not a spatial category at all, but discontinuous in the extreme" (61-62).

[68] Of course, the reverse argument is possible: Both series and processions suggests individual objects that are still single and discrete. Emerson, for example, avoids the more conventional romantic notion of a chain. Notably, the world that poetry thus reveals is one in which "suns [...] and moons" are "strown" on a "meadow of space" and in which "the great deep is adorned with animals, with men, and gods"—all phrasings that suggest an unconnected side-by-side of suns, moons, gods, and men.

Such an emphasis on the atomicity of language reappears in other parts of the essay as well, and even in passages that seem to flirt with notions of connectedness, the underlying logic of parcellation is strong. Even in a paragraph on the value of poetry, a passage that notably mentions long forms of poetic writing, not simply symbols or words, the unit of operation nevertheless is a single thought, which is portrayed as being marked by a lack of connections to others. Accordingly, the passage begins by emphasizing the

> inaccessibleness of every thought but that we are in [...]. What if you come near to it,—you are as remote, when you are nearest, as when you are farthest. Every thought is also a prison; every heaven is also a prison. Therefore we love the poet, the inventor, who in any form, whether in an ode, or in an action, or in looks and behavior, has yielded us a new thought. He unlocks our chains, and admits us to a new scene. (194)

Even though the poet manages to create gateways between thoughts, admitting the readers "to a new scene," these thoughts are nevertheless in themselves imagined as closed, underconnected, and inaccessible from one another. The task of the poet, even when writing an ode, is not to conjoin several thoughts, but to "[yield] us a," one, singular, "new thought." Identifying verse and sentence as two more, longer but similarly disjunct and independent, units, the essay goes on to reassure its readers: "Every verse or sentence, possessing [poetic] virtue, will take care of its own immortality" (194).

Notably, it is this very atomicity of the material that, in reading and processing it, enables "the imagination [...] to flow," and a sparseness and a lack of interconnectivity thus become a positive poetic value.[69] It is not surprising, then, that the value of "an imaginative book," for Emerson, lies not in the meaning of its narrative arc but in its individual tropes that are most productive *before* they have come together to reveal a fuller meaning: It “renders us much more service at first, by stimulating us through its tropes, than afterward, when we arrive at the precise sense of the author” (194). Coherent meaning, here, implies closure, and thus, strikingly, the failure of poiesis, rather than its success.

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[69] It is worth mentioning that Emerson was ambivalent about such atomicity, and that he was self-conscious about a presumed lack of connectivity in his own prose. As Belknap points out, "[h]e himself recognized his own compositions as 'incompressible . . . with each sentence an infinitely repellent particle.'" And his friend Carlyle agreed, telling him that his "sentences [...] 'do not rightly stick to their foregoers and followers; the paragraph [is] not as a beaten ingot, but as a beautiful square bag of duck-shot held together by canvas!'" (44-45).

Lastly, in a third conceptional interface to the data imaginary, Emerson praises massification as one way of turning into poetry the presumably unpoetic materials America has to offer, an aspect that is crucial for the essay’s project of ushering in a US national literature. Precisely because poetic language, as the essay imagines it, signifies by massifying individual symbols, even seemingly “disagreeable facts” end up contributing to the inexpressible but true meaning underneath. This allows Emerson’s poetic theory to also enlist distinctly modern, American images in its project even if they have no place in established traditions of poetic speech: As Emerson explains, where “readers of poetry” might think that “the factory-village, and the railway” break up “the poetry of the landscape,” the true poet “sees them fall within the great Order not less than the beehive, or the spider’s geometrical web.” After all, “it signifies nothing how many mechanical inventions you exhibit. Though you add millions, and never so surprising, the fact remains unalterable, by many or by few particulars; as no mountain is of any appreciable height to break the curve of the sphere” (189).

In a way, Emerson’s vision of language as morselized, and of meaning as fugacious and arbitrary to begin with, as, consequently inherently in need of massification, here allows him to adapt a version of the ‘law of large numbers’ for his poetic theory. One of the foundational intellectual achievements enabling the rise of statistics in the eighteenth century and the emergence of the data imaginary in the nineteenth, this law guarantees that the “many or [...] few particulars” contribute to the mean interpolation of the overall shape.[70] Put differently: If there are enough redundant data points, these will signify truthfully even if individual points might be off—if the scale is right, not even a mountain can distort the overall spherical shape of the earth. This valorizes those common, everyday materials that the essay elsewhere identifies as decidedly American and as turning America into “a poem in our eyes”; it underscores the need to store these materials in catalogs, as Emerson tends to do throughout the essay; but it also leaves in place the sense that these materials, if they were to stand alone, would indeed “break the curve.”

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[70] On the law of large numbers, cf. page 33 above.

In the end, it is their massification, not their individual meaning, that allows them to become poetically meaningful.

In all three instances—in the mirror-like transparency of a particularly direct form of communication, in the notion of morselized language, and in the method of poeticization-by-massification—the language theory underwriting "The Poet" resonates with the data imaginary. Moreover, in all three instances, catalog rhetoric emerges as the stylistic device that is able to effectively host these qualities. After all, catalogs invite the massification of of underconnected, morselized items in service of storing and communicating experience in presumably an unmediated, direct fashion.

2.4.3 Catalogic Value Troubles

It is not coincidence, then, that catalogs mark key moments in "The Poet." Within the perspective outlined so far, they constitute a conceptual bridge, or a bracket, binding together the vision of a new poetic that will, eventually, birth a new national literature; the dataesque desire for storing and transmitting experience in unmediated form; and the longing for this new poetic to be decidedly democratic. Precisely because this is an inherently fraught connection, the essay's catalogs are often troubled. Put differently, the connective work that the catalogs do, bringing together conceptual frameworks that keep pulling apart, more often shows, on the text's surface, as a form of tension and, in result, in fissures rather than in contradictions bridged. This third subsection will probe further into these fissures and impasses by focusing on two longer catalogs in particular.

Throughout "The Poet," catalogs are typically used to both explain and illustrate the language theory outlined above: In light of the "fugacity" and "accidency" (189) of individual symbols, and in recognition of the fact that, in a democratic, egalitarian framework, all symbols "are equally good to the person to whom they are significant" (195), catalogs promise to signify not by offering the best but by offering a multitude of information. When the essay uses the catalog as a rhetorical device, it does so typically both to denote a principle that cannot be named in more specific terms and to illustrate the catalogs' modus operandi in resolving this problem.

This logic underwrites the catalogs quoted above: the one in which "workmen, work, and tools, words and things, birth and death, all are emblems" (189) and the one in which the "mother and child," the "gardener and his bulb," and the "jeweller polishing a gem," all come to signify some shared meaning, a meaning that even from the distant, analytical perspective of the essay is impossible to name precisely and that thus can only be approximated by offering these three images out of "myriad more" (195). In these examples, but also throughout the essay, the catalogs have a tendency to name emphatically mundane things. This speaks to the essay's overall goal of asserting the value of a common, vernacular poetry of America vis-a-vis the venerable, aristocratic poetry of Europe. However, the everyday quality of the (American) items inside the catalogs and the device's massification of such items also undermines the sense that they are, indeed, on par with (European) excellence that the catalog may try to advance.

The famous, longer passage calling for a "genius in America" who is able to value the young nation's "incomparable materials" exemplifies this problem well. It is built around one short and two larger catalogs. The catalogs and their framing are revealing:

> We have yet had no genius in America, with tyrannous eye, which knew the value of our incomparable materials, and saw, in the barbarism and materialism of the times, another carnival of the same gods whose picture he so much admires in Homer; then in the middle age; then in Calvinism. Banks and tariffs, the newspaper and caucus, methodism and unitarianism, are flat and dull to dull people, but rest on the same foundations of wonder as the town of Troy, and the temple of Delphi, and are as swiftly passing away. Our logrolling, our stumps and their politics, our fisheries, our Negroes, and Indians, our boasts, 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; its ample geography dazzles the imagination, and it will not wait long for metres. (196)

After introducing its central concern, the lack of a genius American poet, and asserting its underlying contention that poetry always attempts to make visible the same underlying transcendental truths, "the same gods," the passage launches into a minimal catalog ("Homer", "the middle age," "Calvinism") to suggest that these disjunct historical moments indeed share the same poetic powers and the same poetic concerns. More importantly, however, the triad, in content and in the shift of rhythm from the syntactic to the paratactic, sets the stage for the second catalog—the first of the two longer ones, which both describe the poetic material of the young nation. Opening with “[b]anks and tarrifs,” this catalog emphatically and programmatically embraces the mundane—explicitly and somewhat defensively *ad hominem* insisting that these presumably “flat and dull” institutions are flat and dull only “to dull people.” With this brief intermission, the passage’s third catalog then picks up where the previous one paused, continuing the enumeration of “incomparable materials” America has to offer to the poet who is up to the challenge, adding yet another catalog of relatively contemporary and emphatically everyday impressions of American social life.

The two long catalogs reprise features to be found in other catalogs throughout the essay, and they are exemplary of how catalogs operate here and beyond: Again, the need for a catalog points to an impasse in the essay’s own ability to speak. Unable to more concretely name these “same gods,” it leaves it to the readers to interpolate from “logrolling,” “pusillanimity,” and “Troy,” what higher principles, or even what poetry, a real poet’s “tyrannous eye” would be able to see. The move, secondly, shifts the poetic work at least partially to the readers, who now need to abstract at least a vague sense of meaning from the catalog. Thirdly, most of the items that make up the catalogs emphasize social institutions —institutions, especially in the first one, that are linked to liberal, capitalist democracy and that are mundane rather than exceptional, thus opting out of the traditional subject matter of poetic speech. Like catalogs generally tend to do, both longer catalogs moreover tease with hints of interconnectedness that they are quick to frustrate. The first one demonstrates this particularly well: Logrolling, as a word for political cooperation, originally referred to “a meeting for cooperation in” “rolling logs to any required spot” (“Log-Rolling”), and it thus evokes both forest work and politics without disambiguating which one it is.[71] The following “stumps” suggests the semantic field of forestry, while the “politics” following immediately after foreground the later and more metaphorical meaning of the word. The added pronoun, “*their* politics,” moreover, ties together stumps and politics via the notion of the stump speech. The triplet is thus tied by shifting forms of connectivity, and it suggests some vernacular connection between wood work and politics. More importantly, it sets the reader up to expect more such connections, an expectation that is not met in “our fisheries”—the catalog’s fourth item the presence of which could be motivated by any number of ties as well as by none.[72] Overlaying this tease around order and disorder and around connectivity and disconnectivity is, fifthly, the overall scopic direction of the two catalogs taken together, a visual impression that suggest either an increasing widening of the view, a zooming out, or a panning across the scene of everyday American life. There is, as in many catalogs, a distinct temporal dilation, likened to ‘bullet time’ above (page 76), in which the action described seems to slow down as the ‘camera’ of poetic vision sweeps across it. These features are by no means unique to this particular catalog, but they are exceptionally visible here.

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[71] This play on words underscores the value transcendentalism placed in etymologies. Doubtlessly, the root of log-rolling as political negotiation in the agrarian practice of a community coming together speaks to Emerson’s earlier contention that every word “is fossil poetry”

As much as catalog rhetoric here successfully stylizes the mundane but emphatically ‘American’ materials it expresses, thus exemplifying the point it is also trying to make, it does come with considerable tensions. Notably, the two catalogs’ massification, crucial for their effect, ends up suggesting that such plurality is needed to compensate for the thus inferior, mundane quality of their contents, a dynamic that directly undermines the project of valuing these materials for their own sake. The catalogs suggest a sense of plenty, but they also seem to hint at the inferiority of the material they collect. Accordingly, the first of these longer catalogs balances the five American impressions, from banks to Unitarianism, with only two European ones, suggesting that the latter ones simply have more inherent ‘weight.’ With Homer, the middle age, and Calvinism scaffolding the catalog, it would indeed have been easy to offer at least three examples, a minimal catalog, but apparently the (ruins of) European antiquity are enough, to the essay, to offset “the same gods” signaled by a much broader swath of American culture.

This particular problem, the suspicion of an inferior quality of the individual items triggered by their massification, is not limited to this one catalog at all, and it again points to the inherent difficulty in the essay’s project of reconciling views on poetry as exceptional and as egalitarian.

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[72] Indeed, possibly connections proliferate, but none seems more convincing than the other: a political argument about fishery? The aquatic aspect of the third meaning of log-rolling (a sport of two people standing on a swimming log trying to push each other off)? A foregrounding of the literal meaning of log-rolling by including another practice of turning nature into profit? Each of these explanations is as plausible as the assertion that there is no connection whatsoever.

A longer passage on the sources of inspiration for the poet is even more explicitly indicative of that. In the passage, Emerson first identifies a need to lessen the role of merely cognitive views on the world and to instead allow for a more instinctual approach. The essay then explores the value of various Dionysian practices that can reliably aid inspiration before shifting gears and positioning asceticism as the true precondition of poetic insight, a path seemingly reserved for just a few. Having expressed that inspiration is not a matter of "the intellect alone," it here uses one of its longest catalogs to advertise a more instinctual approach:

> [I]n any manner we can stimulate this instinct, new passages are opened for us into nature, the mind flows into and through things hardest and highest, and the metamorphosis is possible.
> This is the reason why bards love wine, mead, narcotics, coffee, tea, opium, the fumes of sandal-wood and tobacco, or whatever other procurers of animal exhilaration. All men avail themselves of such means as they can, to add this extraordinary power to their normal powers; and to this end they prize conversation, music, pictures, sculpture, dancing, theatres, travelling, war, mobs, fires, gaming, politics, or love, or science, or animal intoxication, which are several coarser or finer quasi-mechanical substitutes for the true nectar, which is the ravishment of the intellect by coming nearer to the fact. (192)

The passage, again, contains two longer catalogs of similar contents: one straightforward collection of pharmacological facilitators of inspiration, and one more heterogeneous list of practices meant to push back against an outsized dominance of the cognitive reason.[73] Together, the catalogs reprise the conundrum of the previous passage and spell it out explicitly. All items in the catalog are easily, democratically accessible, an accessibility extolled in their "quasi-mechanical" reliability. At the same time, however, they are mere "substitutes for the true nectar." The imbalance, more openly embraced in this case where it aligns with the essay's push for asceticism, is palpable: It takes all of these twenty-four items, each valuable for its availability, to make up for the one "true nectar" of inspiration, which is commonly out of reach.

The catalog thus focalizes the dilemma of the entire section, that is torn between imagining inspiration as a condition that sets the true poet apart from others at the same time that it wants to position it as a capability available to “every intellectual man” (191), asserting that “the imagination [that] intoxicates the poet, [...] is not inactive in other men” (193). Further accentuating this dilemma, the essay that generally values the presumably non-poetic qualities of modern life and industry, here falls back to a more traditional (European?) romanticism that seeks inspiration in nature alone. It asserts that “sublime vision comes to a pure and simple soul in a clean and chaste body,” and it references Milton to suggest that the poet should “drink water out of a wooden bowl.” Indeed, “the poet’s habit of living should be set on a key so low, that the common influences should delight him. His cheerfulness should be the gift of the sunlight; the air should suffice for his inspiration, and he should be tipsy with water” (192). In a passage that stands out for the faux-old style of its commandment, it groups the American cities of Boston and New York with France: “If thou fill thy brain with Boston and New York, with fashion and covetousness, and wilt stimulate thy jaded senses with wine and French coffee, thou shalt find no radiance of wisdom in the lonely waste of the pinewoods” (193). Such a rejection of urbanity is not surprising in the context of romanticism, but that is precisely why it is surprising in the context of Emerson’s essay, which, in its more general thrust, aims to reconcile *all* American materials as material for its new poetic.

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[73] In line with the catalog device's tendency to tease with (but ultimately frustrate) categories and order, there are several possible categories under which almost (!) all of the items here can be grouped. It is hard, however, to come up with a single category that does justice to all of them.

Ultimately, these tensions around inspiration and asceticism again point to the difficulty of imagining a democratic poetry, or a democratic national literature more generally, and thus of reconciling the contradictory logics of artistic exceptionalism as a touchstone of literary value and of democratic egalitarianism as a core value of the young nation. In this case, and throughout the essay, catalogs constitute the method of choice to facilitate such a reconciling. Their nonhierarchical structure suggests a nonhierarchical social order, and the plurality of symbols they hold promises to address a diverse plurality of readers. They serve not only to describe but to exemplify a poetic that does not trust an exceptional poet to select the one best image but that aims to store, and offer to its readers, a massified plurality of images from which they can construct their own poetry in participatory, democratic fashion. In expressing the value of this project, however, the essay relies on notions of exceptionalism that run counter to its larger thrust, a contradiction that is particularly visible in the catalogs and that marks the catalogs as sites at which particularly difficult conceptual work is being done.

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In Ralph Waldo Emerson's "The Poet," the essay that like few others heralds the arrival of a US national literature, catalogs emerge as a crucial site: They simultaneously explain and perform the pioneering literary practice the essay aims to usher in. However, in doing so, they register tensions in this new literary practice, tensions they are able to contain but unable to resolve. These tensions speak to the difficult conceptual and cultural work these catalogs, and, by extension, the essay here set out to do.

As I have shown, the "The Poet" is, without ever explicitly saying so, deeply invested in imagining a new national literature, and in imagining it as democratic. It anchors this desire in two places: One is its rejection of a 'studied' form of literariness by an aristocratic elite of literati in favor of an endemic literary faculty shared by "men of all classes"—a widespread trope in the romantic movement on both sides of the Atlantic. The other is a view on language as inherently egalitarian. Underwritten by an individualistic outlook, this view holds that any symbol can mean anything to different people and that a poet accordingly cannot find and offer the 'best' symbol for what he wants to say. The massification of similar symbols that catalog rhetoric allows for plays a crucial role here because it promises successful poetic communication in spite of the "accidency and fugacity of the symbol." As Emerson imagines it, catalogs thus enable a poetic that views language as inherently underconnected and morselized but that trusts that "transparency" can be achieved by massifying individual symbols.

It is here that Emerson's poetic project most immediately dovetails with my interest in the nineteenth century's data imaginary. In light of the essay's emphasis on the highly subjective quality of symbols, the presumed objectivity of data emerges as an immensely attractive site. Morselized and aggregated symbols, each signifying the same principle in slightly different form, now promise to more successfully speak. The essay, as I have shown, makes this point at the same time that it demonstrates it, repeatedly using catalogs to suggest a meaning that is, in line with its own theory of the limitations of language, apparently unable to more narrowly express.

This, finally, explains the crucial role catalogs play for Emerson's "The Poet." They mark the site at which the essay most emphatically tries to invent and perform a new poetic, and to imagine this new poetic as bridging the conceptual chasms it is invested in. One such chasm, widening at the time, is that between dataesque and literary textualizations of the world, with both data and literature spawning complex webs of social institutions that subscribe to either of them, respectively. Another one is that between literary excellence, a national literature on par with the literary production of Europe, and literary egalitarianism, a constellation in which the poet is not different from anybody else. In my reading above I have focused on identifying, in these catalogs, moments of failure, fissures at which the catalogs fail to fully reconcile the conflicting value economies they try to bridge. But these failures, of course, first and foremost speak of the cultural work that they attempt to do.

* * *

One of the more striking elements in nineteenth-century US literary discourse is the broad, long-ranging insecurity around the possibility of a national literature, which was circulated again and again in essays, articles, and reviews. Indeed, even as the nation inched toward the first centennial of political independence, as it approached the celebration of the first one-hundred years of successful democratic governance, the corresponding cultural independence was felt to still be in question. This resulted in an—at times insecure but always highly self-reflexive—discourse on the outlines of literariness. It is this self-reflexive discourse, and its interrelationship with the nineteenth century's emerging data imaginary, that this chapter was interested in.

It may be tempting to read the lingering insecurity around national literary independence and self-worth as an 'authentic' expression of an 'actual' historical condition: a nation that struggled to find a literary voice of its own. But such a view fails to see how much these two concepts, the nation and the literary voice, are of course constructs, called into being by discourses that affirm them as much as by those that deny them. Accordingly, an in line with this book's overall argumentative thrust, this chapter has taken a different route, suggesting instead that these public displays of insecurity are part of an elaborate discursive performance that helped bring about the object, American national literature, the presumed absence of which it claimed to describe. More specifically, this chapter has positioned this discourse's investedness in potentiality rather than presence, in imagining an American national literature as nonexistent but as perpetually on the cusp of emerging, as indicative of a difficult ideological double-bind: Imagining an American national literature to-come as both democratically egalitarian and artistically supreme, the discourse on this future literature operated two value economies that are fundamentally at odds.

In this conflicted constellation, catalog rhetoric, “one of the defining features of romanticism in America” (Buell, *Literary* 166), came to be invested with particular meaning. The device metaphorizes egalitarianism by placing all its items on the same level of importance, and it suggests (the potential for) endless, pluralist inclusivity. At the same time, it constitutes a marked deviation from everyday speech, and it thus invites deeply literary engagements that look for, or project onto it, meaningful, perhaps hidden, formal principles of order. In this, catalog rhetoric, as I have shown in detail above, answers to two very different representational desires: One is for indiscriminately and exhaustively capturing, storing, or transmitting the world. Its values are total capture, bandwidth, massification, and plurality. The other is about selectiveness, about finding the most evocative symbol, the most poignant pregnant moment, it is about formal refinement and artistic finesse. As I have also shown above, and as this study generally argues, in the nineteenth-century US discourse on literariness and in light of the emerging data imaginary, these two representational desires came to be associated with data and literature, respectively. Because data, in nineteenth-century conceptualizations of this symbolic form, could more easily be associated with democracy, whereas literary excellence typically came with ‘aristocratic’ overtones, catalogs, the device liminally situated in between data and literature, gained particular meaning and embodied particular promise.

Both primary texts discussed above, Margaret Fuller’s “American Literature” and Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “The Poet” turn to poetic catalogs at key moments in their project of envisioning a future US national literature. In how these texts use catalogs to capture the sprawling diversity of the young nation, to pan a visionary gaze across an irreducible plurality of distinctly American materials, they demonstrate what they imagine this future national literature to do. Precisely because they capture indiscriminately, as data collections are typically imagined to do, and because they still present their materials in stylized form, these catalogs promise to bridge the chasms both between data and literature and between an ‘egalitarian’ and an ‘aristocratic’ value economy. However, as my reading has shown, the catalogs ultimately fail to fully resolve the conflicts they are employed to engage. It is this failure, then, that makes them such an important and productive site to explore. After all, it is in these fissures that they involuntarily lay bare the difficult cultural work they are tasked to do.

3 “Songs” or “Inventories”? Data, Storage Desires, and the Ambiguity of Whitman’s Lyricism

3.1 Lyric Databases and Ambiguous Form

“Dear friend! not here for you, melodious narratives, no pictures here, for you to con at leisure, as bright creations all outside yourself.” Thus writes Walt Whitman on an untitled notebook page, playing around with possible framings for the introduction of the next, the 1867 edition of *Leaves of Grass* (cf. Furness 137). The pitch is not only remarkable for how it promises to involve the readers, offering something that will not just be “outside” of them, or for how it anticipates, and proudly owns, disappointing those readers who might come to the book looking for “pictures,” “bright creations,” or “melodious narratives.” Rather, the very notion of “melodious narratives” itself is striking: It evokes, albeit as missing from the book, ‘narrative.’ But it does so by calling it ‘melodious,’ an epithet one would typically associate with the lyric, not with narrative. Whitman’s phrase of “melodious narratives” thus performs an obfuscation of the boundaries between literary forms that could hardly be done in more concise and effective a fashion. This is even more significant considering that blurring the outlines of the lyric, a fuzzy category to begin with, was central to Whitman’s success. As Leslie Fiedler observed, “[echoing] D. H. Lawrence’s famously iconoclastic reading of Walt Whitman” (MacPhail 134), *Leaves of Grass*’s acclaim as the foundational text of US-American poetry may well rest on a misreading in which the lyric, “swollen to epic proportions” (Fiedler 157), gets mistaken for the epic. Whitman’s notion of “melodious narratives” and the blurring of literary forms it engenders thus point to a crucial double function that the lyric played for Whitman’s poetic. It allowed him to escape the more closely mimetic representational desires and the constricting linear and hierarchical logics of narrative, and it allowed him to ambiguate formal boundaries in deeply liberating ways.

Expanding on this Whitmanian love for a liberating ambiguity, this chapter will thus argue that, much more so than many of his contemporaries, Walt Whitman was openly and emphatically ambivalent about the relationship between data and literature, that he embraced their ambiguity, and that the lyric for him was a vehicle to play out this very ambiguity. His famous free-verse poetic catalogs thus not only endowed his writing with a particular set of dataesque affordances—a means for the nonhierarchical storage of information, a way of capturing the plurality of the young nation without constricting it in one coherent narrative or submitting it to the hierarchizing logic of causal connectivity. The catalogs also ambiguated the relationship between different symbolic forms and the social practices and positionalities tied to them. Entering the literary field from the position of a knowledge worker of sorts, a former printer, journalist, and teacher, Whitman himself perhaps felt considerable ambiguity about how the formation and increasing institutionalization of the literary field drew its stratifying boundaries around different practices and occupations. An outright disregard for these boundaries can readily be seen in both his poems and his discussions of his own poetic.

Previous work on Whitman has relied on various registers to address this ambiguous, liminal quality. Matt Miller, for example, uses the chiffre of 'collage' to characterize how Whitman's poetic process combined fragments of experience in ways that defy expectations of syntagmatic meaning-making and instead foreground the collection of diverse materials, their organization in assemblages, and their presentation in open, flat, expandable structures. Miles Orvell turns to the notion of the 'photographic' to identify a "deeper structure of urban popular culture" in Whitman's poetry, a structure that stems from transformations of visuality at the time and that surfaced in a wide range of (popular culture) practices and objects. Most pertinently in the context of this study, Ed Folsom uses the notion of the database to express the same qualities—highlighting, via Lev Manovich's discussion of symbolic forms, the principle of paradigmatic replaceability in Whitman's work as a principle that underlies the "data ingestion" performed by his catalogs ("Database" 1575).

All of these engagements situate Whitman—and *Leaves of Grass* as the most prominent product of his poetic—within the transformations of the information landscape happening at the time, transformations expressed in a wide range of knowledge practices and tightly bound up with the rise of the data imaginary. Claiming that "we must [...] place Whitman within this larger nineteenth-century cultural context, beyond merely literary influences, to discover the sources of his originality," Orvell spells out this connection in particularly explicit and telling a form:

> [I]n eschewing the tight organization of conventional poetry in favor of a loose, free-flowing, disorganized encyclopedia, Whitman had found the literary equivalent for one of the key patterns in nineteenth-century popular culture: the organizational principle underlying the gallery, the panorama, and the exhibition hall—the containment of an infinitely expandable number of parts in an encompassing whole. (334; 342)

The phrasing is striking for a number of reasons: its reference to nineteenth-century US culture's search for a form that could contain "an infinitely expandable number of parts in an encompassing whole" could not sit more snugly with the cultural transformations that form the background to this study's interest in the rise of the data imaginary: The scrapbook, clipping services, the Dewey Decimal System—all of these are attempts to find forms that are at once structured and expandable and that emphatically turn on the symbolic form of data.[74] When Orvell situates these developments "beyond [the] merely literary," however, he is not talking about information technologies. Rather, he references popular culture, another 'other' to literariness, narrowly understood, thus suggesting that popular culture may be more perceptive and more responsive to the information transformations at the time than the literary proper is.[75] Lastly, Orvell's reference to the "sources of [Whitman's] originality" seems like a curious phrasing considering how much the term is bound up with the value economy of the literary field (as we understand it today).[76] It is also curious considering that Orvell's main goal is showing Whitman's indebtedness to urban popular culture, not his originality. His unwitting recourse to "originality," then, is indicative of how strong a pull the logics of literary excellence exert, especially in the context of an author, a poet, whose recognition is so heavily inflected through the register of literary nationalism.

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[74] On scrapbooking and on clipping services, that would reprocess newspapers into indexed databases of short, topical clips, cf. Garvey (*Writing*). Cf. also page 46 above.

[75] Cf. my discussion of 'minor modalities,' and in particular of sentimentalism, in chapter 4, starting on page 244 in particular.

[76] Indeed, 'originality' obviously is a value that gains currency only against the backdrop of the processes textual massification described above and that might speak more to twentieth-century sensibilities than to those of the nineteenth. As Meredith McGill points out, nineteenth-century US literary culture more readily prized "iteration" over "origination" (*American* 4).

Indeed, many of the discussions that are most fruitful for this chapter take place in the context of manuscript studies or biographical scholarship, precisely because they are the ones that have most successfully managed to dislodge Whitman from his revered but constricting role as the founding father of American poetry, a role caught up in what Günther Leypold calls “a virtuous circle of mutual validation” (90). It seems that the kind of formal analysis that poetry invites in more strictly, more narrowly literary studies approaches often ends up generating evaluative readings that either deny any literary merit to Whitman’s catalogs, thus affirming one particular standard of literariness; that praise him as a precursor to modernism, another standard; or that highlight the ‘democratic’ quality of his work as suspending questions of its artistic merit. These readings are often complicit in reifying Whitman as the towering representative of American literature, a role in which he, in turn, validates their critical enterprise by being worthy of study. These readings’ investedness in evaluating Whitman’s literary merit, their entanglement in the value economy of literariness, then typically keeps them from going “beyond merely literary influences” in their understanding of his work. Manuscript studies and biographically interested work sidesteps this lure of evaluation, in part by stepping away from the text itself, and my own turning to a digital humanities-inflected distant reading below similarly attempts to safeguard my own engagement from this lure while still attending to the text itself.

Still, fully appreciating Whitman’s liminal position on the margins of the literary field and embracing his attempts to ambiguate this field’s boundaries, is a tricky endeavor, as Ed Folsom and Kenneth M. Price also explain in particularly felicitous a way. Using different manuscripts to reconstruct Whitman’s poetic process, they note:

> Whitman was [...] doing a lot of “taking apart and putting together,” pre-computer cutting and pasting that [...] was breathtaking in the complexity and scope of rearrangement. [...] It is a process that invites us to play the dangerous but instructive game of shuffling Whitman’s lines all through “Song of Myself” (or, indeed, all through the 1855 Leaves) and discovering how easily new poems emerge that sound perfectly plausible: Whitman’s lines, all concerned with absorption and the celebration of the democratic scatter of the world, are often

> interchangeable, and, when shuffled in myriad ways, keep forming different poems that say the same things. (33-34)

Their notion of a "dangerous but instructive game," in itself already expressing ambivalence, is immensely productive here. Speaking of a "game" highlights a particular ludic quality in Whitman's lyricism: the mobility of his lines, and the way in which this mobility corresponds to the "loose" form Orvell identifies above.[77] It moreover links this form to a more general democratic quality: the form, their phrasing suggests, poetically models the "democratic scatter of the world" that the lines' content is concerned with, too.

At the same time, the game, as they point out, is "dangerous," and this danger again is twofold: on the one hand, remixing his lines casts doubt on the literary merit of the version Whitman chose. If, simply by shuffling the lines, "new poems emerge that sound perfectly plausible" there is perhaps nothing special about the version that ended up being printed. Put differently, one apparently does not need a Whitman to write a Whitmanian poem—simply shuffling his lines will do the trick. This view, as much as it speaks to democratic, egalitarian sensibilities, of course casts doubt on the value of the author and on (the originality of) the work, suggesting once more how tightly the two are interwoven in the value economy of literariness. The second danger the "game" thus entails is a threat not just to Whitman's literary reputation but to the overall value economy that regulates the literary field and literary studies as one important enterprise within this field. After all, if the poems that emerge after reshuffling Whitman's lines sound "perfectly plausible," the critic's—any critic's—ability to judge the quality of a literary text, to reliably determine which texts are 'good' and why, is fundamentally in question. This is a dangerous game indeed, considering that the humanities get regularly attacked as operating by subjective, arbitrary standards and considering that—despite the decades of canon wars and revisions to Arnoldian views of culture as "the best that has been thought and said"—the view of artistic value as inherent in some objects

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[77] Cf. also Miller's remarkably similar claim: "The lines of 'I celebrate myself' can be shuffled into alternate poetic forms that make just as much sense as how they were eventually presented" (98). Note also that Whitman himself called *Leaves* a "language experiment," a term that, too suggests a certain playfulness (qtd. in Warren 7). The digital companion to this study offers a decidedly visual interface to this quality of the work. Cf. www.data-imaginary.de/whitman-analytics/line-flux.htm.

(and absent from others) continues to be one of the core regulating notions of the field.

Interested in observing, understanding, and historicizing these discourses rather than in participating in them, this study is agnostic about questions of literary value. In this, it aligns with other revisionary work that is interested not in appreciating the formal complexity or ‘depth’ of Whitman’s poems but in understanding the cultural work of his poetic production, both in its written, printed results and in its process. Indeed, there is a particularly marked split in Whitman criticism between traditional and revisionary work, and this split is not merely a matter of when a piece of criticism was written. As Folsom and Price point out: “Many of us still talk about ‘Song of Myself’ as if it were a single, stable entity,” and while they link such a view to “older models of criticism” and their “inadequacy,” their claims that “[m]any of us still” write this way also signals the ongoing attraction of these models. Notably, they recommend new, digitally inflected manuscript studies as one way to guard against this attraction: “Once we begin to think about Whitman through the lens provided by digital resources, new questions become accessible and new problems emerge” (xii).

In the following pages, I will use this study’s interest in data to similarly sidestep questions of literary merit, or, more precisely, to tend to them from afar, as discourses that unveil cultural work but that I will not engage in myself. In this, the goal will be to argue that Whitman’s poetic, as expressed in *Leaves of Grass* and in his paratextual writings, form an attempt to integrate knowledge work and literature, and to thus trouble and ambiguate rather than to accentuate the border between the two. I will tend to this project of ambiguation in three locations, devoting one section to each.

I will first engage comparatively recent attempts, undertaken mostly in manuscript studies frameworks, to historicize *Leaves* by focalizing the biographical context and hands-on processes that facilitated its production. As Folsom and Price suggest above, such a perspective nuances and complicates traditional understandings of Whitman’s work as literary origination. It does so not least by highlighting the mobility of bits and pieces of language in his writing process or by turning to concepts such as ‘collage’ to characterize his working process and its result. Building on such studies, I will accordingly use the first section to argue for the value of thinking of Walt Whitman as a knowledge worker and to show that he thought of himself this way. This perspective makes it easier to see the extent to which *Leaves* is underwritten by impulses for information storage, management, and circulation that, in the lyric surface they result in, might be indistinguishable from impulses of poetic origination. Accentuating this quality in Whitman might seem like a diminishing of his qualities as an author, and a considerable portion of criticism has in fact taken this view, either by disparaging his writing as mere inventory or by defending him against such disparagement—thus validating the allegation to produce 'inventories' as a slur. But of course, reading poetry as (also) knowledge work only becomes evaluative within an ideological framework that regards the work of literature as categorically different from and superior to the knowledge work of, say, lexicography. Characterizing Whitman as a knowledge worker and thus situating him in the borderlands between data- and literary practices, as the first of the following sections will do, not only sidesteps but highlights and critiques this evaluative cultural logic.

The second section will then read different discussions of Whitman's work for how they engage in the boundary work of separating data and literature into distinct cultural realms. Whitman himself prolifically amended his own writing with paratextual commentary, both inside of *Leaves of Grass* and outside. Inside the book, prefaces, postfaces, reprints of reviews, and comments on the production process—from the first editions untitled foreword "America does not repel the past" to the final edition's "Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads"—frame and couch the poems in a logic of supplementarity that ambiguates their allegiances to either literature or data. Outside of the printed volumes, Whitman similarly kept framing and explaining his own poetic project in articles and reviews, many of them published anonymously or pseudonymously. These, too, ambiguated rather than clarified its formal allegiances. I will accordingly read this prolific paratextual commentary, this permanent paratextual framing, as a strategy of affirming *Leaves*'s categorical ambiguity rather than resolving it. This project in Whitman's own framing of his work, however, is diametrically opposed to the gist of much of Whitman criticism and scholarship. This section's second half thus also attends to how Whitman criticism, be it affirmative or pejorative, has struggled to fix the in-betweenness of his work, suspended as it is between literature and data-driven knowledge practices.

A third section will then use the digital humanities methods of algorithmic criticism and distant reading to engage the entirety of *Leaves of Grass*, all seven major editions, for how they live out a 'storage desire,' an impulse to use the lyric not to express some particular, individual experience exceptionally well or to encapsulate a moment of subjectivity. Rather, I will argue, *Leaves* utilizes the formal possibilities of the lyric in a brute-force effort to store as large a chunk of the world as possible. This poetic project, in which literary and more generally knowledge management-oriented dispositions meet and mix, can be algorithmically read from several quantifiable formal devices. Tracking these throughout the thirty-six year life cycle of seven *Leaves* editions then also indicates moments in which a desire for storage and a desire for literary recognition come into conflict. Turning to the digital humanities, a methodological *excursus* of sorts, not only helps with sidestepping the pull toward evaluative criticism mentioned above. Using this methodological framework, data-driven as it is, to investigate the data affinity of *Leaves of Grass*, also adds an important meta-methodological twist to this study: After all, the digital humanities can 'emerge' only as 'bridging the divide' between quantitative and qualitative views on culture in a cultural context that has fully internalized the presumably natural, categorical distinction between literature and data. Combining in one study—and reflecting on—these two methodological modalities, traditional (close) reading and DH, then becomes another way of interrogating, from a contemporary, meta-perspective, the historically contingent culturalization of the data-literature divide and its intellectual consequences. I will use part of this chapter's final section to reflect on this. The actual 'reading,' an explication of a series of twelve graphs, will then argue that Whitman used a double strategy, traceable both on the macro and the micro level, of textualizing a desire for massified information storage: On the one hand, the poems fulfill the function of actually, massively storing particulars; on the other hand, aesthetic strategies, generating a 'storage effect,' are used to signal massified storage even as the practical possibilities for implementing it are increasingly exhausted.

3.2 The Poet as Knowledge Worker

The following section positions Walt Whitman in relation to (presumably 'non-literary') practices of knowledge work. It will locate, in Whitman's oeuvre, in his biography, and in his working process an affinity to knowledge work, broadly understood, and it will thus read Whitman as viewing himself as a knowledge worker of sorts before the term existed as such. To a large extent, this argument will rely on work done by other scholars, most prominently the work by Ed Folsom and Kenneth M. Price, along with that of Matt Miller. The remarkably wide-ranging and detailed archival and manuscript work they do does not match the scope of this study's interest, and rather than trying to add to their findings, I will focus on accentuating individual points they make and synthesizing from their observations one particular version of Walt Whitman: Whitman, the knowledge worker.

3.2.1 Genre Troubles: The Lyric, Media, and Symbolic Form

From the beginning on—even before its beginning, to be precise—the 'generic allegiance' of *Leaves of Grass* was unclear to its creator, and it continued to be questionable to its audiences in the decades after. This is certainly true in the more narrow sense of 'genre': the use of free verse and the lack of rhyme, even more startling at the time, along with the subject matter of some of the 'poems,' made it challenging to categorize *Leaves* as poetry.[78] In fact, Whitman himself was unsure as to what genre, narrowly understood, he was aiming for even as he began his work on the volume. As Ed Folsom points out: "Whitman's notebooks indicate that, as he was drafting the ideas that would become *Leaves of Grass*, he was entirely unsure how it would fit into a genre at all: 'Novel?—Work of some sort [^Play?] . . . A spiritual novel?' he wrote, going on to describe some inchoate and absorptive work that would archive the full range of human experience" ("Database" 1572). What the notes show, then, is a will to expression, a desire to produce something, anything, that could, in Folsom's words, "archive [...] human experience." At least as importantly, the notes show a will to doing so that is remarkably 'undisciplined'—impossible, it seems, to be fit into the existing categories of literary production.

It is no coincidence, then, that Whitman settled for the lyric, a form that already by itself is more 'undisciplined' and less constrained than drama or narrative would have been. Indeed, up until today, as Jonathan Culler remarks, the lyric remains so undisciplined, so fuzzy in its outlines, and so fluid in its parameters that "we lack an adequate theory of

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[78] Cf. e.g. Walker Kennedy's expression of category confusion when he asks in an 1884 review: "[I]f 'Leaves of Grass' is not a literary performance, what is it? It is surely not a scientific treatise nor a passage of music" (11). I will comment on his review in more detail below (page 167).

[it]" (*Theory* 2).[79] In Culler's telling, the lyric had been akin to a container term for "a miscellaneous collection of minor forms" until romanticism, and it was only problematically, reductively understood in the decades after (1-2). The lyric thus, quite literally, can 'contain multitudes' of expressive modes and impulses, and its formal looseness was exploited and further heightened by Whitman's radical innovation of free verse. But the lyric did not just fit Whitman's will for expression because of this amorphous quality. One of the few qualities of the lyric that critics can agree on is the fact that "lyric poetic systems [...] are not mimetic," a quality that sets them apart from all other literary forms, such as narrative or drama (Miner qtd. in Culler, *Theory* 1). Indeed, attending more specifically to Whitman's lyricism, Onno Oerlemans engages this quality by thinking about the radically different desires that underwrite narrative and the lyric. He concludes that the lyric is not even a particular form but should instead be understood as a "mode, a desire for and in writing" (150). While narrative in this thinking is underwritten by and expressive of a desire for "constructed and completed meaning" (168), a desire "to construct order" out of experience, the desire of the lyric is oriented toward "those moments that pre-exist order, or even, deconstruct it" (151). The 'storage desire' that this chapter identifies in Whitman's poetry, in his poetic, and his practices of knowledge management as they inform his writing, is a lyric desire in this sense: it strives to embrace and express the world, to inhale and exhale it, without submitting it to the linear, causal, or hierarchical logics of the mimetic forms.

Fittingly, the generic indeterminacy that Folsom traces here is not merely about the difference between narrative, drama, and lyric but about genre in a much broader sense: Writing about "Database as Genre," Folsom thus later refers to Lev Manovich's adaptation of "symbolic form" to position the symbolic form of database as one such genre.[80] In doing so, he suggests that genre organizes not merely literary forms of expression but groups together different strategies of storing and transporting information, be they literary or not. Genre and symbolic form, in Folsom's take, are thus to a certain extent interchangeable, and this view, of course, fits Whitman's own treatment of such categories. What Folsom's observation on the generic fluidity of *Leaves of Grass*, and on its author's indecision as to his work's genre affiliation, then, focalizes is not so much Whitman's flexibility around the question of individual, established literary genres. Rather, it accentuates a more fundamental categorical fluidity around how Whitman conceptualized textuality and how he sought to channel his will for expression. This categorical fluidity, as it illuminates *Leaves of Grass* and Whitman's approach to textuality, is best understood by thinking of him as someone, who was not constrained to literary writing at all, nor constrained to imagining textual production primarily as a form of poetic origination.[81] Appreciating how 'undisciplined' Whitman's textual work was becomes far easier if he is imagined as a knowledge worker in a broader sense; as someone who was fascinated by the techniques and technologies for capturing, storing, circulating and recreating human experience that were emerging and advancing all around him and as someone who was eager to participate in these developments.

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[79] To Culler, this lacuna might be due to "quite contingent reasons—the fact that Aristotle wrote a treatise on mimetic poetry, poetry as an imitation of action, and not on the other poetic forms that were central to Greek culture" (1). Oerlemans, in turn, suggests that critical and theoretical interest in the lyric was superseded by an interest in narrative because narrative is also the mode of criticism. "Critical theory has tended to favor narrative because in expanding the boundaries of the forms of narrative, it increases its own power and prestige; all writing becomes like its own" (151). For both Culler and Oerlemans, the dominance of narrative, and contemporary criticism's urge to interpret lyric poetry for its meaning, suggests a critique of criticism.

One of these technologies is, obviously, print, and much of this section approaches Whitman's knowledge work via his training as an editor and printer and against the backdrop of a mass circulation of printed matter at the time. There is, however, throughout Whitman's notes and writings, ample evidence of the role that other media played for him and for how he envisioned his own poetic. Photography, for example, informs *Leaves*, quite literally from the beginning on: Instead of an author's name, the first edition famously featured an engraving based on a daguerreotype.[82] More conspicuously, Whitman later explained that the entire volume is a photographic project in that it lacks certain forms of refinement: "[i]n these *Leaves*, everything is literally photographed. Nothing is poetized, no divergence, not a step, not an inch, nothing for beauty's sake, no euphemism, no rhyme" (*Notes* 64). This connection between a lack of adornment and the medium is no coincidence. As Folsom points out, to nineteenth-century spectators, the main visual difference between painting and photography was typically that paintings showed a curated, edited, refined version of reality whereas photographs were marked by disorder and clutter, which in turn thus became markers of reality: "Whitman would try in his own poetry to do the same thing. Through the development of techniques like the poetic catalogue, Whitman attempted to create a poetic field just as cluttered as a photograph" ("Photographs"). It is obvious how this positive sense of 'clutter' jibes with the logic of massification that is characteristic of data.

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[80] The essay is part of a special issue in *PMLA* which was part of the MLA's efforts of engaging the increasing presence of digital humanities. Cf. page 366.

[81] Meredith McGill discusses Whitman's unusual readiness to imagine literary production in ways other than origination, narrowly understood, albeit with a focus on (textual) circulation as the other to origination. To her, Whitman "blurs the distinction between accident and origination" ("Walt" 46) and easily lets go of "the cultural presumption of authorial control, a fiction that served both to consolidate publishers' power and to protect authors from their readers. Whitman, however, unabashedly celebrates American reading" (44).

The same observation informs an earlier and even more sustained discussion by Miles Orvell, who links Whitman's catalogs to a more fundamentally 'modern' regime of visuality, a cluster of 'urban' visuality, consumerism, surveillance that "in the nineteenth century transformed the eye of the observer" (321). To him, photography brings about an "omnibus form" that captures experience "not on the terms of an extended meditation (cf. Bryant or Longfellow), but with the perception of discrete particulars made possible by the camera" (322). This form is present already in the un-curated, unrefined detail of the single photograph, but it becomes even more poignant in the daguerreotype gallery, one of several popular "omnium-gatherum" institutions at the time (331). Whitman was fascinated by these galleries, and by the latent narrativity of these detail-rich moments, frozen in time and arranged in space. Orvell relates Whitman's reaction after visiting one such gallery:

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[82] On the daguerreotype, cf. Folsom and Price (42). As Folsom points out, Whitman was "the most photographed writer of the nineteenth century" and, "[a]s *Leaves* went through its various editions, Whitman experimented with the portraits he used in his book; in the 1889 edition of *Leaves*, he included five photographic portraits (or engravings of photographs) and created a kind of visual progression of his life, as well as a kind of exhibit of the evolution of nineteenth-century techniques of photographic reproduction, from wood-engraving to half-tone reproduction" ("Photographs"). For the "significant enlargement of the bulge in Whitman's crotch" between two iterations of the original engraving, cf. Genoways (98).

> "In whatever direction you turn your peering gaze, you see naught but human faces! There they stretch, from floor to ceiling—hundreds of them. Ah! what tales might those pictures tell if their mute lips had the power of speech! How romance then, would be infinitely outdone by fact." And he goes on to imagine several dramatic biographies—for instance, "Is the husband yet tender to his bride?"— in the faces on view. (331)

Indeed, the idea that the "mute lips" of the pictures "might" tell tales, that their narrativity is so immense ("Ah!") precisely because it is not realized but mere potential, heightened by the lifelikeness of detail, the lack of "euphemisms" and "rhyme," and by the massification of such snapshots in the gallery, directly informs the logic of the poetic catalogs. The daguerreotype gallery was, "by its very structural properties, an organizational model for *Leaves of Grass*" (331).[83] What at first glance, then, seems like a question of medium turns out to be, like the question of genre above, a matter of symbolic forms. After all, and contrary to Whitman's claims, the contents of *Leaves of Grass* are not "literally photographed" (or they are so only in a metaphorical sense of the word 'literally') but expressed in printed words. The textual quality of being "literally photographed" stems from how the book implements the dataesque formal principles of the daguerreotype gallery—a presentation of morselized, individual impressions organized for random access and imbued with high levels of latent narrativity—in words and in the medium of print.

Next to these symbolic logics of print and visuality, recent scholarship has also emphasized the role of a numerical episteme for Whitman's poetic,[84] thus reading the poet through "a relatively unexplored aspect of the intellectual formation of nineteenth-century Americans: arithmetization" (Bronson-Bartlett)—an aspect that is obviously related to this study's interest in data. As Stefan Schöberlein explains, Whitman explicitly linked the representative work of mathematics to the representative work of capturing the nation that, among others, (national) literature also does. This can be seen in an 1846 review of the math textbook *Practical Arithmetic* in which Whitman lauds how mathematical understanding in the book is interwoven with an understanding of a budding American modernity:

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[83] Notably, even here, in the realm of visuality, this leads to a tension between established notions of art and these new forms of representation similar to the tensions around a democratic national literature sketched above. As Stephen John Hartnett notes, the introduction of daguerreotypy and its mass application constituted a "cultural shift from elite art (portraiture) to populist commodity (daguerreotype)" (139).

[84] Cf. in particular the contributions to the 2016 special issue of the *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*, 34.2, on "Whitman and Mathematics." Cf. also work by Charlotte Downey in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

> What is contained in the main body of the textbook is still much more than a mere set of practically oriented math exercises—it is a representation of the United States in numbers, a civics lesson in arithmetic. [...] Students [...] are not just meant to understand how math works but how a society like the U.S. functions—a society that appears so fundamentally based on the mathematical principles behind its taxation systems, interest rates, and stock exchanges. (Whitman qtd. in Schöberlein 172)

This relationship between numbers, memory, and the nation is pervasive in Whitman, not least in how, in his later writing, the Civil War, national memory, and statistics interact. "For Whitman, a national memory properly constituted must body forth from a skeletal structure built out of numbers rather than narration, out of counting rather than history" (Dawes 45-55; cf. also Folsom, "Counting" 155). Numbers and statistics form an episteme, but they also constitute a cultural device to capture a present and a past.

But mathematics is of relevance to Whitman here not only for how numbers can represent American modernity or the national past; several scholars have also identified mathematical principles at work in his writing.[85] Even more to the point, Whitman's notes give evidence of his own 'numerical' approach to literariness. Matt Cohen and Aaron Dinin point to Whitman's calculation of word counts for important literary works. On the first pages of the famous "blue book," the 1860 edition of *Leaves* that Whitman tinkered with in preparation of future editions, he scribbled the word counts for the Bible, the *Iliad*, Dante's *Inferno*, and other important works, among them, of course, *Leaves of Grass*. Cohen and Dinin read this as a concern with the "physical appearance of the poetry" and with the "physical text, not merely its discursive or spiritual content." Whether or not the word counts point toward the "physical text," these document statistics reveal a particular, somewhat unusual understanding of literariness.[86] Obviously exploring how *Leaves* relates to (other, established) works of 'great' literature, the numbers suggest an opting out of a 'literary' view that would locate quality in either the form, the content, or the relationship between the two. Literary greatness, at least in this one, tiny interaction, is simply a matter of getting the word count right.

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[85] Despite its limited volume, there are different strands to this direction of research, among them: a more biographical interest, e.g. in how Whitman's relationship to statistics and numbers changed throughout his life (Folsom, "Counting"); a broader cultural history interest, e.g. in how the culturalization of concepts such as infinity and set theory (cf. Bronson-Bartlett's pointers to Kathryn Davies Lindsay, Rachel Feder), equality (cf. Schöberlein), and others (cf. e.g. Downey) informs his writings; more numerological readings, in which hidden meanings are suspected to be "numerically encrypted" in the text (Bronson-Bartlett 109; cf. also Schöberlein n18).

There is another, very practical indication that Whitman was not at all eager to contain his book in emerging, evolving, and tightening conceptualizations of the literary field: the odd partnership he entered into with the publishing house Fowler & Wells. Operated by the two brothers, Orson Squire and Lorenzo Niles Fowler and Samuel Roberts Wells, Fowler & Wells was a scientific institution and publisher known mostly for its work on phrenology. Whitman had known the phrenologists since the late 1940s and had worked for them before, and so his decision to partner up with them for *Leaves of Grass* certainly stemmed from many factors. However, as Ezra Greenspan points out, taking into account that *Leaves* was not conceptualized as a narrowly 'literary' work makes this business decision more meaningful. The young writer with his broad desire for expression and circulation and the publishing house with its broad, nonliterary portfolio formed "a strange but by no means illogical partnership. Fowler and Wells did not publish imaginative literature, but then again, they may have seen *Leaves of Grass* less in this guise than in one more or less in line with the kinds of works on phrenology, self-culture, health and dietary reform, and workmen's rights in which they specialized" (86). The collaboration, in other words, again accentuates both, *Leaves*'s liminal position in-between rapidly diversifying genres of textual production—here: literary and self-culture oriented ones—and its author's willingness to fully embrace such undisciplined ambiguity.

Still, viewing Whitman as a knowledge worker is complicated by the extent to which this question marks a site of heavily overdetermined struggles—around the meaning and value of different forms of expression but also, more immediately, between Whitman and his readers, who tend (up until today) to be eager to fix the book's and its author's allegiances to different symbolic forms. While this chapter's second section (starting on page 160) will return to this question in more detail, one particularly prominent such case can briefly illustrate this point. As Ed Folsom points out, the initial and euphoric response *Leaves of Grass* found with Ralph Waldo Emerson tellingly lacks any recognition that the text under consideration was literary in a narrow, conventional sense. In his famous letter, Emerson, characterizing the book as a "piece of wit and wisdom," famously greets the young author "at the beginning of a great career" and lauds the "incomparable things said incomparably well." In the indeterminate praise for "things," in an applause for an absence of "handiwork," and in the characterization of this book as a "piece," a collation of "wit and wisdom," there are indeed indications that Emerson did not recognize the volume as a literary achievement but rather saw it as a collection of material that had the potential to inspire literary production (Whitman, *Leaves [1856]* 345). *Leaves*, in this view is, at best, a proto-literary text—something becoming of a "young" author rather than an accomplished one. In consequence, its generic indeterminacy becomes a source of disparagement, even if it is clothed in praise in this particular case; a dynamic that repeats throughout the history of Whitman criticism.

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[86] On a similar interest in the relationship between word counts and literariness, cf. the work of Lucius Adelno Sherman discussed in section 5.2 below (starting on page 319).

Folsom suggests that Whitman responded to this enthusiastic yet somewhat backhanded compliment not only by appropriating the letter, reprinting it without permission in the second edition's paratextual "Leaves Droppings" section. He also went on to preface every chapter of his "piece" with the words "Poem of." Where the first edition did not feature any titles, the second one now introduced them and seemingly used them for a less-than-subtle generic disambiguation: "Poem of Walt Whitman, an American," "Poem of Women," "Poem of Salutation," and so on.[87] The titles do not merely fix the literary genre, narrowly under-

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[87] Cf. Jay Grossman for a discussion of this move, and of how it fits in a larger project of using the second edition to explain the poetic project behind *Leaves* to its readers, thus at once insisting on its own poetic method and acknowledging the extent to which it is outside of "any conventional understanding of poetry" (100). McGill in turn focuses on how the "double genitive" in, e.g., "Poem of Walt Whitman, an American" introduces yet another level of ambiguity. It potentially identifies both an object of poetic interest and a potential origin ("Walt" 40).

stood. More fundamentally, they insist on the following texts' quality of being literary in the first place, both by submitting them to a literary genre, poetry, and by introducing a form of topical segmentation that underscores a literary will to form. What at first glance thus seems like an acknowledgment of a need for categorical clarity, a willingness to subscribe to existing genres, however, does not homogeneously inform the other changes Whitman made between the 1855 and the 1856 editions. Admittedly, the seven major versions of *Leaves of Grass* overall follow a trajectory from an initial radical, unpolished impulse to a more refined and conventional composition.[88] But the second edition hardly shows traces of formal compromise that would befit the genre designation "Poem of [...]": While the inclusion of the titles, and their claim to mark the sections as poems, pays lip service to established literary forms, the second edition is, at least in places, marked more by a doubling-down on exactly those qualities that likely triggered Emerson's reservations in the first place.[89] If, as Folsom claims, Whitman's revisions responded to Emerson's reluctance to regard *Leaves* as literature, this response is marked by a particular, characteristic ambivalence: It accommodates a narrow sense of literariness in its packaging, but it makes the opposite move in its substance.

Within the individual poems, one crucial source of generic indeterminacy are the infamous catalogs, and Whitman notably expanded some of them at the same time that he labeled them as poems. As Whitman himself and many of his critics have observed, these catalogs do indeed turn the poems into more of a proto-literary form than a complete poetic achievement. Rather than forming a finished work, theses “poem[s] of materials” (M. Miller 181) provide building blocks for the readers’ own poetic work.[90] In Whitman’s own poetic theory, they, more so than other forms of writing, need to be ‘used’ by the reader. As countless critics have argued, the result is an interactive form in which poet and reader collaborate in the making of the poem from material that the world provides to the poet and the poet provides to the reader. In Gay Wilson Allen’s words: “It is literally true that Whitman attempts less to create a ‘poem,’ as the term is usually understood, than to present the materials of a poem for the reader to use in creating his own work of art” (*New* 209). This Whitmanian desire for readerly interactivity, for appropriation, for the readers’ “pursue[ing] [their] own flight” (Whitman, *Leaves [1891]* 434) provided one basis for later appreciations of *Leaves* as modernism before its time. But before even beginning to discuss the merit of such a disciplining within a modernist understanding of what literature ‘is’ or what it should do (see page 160 below), it bears noticing that the catalogs and their expansion are part of a contradictory move with regard to genre. While Whitman adds the titles that mark the individual sections as “poems,” he simultaneously doubles down on a form of “data ingestion” (Folsom, “Database” 1575) that is generically unbound —resonating more with other practices of information gathering, processing, and distributing at the time than with any established and solidifying notions, during romanticism and after, of what kinds of texts properly belong to the literary field.

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[88] Cf. Folsom and Price's claim that the two early editions of 1855 and '56 "were possibly Whitman's most radical editions, at once challenging publishing conventions and creating new conventions." With these, he "was groping for a new genre to express his radical notions of democracy, reading, writing, and absorptive American identity" (xiii). Cf. also Miller's observation that Whitman discovered the theory 'behind' his writing, the "poem of materials" at some time "between the publication of the first and second editions" (181). On how Whitman's enthusiasm for the catalog cooled down later in life, cf. Chari (17). Cf. also my quantitative discussion below starting on page 198, specifically around page 216.

[89] Emerson possibly never fully endorsed these qualities. As Jay Grossman puts it, the letter shows Emerson's failure "to recover a meaningful genealogy for the book, his effort to position it someplace within a range of publications or modes of writing." Even decades later, he could "find no place for the writer of *Leaves of Grass* in his 1874 *Parnassus* collection of American poetry" (94). And even later, he ended up adjudicating on Whitman's failure or success by redrawing the boundaries the boundaries Whitman kept blurring: "I expected him to make the songs of the nation, but he seems content to make the inventories" (qtd. in Daiches 123).

3.2.2 Seeing Knowledge Work in the Foreground

Intriguingly, much of the original repression and eventual recuperation of Whitman’s positionality as a knowledge worker—of the degree, in other words, to which his conception of authorship blended different kinds of knowledge work—has happened in response to a particular phrasing in Emerson’s letter. As he suggests that the book marked only the “beginning of a great career,” Emerson introduces the idea that it nevertheless “must have had a long foreground somewhere, for such a start." In the decades since, critics and scholars have again and again returned to this question of the "long foreground" and have marveled at this "enduring mystery in American literary studies: the question of how Walter Whitman, a rather undistinguished newspaperman and author of potboiler temperance fiction, transformed himself with astonishing speed into the author of America's most celebrated collection of poems" (M. Miller xiii).[91]

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[90] For a more detailed discussion of *Leaves* as a resource, a “Poem of Materials,” cf. page 193 below.

However, such a desire to illuminate the sources of Whitman's literary prowess as they are assumed to lay in a presumably dim and nonliterary foreground once more is informed by narrow, contingent notions of literariness and authorship. This is definitely true of Emerson, but it even, perhaps unwittingly, surfaces for brief moments in otherwise overall revisionary accounts such as Miller's—testifying to the strength of the underlying ideological configurations. In Emerson's case, and in much of the classical scholarship on Whitman's "foreground," this notion of literariness classifies Whitman's other textual and information-related endeavors as emphatically nonliterary. In this view, journalism and potboiler fiction are so categorically different from poetry that it is near to impossible to imagine the same person being the author of both without assuming a radical transformation of identity in between. As Jay Grossman puts it, the interest in Whitman's "foreground" typically subscribes to a view that sees literature in binary opposition to other textual or knowledge practices, in this case, a "binary 'journalism/poetry'" in which "the process of 'becoming' a poet is not artisanal, in the model of apprenticeship, but rather discontinuous and epiphanic." Wondering about the "foreground" of *Leaves of Grass* as something that is decidedly not part of Whitman's life as an author, in other words, relies on and reinforces particular models of authorship and of literariness, "model[s] that [refuse] or [discount] a role for Whitman's journalism" (86) and that thus artificially separate the more artisanal or clerical forms of knowledge work from the (presumably) categorically different and superior work literature does.

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[91] Cf. also Folsom and Price's work on the problem of the length of the "long foreground" and the dating of the "Albot Wilson" notebook (17). As they point out, Whitman scholarship had long failed to properly assess the length of the foreground due to a mistake in the dating of a crucial manuscript fragment. Cf. also Stovall for the suspicion that the foreground might be much shorter than generally assumed (149). Grossman insists that "[t]he notion of 'foreground' [...] has catalyzed much Whitman scholarship" (94).

Indeed, traditional attempts to understand the “long foreground” have typically—implicitly or explicitly—regarded Whitman’s creative, poetic ‘explosion’ as a break from, rather than as a continuation of, both his previous writing and his other knowledge and information oriented work, a move that meant excising a considerable part of his life from his artistic biography. After all, before mustering the remarkable confidence to write and publish *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman already had gathered experience as a writer of journalism, of more conventional poetry, and of temperance fiction, as a school teacher, and as a printer. However, in the cultural logic underwriting the discussions of his “long foreground,” none of these practices qualifies as being on par with, or even sufficiently explanatory of, ‘literary greatness’: In this line of thinking, journalism is too practical a form of writing, too much embedded in the everyday and in social contexts, and too much merely representative of events happening in the real world, a regurgitation of reality or of existing representations of reality rather than a form of poetic, creative acts of origination. Perhaps just as damningly, it is an occupation, writing for money, and a trade that is being learned precisely through apprenticeship. The genre fiction of temperance writing gets discounted for similar reasons: With its clear political agenda, it, too, is socially embedded, is written for a predefined (and paying) audience, a veritable mass market, and is regulated by strict genre conventions that do not encourage artistic freedom and originality. Whitman’s school teaching and his experience as a printer typically get even less credit in the traditional discussions of his “long foreground.” Again, these knowledge practices get disqualified for their immediate social import and for how they are conceptualized as practices that reproduce and circulate information rather than create it. In this view, print in particular ends up being imagined as nothing but a storage and distribution technology, a clerical profession seen not as facilitating the social institution of literature but merely reproducing the greatness invested in a work by the poet who has ‘created’ it. As such, it is presumably sharply distinguished from the original, creative work the latter does.

Revisionary work, in turn, has attempted to complicate this perspective and has highlighted how porous the border is between poetic, imaginative creation and these other varied knowledge practices. Drawing on work by Simon Parker, Miller accordingly points out that “Whitman’s catalogs parallel the nineteenth-century [newspapers’] editorial practice of situating the reporting of disparate events side by side in incongruent, even jarring sequences" (107). Indeed, as Parker traces in his article, Whitman's writing flowed directly from his "substantial experience as a newspaper printer, editor, and reporter." In terms of content, this experience encouraged him to emulate the newspaper's "mingling of a new and apparently chaotic range of material—trivial and sensational, highbrow and lowbrow," but it also shaped his approach to language more fundamentally: Working in the news business, "he had been trained to see language in terms of blocks of type and proofs to be arranged and edited rather than composed" (161; 162; 165). Along these lines, Miller even points to a "[n]ewspaper-like manuscript for 'Song of the Broad Axe'" from one of Whitman's notebooks. The page is organized in columns that indeed resemble a newspaper page's layout (111).

Whitman's training as a printer moves even more center stage in an observation Ed Folsom makes in his "Census of the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*": Since Whitman kept editing the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* while it was already being printed, this first edition exists in different variants. In one of these on-the-fly changes, the line "The night is for you and me and all" was changed to "The day and night are for you and me and all." In dialog with a reading of this change by Gary Schmidgall, Folsom points out that there are at least three different interpretations for this change. One can argue, as Schmidgall does, that adding "day" blunts the moment of sexual innuendo in the line; alternatively, Folsom adds, the addition might be indicative of a general tendency, throughout *Leaves*, to balance night and day. To these two readings, he then adds a third: "or maybe his revision of the line is just another example of Whitman's printer's 'anticipatory eye,' an indentation of a short line between two long ones that Whitman just didn't like the looks of, so he extended it" ("Census" 77). All three explanations, to which one might add a fourth one—a drive toward completeness that is independent of content but inherent in the data logic that motivates also the catalogs—are, of course, perfectly valid, but they operate on radically different registers. Like revisionary accounts of Whitman's 'nonliterary' foreground tend to do, Folsom's observation underscores how much the qualities in Whitman's work that have come to be read as textual, even poetic, and as thus worthy of interpretation in search of their meaning, are intimately related to the other, non-poetic knowledge practices he was familiar with. Acknowledging this does not subtract from the poetic qualities, understood as affordances for literary engagement, one might find in a work such as *Leaves*, but it highlights the arbitrariness and porosity of the border that separates these presumably distinct realms of knowledge work.

Just how much *Leaves of Grass* is indebted to varied knowledge practices, however, and how much these practices relate it to the data imaginary's affinity to the collection, storage, and recirculation of discontinuous, decontextualized information, becomes most starkly visible in Whitman's production process. This is true for the actual printing and for the way in which the printing press inspired Whitman to move around chunks of material, but it also holds for how he collected and organized material, and for the informational desires underwriting his collecting.

As Folsom's above observation on the line change indicates, Whitman, the "printer-poet" who "preferred to work, whenever possible, from proof" (Greenspan 86), used the press with its movable type both as a means and as a template for his poetic process. Based on their study of Whitman's notebooks and manuscripts, Price and Folsom accordingly claim that the author

> was actively making substantive last-minute changes—reorganizing, adding, and deleting, even while Andrew Rome was typesetting the poetry. These manuscripts suggest that the poems of the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* were extremely unstable right up to their being set in type (and even after that, since we now know that Whitman stopped the press at least once to rewrite a line and another time to correct a typographical error in the preface).

Whitman, their reading suggests, used the printing press to implement a kind of "pre-computer cutting and pasting that, if this one example is an accurate indication of his general process, was breathtaking in the complexity and scope of rearrangement" (33). This fluidity and the "substantive last-minute changes," to them, are notably not indicative of a particularly strong will to form, or an irrepressible vision of a final shape the poems are intended to have. Instead, they jibe with a poetic more generally based in "response, revision, process, and his own compositional techniques emphasized his refusal to reach conclusion" (ix). This view, of course, also closely resonates with Parker's findings that "the process of [Whitman's] poetic creativity was closely allied to the newspaper editor's work of combining a variety of clippings from other newspapers with his own thoughts and firsthand reports" (165), but it more generally underscores how much of the production of *Leaves* was a playing with movable, morselized bits of language and information.[92]

3.2.3 Collection, Storage, Circulation: Data Ingestions

Such an emphasis on mobile, morselized information, also throws into relief how fundamentally Whitman's poetic vision and its most substantial single manifestation, *Leaves of Grass*, are expressive of a desire for collection and transmission. This comes into even clearer focus in two episodes Miller also enlists as part of his discussion of Whitman's collage-driven composition style, both of which warrant a more detailed discussion here. One is the beginning of "Specimen Days," the other is a conversation with three friends in which Whitman described his poetic process, relayed in Harold W. Blodgett's "Walt Whitman's Poetic Manuscripts."

Whitman begins his prose collection "Specimen Days," published in 1882 and marked by a strong retrospective tone, as follows:

> *Down in the Woods, July 2d, 1882*.—If I do it at all I must delay no longer. Incongruous and full of skips and jumps as is that huddle of diary-jottings, war-memoranda of 1862–'65, Nature-notes of 1877–'81, with Western and Canadian observations afterwards, all bundled up and tied by a big string, the resolution and indeed mandate comes to me this day, this hour, [...] to go home, untie the bundle, reel out diary-scraps and memoranda, just as they are, large or small, one after another, into print-pages,* and let the melange's lackings and wants of connection take care of themselves. It will illustrate one phase of humanity anyhow; how few of life's days and hours (and they not by relative value or proportion, but by chance) are ever noted. Probably another point too, how we give long preparations for some object, planning and delving and fashioning, and then, when the actual hour for doing arrives, find ourselves still quite unprepared, and tumble the thing together, letting hurry and crudeness tell the story better than fine work. At any rate I obey my happy hour's command, which seems curiously imperative. May-be, if I don't do anything else, I shall send out the most wayward, spontaneous, fragmentary book ever printed. (*Complete* 7-8)

In how it evokes and fleshes out the image of a bundle of varied materials, "tied by a big string," the passage obviously and explicitly signals an interest in collecting and storing experience, and it imagines "print-pages” as the technological vehicle through which these materials can be “reel[ed] out.” In this logic, the mobile, morselized quality of these ‘jottings’ and ‘scraps,’ is the precondition for them being bundled together, stored, and recalled later. The representational project the passage imagines is emphatically not one of processing, condensing, or refining experience, but one of taking the most immediate, most direct record of past situations available, and reproducing them with, presumably, as little modification or even contextualization as possible. It aims, in other words, to record and play back experience.

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[92] Cf. page 207 below for a visualization that makes this mobility of pieces of language more tangible.

This storage quality, the passage repeatedly emphasizes, is tied to the lack of cohesion between the individual items. The “skips and jumps” and the “wants of connection” vouch for the material’s authenticity, but they also allow for “hurry and crudeness” to “tell the story,” to tell it “better than fine work,” and, in effect, to tell it better than the poet himself could. As is characteristic of the data imaginary, Whitman here assumes that ‘raw data’ will ‘speak for itself,’ and his lines indeed keep emphasizing the absence of an authorial voice and authorial agency: he is writing not out of his own volition but because a “mandate has come to [him].” In fact, he himself still feels “quite unprepared” and merely “obey[s] [his] happy hour’s command, which seems curiously imperative.” In contrast to received notions of authorship, in which a poets submit the material to their will to form, the image Whitman casts of himself here is not that of a poet in command of his material—or the process of its circulation—at all. The lack of authorial control shows in how the fragmentation of the material is preserved and justified in the resulting text, in how it is not tied together by a story but rather freed from the “string” that held the bundle together and in effect “reel[ed] out.” At the same time, the passage is remarkably successful in couching this form of authorial impotence in a moment of ambivalence. It does so by alluding to a romantic frame of reference. The lines are claimed to have been written “[d]own in the woods,” and the ‘curious’ quality of the imperative he is under suggests a spiritual dimension. The final sentence then perfectly balances an admission of authorial failure, not doing “anything else,” no meaningful formative work, but “send[ing] out” a “wayward, fragmentary book,” with a burst of grandiosity and romantic inspiration. After all, it is not just any failure at coherence, but “the most” extreme one, and it is not just “wayward” and “fragmentary” but, in its fragmentation, also “spontaneous”—a strongly positive-connoted term in Whitman, and in romanticism generally.

Notably, the fascination with collecting and replaying experience here is tied to a larger vision of storage, and the passage accordingly suggests two different tiers to its project of signification. One is the recreation of the past by way of the stored materials that now get replayed in print. By collecting, bundling up, unreeling and, finally, printing a disorderly, unconnected collection of impressions authentically captured in the moment of their occurrence, "Specimen Days," as it is being presented here, is a database of individual experiences. The explanation of and justification for this project, at the same time, makes it synecdochically stand in for a larger significatory desire: Emphasizing the value of capturing not just individual experience but, in it, "one phase of humanity," it laments "how few of life's days and hours [...] are ever noted." Presumably, a complete and total record of all experience during those years would have been even more desirable.

The passage, lastly, accentuates many of these points further, fittingly, in a footnote marked by an asterisk—print's primary technology to achieve nonlinearity and a genre marker of knowledge work. The footnote, outlining a rough structure for "Specimen Days," again emphasizes the unprocessed authenticity of the material gathered,[93] but in terms of a storage logic, things get even more interesting as Whitman discusses a larger section of the volume called "Collect":

> The COLLECT afterward gathers up the odds and ends of whatever pieces I can now lay hands on, written at various times past, and swoops all together like fish in a net.
>
> I suppose I publish and leave the whole gathering, first, from that eternal tendency to perpetuate and preserve which is behind all Nature, authors included; second, to symbolize two or three specimen interiors, personal and other, out of the myriads of my time, the middle range of the Nineteenth century in the New World; a strange, unloosen'd,

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[93] Whitman stresses the authenticity further by describing their material shape of the notes in detail and by investing them with the visceral authenticity of war: many of them are "blotch'd here and there with more than one bloodstain", and while the first parts "are nearly verbatim an off-hand letter" Whitman had written, much of the following material regarding the Civil War is taken from "little note-books" in which Whitman "brief'd cases, persons, sights, occurrences in camp, by the bed-side, and not seldom by the corpses of the dead [...] Most of the pages from 26 to 81 are verbatim copies of those lurid and blood-smutch'd little note-books" (7). In this sense, they literalize the notion of a 'poem of materials' (on this concept, cf. page 193 below).

> wondrous time. But the book is probably without any definite purpose that can be told in a statement. (8)

The passage operates the same logic as before, but it does so even more emphatically. Again, there is a pointed emphasis on random storage, on the value of an "eternal tendency to perpetuate and preserve." Again, this desire for storage is read as endemic to nature and discounts authors' will to publish as "included" in this more general, natural urge to store information, and again it values implementing one such storage, a gathering of only "two or three specimen interiors" for its ability to contribute to the larger project of storing the entire "middle range of the Nineteenth century in the New World" and to do so not by selecting some few, particularly telling events, but by way of a random sampling of experience in lieu of a more total record.

As notebooks and manuscripts reveal, this process and the underlying storage desires not only informed the late prose collection "Specimen Days." Rather, they form a constant for all of Whitman's work, including the creation of *Leaves of Grass*. The notebooks do not only contain preliminary versions of many of the poems, making them a "practicing ground for poetry." In many cases, they are, in Harold W. Blodgett's words, more accurately characterized as a "repository for ideas toward poems" (35), and Whitman's process was based on amassing such morselized scraps and ideas in physical containers and then reproducing them with comparatively little work devoted to developing their connections. Blodgett brings together the reports by three of Whitman's friends to reconstruct this process. According to Harrison S. Morris's account, Whitman would take random ideas, as they "would strike him" and, if they seemed promising, "adopt" them, noting them on scrap paper and putting them in an envelope.

> "Then he would lie in wait for any other material which might bear upon or lean toward that idea, and as it came to his mind he would put it on paper and place it in the same envelope . . . ." More succinctly, his young friend Mary W. Smith Costello described the same process: "He continues to write on torn scraps of paper and backs of envelopes, as the fancy takes him; and these, when he has found a sequence to his mind, he pins or gums together. Until then the Sibylline leaves fall in a shower not only over the table but on every part of the floor."
>
> Similarly, Thomas Donaldson reported: "He sometimes wrote on scraps of paper, on the inside of envelopes addressed to him, on the backs of unwritten portions of letters received by him, and on paper

> received around packages; in fact, on anything that would carry ink. His manuscript was like Joseph's coat, of many colors. Sometimes he used half a dozen kinds of paper on which to complete one poem—a verse or two on each, and then he would pin them together."
>
> Although such testimony may convey an impression of haphazardry, study of the manuscripts enforces the conviction that the poet knew exactly what he was up to, that—as he told his young friend Morris, the pieces and scraps "always fell properly into place." (35-36)

From the three accounts, a process emerges that is indeed literally that of collage, a gluing together. It is also, as in "Specimen Days" a process that is driven first and foremost by processes of collecting and organizing information: the poems begin very similar to how the catalogs end up: material is gathered and amassed in a container, ordered not by syntagmatic connectivity but by paradigmatic replaceability, so that the order inside the catalog hardly matters. The poetic composition also is not meant to then connect these items in new, meaningful ways, but merely to contain them. As much as Blodgett works against the "impression of haphazardry" in this process, against the suspicion that the resulting poetry really is just a somewhat arbitrary collection and could be reordered randomly, his denial that Whitman just reproduced his scraps says more about the standards of literariness he operates under than about Whitman's process. In any case, the latter's statement that the scraps "always [fall] properly into place," a statement of remarkable if characteristic confidence, does nothing to suggest a process of composition, selection, or syntagmation.

3.2.4 "Brief Data," Lists, and Indices

Even when Whitman did not work from envelopes full of notes, his process, not just its result, was often marked by a catalogic, encyclopedic effort to get and store information. As one example of this, several scholars point to Whitman's intention, memorialized in his notebooks, to write a "Poem of Insects" and to the fairly straightforward poetic process these notes propose.[94] In his notes, Whitman reminds himself:

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[94] Cf. Belknap (108). Cf. also Roger Asselineau, who points to the passage as indicative of "all sorts of investigations" Whitman undertook, and of his general "[interest] in etymologies and [...] forgotten images from which so many abstract words derive," but he contains this—in my reading broad, knowledge-oriented interest—in a desire for "new words" that would enrich his vocabulary" (233). Brett Barney, in turn, interested in the connec-

"Get from Mr. Arkhurst the names of all insects — inter-weave a train of thought suitable — also trains of words" (Whitman, *Notebooks IV* 1349)[95] and, in another notebook:

> get from Mr. Arkhurst a list of *American insects* — / ? Just simply enumerate them with their sizes, colors, habits, lives, shortness or length of life—what they feed upon (A little poem of a leaf, or two leaves, only) First enumerate the insects—then end by saying I do not know what these are but I believe that all these are more than they seem
> I do not know what they are
> I dare not be too assuming over them
> I have advised with myself . . .
> . . . I dare not consider myself, anymore for my place
> then [sic -smh] they are for their places (Whitman, *Notebooks I* 287)

Indeed, these notes underscore the crucial role data, even in its narrow sense, plays for Whitman here: His 'recipe' for this poem is to "simply enumerate" discrete, quantifiable information and then "end by saying" something about the contents of the insect information database collectively. Nothing suggests that the information about the insects should have a particular internal logic, or that the specifics and their organization have any particular meaning for or bearing on the rest of the poem. In fact, the rest of the poem can apparently be written without yet having

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tion between Whitman and popular culture and arguing that contemporary readers need to "[trace] connections between Whitman and so-called 'sub-literary' forms [...], as it makes us more competent readers" sees in the unfinished insect poem and its fascination with insects connections to museum culture at the time (241). Miller reads the notes as indicative of Whitman's growing awareness of the "prime formula for generating his soon-to-be-infamous catalogs" and acknowledges that "[r]eviewing the notebooks and manuscripts, we find the notes everywhere: of birds, parts of ships, body parts, items crafted from wood, of people at work, of specific men and boys who preoccupied him. Sometimes the words came straight from dictionaries, including the one he himself was compiling around the time the insects passage was written; sometimes the lists came from his old notebooks; and sometimes he probably just brainstormed them himself" (33).

[95] Grier remarks that the note is written on what appears to be "wrapper stock for LG (1855)," suggesting that "the date is probably between 1855 and 1857," placing it at a moment where, as described above, Whitman had settled on his poetic method and was doubling down on some of the more prosaic aspects of his method.

the list.[96] The piece and its effect, as Whitman seems to imagine it, revolves around the ingestion and massification of data: it is meant to cover "all" insects so as to impress the reader as a database.

Accordingly, Whitman often satiated his desire for data ingestion by cutting or tearing out articles or parts of articles from newspapers and magazines. His ever growing collection of material from which to write accordingly by no means contained only his own notes, ideas, letters, or observation. Instead he amassed a highly flexible, mobile archive of scraps, decontextualized information reduced to the parts he was interested in and often heavily annotated in several passes to further condense the information it contained.[97] Relying on Bucke's description, Stovall describes the process as follows:

> Bucke said, on Whitman's authority, speaking of an uncertain period of time but probably the late 1840's and early 1850's: "These years he used to watch the English quarterlies and Blackwood, and when he found an article that suited him he would buy the number, perhaps second-hand, for a few cents, tear it out, and take it with him on his next sea beach excursion to digest." He followed the same practice with some books, especially anthologies. Apparently he did not have the collector's respect for books as such, but only for that part of them which especially interested him. Something can be learned of the progress of his self-education from these clippings. (143)

While this practice, as Stovall and others describe it, overall served his self-education, the process of mobilizing information, both literally by making it possible to take it to the "sea beach" and structurally by eliminating the contexts that narrow down its meanings, is the same as the one described in the "Specimen Days" opening above.[98] It breaks up the linear form, reduces material to what is of interest, and makes it possible to store this compressed information in containers, and to rearrange and recombine it at will later on. As Parker also notes, the material then frequently finds its way into the poems via the notebooks: "In the notebooks, Whitman often seems to mix poem fragments with copied newspaper classified columns" (161).

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[96] The notebooks show considerable edits and tinkering with the exact phrasing of the contextual lines, suggesting that Whitman was indeed already quite invested in the language of these closing lines.

[97] Cf. Stovall for an attempt to taxonomize his annotations (151).

[98] There is indeed another moment of mobilization here, captured in Stovall's remark about Whitman not having "the collector's respect for books as such." Trained as a printer, Whitman certainly had a more hands-on relationship to books and felt closer to the material labor of binding (and unbinding) them. But "the collector's respect for books as such" also, of course, is a learned cultural behavior, part of the classed habitus formation that accompanied the emergence of the literary field. A respect for "books as such" becomes invested with cultural capital in the moment in which books themselves, like printing generally, start to be-

This modus operandi—a generative interest that eventually results in 'poems' but that begins as a desire to traverse varied fields of knowledge and to collect, aggregate and organize their information in containers—is, perhaps, the strongest single indication of how much Whitman's poetic work is intertwined with his knowledge work: his interest in and desire for information storage and management. This modus operandi finds its most poignant material expression in his scrapbook. Along with his notebooks, Whitman kept a "large, thick volume, 10 1/2 by 9 by 5 inches" (Bauerle 158), "a huge scrapbook which [he] made by taking apart four geographies and atlases and recombining them so that he might insert clippings next to the maps to which they are related" (Stovall 150). The dating of the source material suggests that the scrapbook was created in the one or two years leading up to *Leaves of Grass*, and previous research has indicated that it was one of the sources he used in the composition. As scrapbooks tended to do, it covers a diverse swath of topics;[99] a particularly concise overview over the wide ranging interests that informed this work, however, is given by the inside and outside of the back cover.[100] Here, Whitman glued in printed lists—e.g. of the

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come cheap enough so that they no longer have to be valued for their material value.

[99] In this context, note that the pop-cultural phenomenon of scrapbooking, in Whitman's case and generally, answers to a world in which there is too much information, so that it makes sense to cut away most of it and only save small bits; it is possible only in a world where the media carrying this information are so cheap that a sizable audience can afford such a 'wasteful' process. Cf. section 4.3 below for more on one particular scrapbook-like project, *American Slavery as It Is*. Cf. also page 47 above.

[100] It seems richly suggestive of an almost hagiographic impulse to conserve that Richard M. Bucke felt compelled to simply copy the words to his *Notes and Fragments*, when much of their value is in their placement. On the other hand, Bauerle's response to the list powerfully illustrates the potential narrativity inherent in such collections and the urge felt by readers to turn them 'back' into narratives. He writes: "Puzzling and intriguing are such sequences as 'war,' 'iron,' 'police,' 'individual freedom.' Did Whitman regard the first three as closely related, and then did these terms

"names of the arts and sciences," a list he amended with entries he felt were missing, such as 'phrenology' and 'sociology'—and kept a record of dozens of concepts of interest to him, "Language," "Government," "Trades, mechanics, etc.," "artificial drinks," and so on, but also noted down questions and research tasks to follow up on: "Who are the most eminent men? Also women?"; "look in Census Reports.—"; or: "In 'History and Geography of the World,' introduce every where lists of persons—the great persons of every age and time" (cf. Bauerle 162). It is easy to see the resonances between these notes, this mode of ingesting information and organizing it, the stated research goals and, say, Whitman's intention to write a poem on "all insects" after getting a list detailing them.[101]

A particularly noteworthy feature of the scrapbook, then, is how it strives for a structure loose enough to be infinitely expandable, allowing for more and more information to be taken in, and simultaneously orderly enough to still facilitate somewhat effective information retrieval: The scrapbook is a form inherently in need of an index. In this sense, the geographies constitute a visual spatial index that organizes information according to its location on the globe. The printed and handwritten lists similarly form indices of sorts: While they do not point to page numbers, they are digested versions of the book, indicating the content realized in (or desired for) the entire volume.[102] As Michael J. O'Driscoll notes, the modus operandi of the scrapbook thus resonates with Whitman's overall

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prompt him to place after them a human value they threatened, 'individual freedom'? [...] When he listed 'legislation' after 'crime, criminals etc.,' and 'Prisons,' did he regard legislation as a remedy for crime?" (160).

[101] Cf. also how Whitman, on a different manuscript page, "reminds himself to 'read the latest and best anatomical works' but also to 'talk with physicians' so that he can write 'a poem in which is minutely described the whole particulars and ensemble of a first-rate healthy Human Body'" (M. Miller 85).

[102] Bauerle also considers the lists as indices, albeit not to the scrapbook or to the information therein but to the poet's "language world." This is in line with Bauerle's tendency, widespread of course in Whitman scholarship, to inquire into Whitman's knowledge practices only insofar as they can be framed as an explanation to his 'poetic' or 'literary' work. "Language," perhaps not least because of Whitman's own characterization of *Leaves* as "nothing but a language experiment" and because of this phrasing's compatibility with modernist understandings of poetry, figures as a central trope in these endeavors. Cf. also the fact that Matthiessen titles his chapter on Whitman in *American Renaissance* "Only a Language Experiment."

project of an “indexical textuality” and is expressive of “the poet’s ongoing concern with the problematics of textual management.” In O’Driscoll’s reading, this engagement with textual management in turn exemplifies a contradictory double impulse in Whitman, a desire on the one hand to “exploit the overwhelming potential of vast accumulations of printed matter, and,” on the other hand, “to render transparent that wall of books that threatens to close off the reader from any kind of originary experience” (297). Clearly, one of the two jibes with knowledge work and the other with romantic writing in general and transcendentalist thinking in particular. Together both form a dialectic double-response to the modernization and transformation of the information landscape of the middle of the nineteenth century.

Unsurprisingly, then, indexing is at the core of Whitman’s knowledge work, along with clipping and annotating. This is explicitly expressed in a short note he left on the back of a tax form. On it, he imagines a ‘world index’ in which all information is made accessible by way of lists and digested information. While the idea of a total encyclopedia based on indexed information is not unique to Whitman, his interest in it speaks of his general fascination with information management. The similarity between the form he imagines for such a project and his scrapbook underscores the intensity and pervasiveness of this interest:

> A new way and the true way of treating in books—History, geography, ethnology, astronomy, etc., etc.—by long list of dates, terms, summary paragraphic statements etc. Because all those things to be carried out and studied in full in any particular department need to have recourse to so many books—it is impossible to put them, or think of putting them, in any history—so that brief DATA, all comprehensive, and to be pursued as far and to as full information as anyone will, afford the best way of inditing history for the common reader. The History of the World,—viz.: An immense digested collection of lists of dates, names of representative persons and events, maps and census returns. (*Notes* 75-76)

Even though it does not make an explicit, verbatim reference to indexing, the organization of information Whitman imagines here, “long lists” that can be “pursued [...] to [...] full information,” clearly suggests as much: lists that do not simply contain the information desired but that point to it so that one can pursue increasingly granular data. The long form of information, books, the passage conversely seems to suggest, cannot cope with the exploding needs for the storage and circulation of knowledge. In their stead, Whitman imagines a multimodal collation of materials, "dates, names [...], maps and census returns," to constitute a better representation of the "History of the World." The all-caps "DATA" at the center of the paragraph not only testifies to the newness of the concept but also underscores what the different elements have in common: they are a form of decontextualized, maximally reduced and condensed, discontinuous and morselized information.

By thus invoking the specter of information overflow, Whitman's decidedly modern "new" and "true way of treating" information again firmly and affirmatively situates his own knowledge work at the center of the media and information changes at the time. Whether in his general cutting and pasting from newspapers and magazines, in his scrapbook, or in his 'world index,' this knowledge work responds to and is facilitated by the massification of information and of the media through which it travels. This is true on a practical level: only in a world of mass printing are newspapers, magazines, and geographies in wide (and cheap) enough a circulation to invite this kind of work. It is also true in a more cultural sense: only in a world of mass information is there a need, for the individual but also for society as a whole, to develop techniques that reduce, condense, and organize information to keep it manageable despite its proliferation.

Whitman's enthusiasm for the possibilities of "brief DATA," then, is indicative of his more general response to the exploding textual, informational abundance at the time. His notebooks and manuscripts suggest that he, like many of his contemporaries, understood this as a crisis. They also suggest that he, due to his training in a variety of other knowledge practices, simultaneously was fascinated by the possibilities this crisis delivered, a disposition that set him up for an openly ambiguous response.[103] Using the lyric to conjoin rather than separate the dataesque and the literary cultural responses to this crisis gave him a remarkable productivity and originality, but it also put him at odds with the more mainstream cultural trend at the time—a trend toward differentiating into distinct fields the literary and the dataesque treatments of experience. Indeed, if the emergence of the literary field during Romanticism was indebted, among other factors, to the existence of systems of mass production and circulation of text, and if this particular cultural response operated by repressing this indebtedness, Whitman's fascination with and embrace of mass print uneasily situates his poetic at the then-widening rift between these two fields, which kept casting doubt on the literariness and the artistic merits of his poetic. Notably, as the following section will explore in more detail, Whitman frequently embraced these moments of doubt and enlisted them in service of his strategy of ambiguating the difference between literature and data.

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[103] One way of thinking about this aspect obviously has to do with Whitman's personal background: A particularly 'self-made,' self-educated member of the group that imagined itself and came to be imagined as founding an American National Literature, he was perhaps particularly ambiguous about the cultural stratifications that accompanied the emergence of the literary field. Or, as Jay Grossman puts it: "Shaped by the material practices of their distinctly different cultural and educational "foregrounds," Emerson and Whitman came into the period of their greatest productivity with different conceptions of the functions and political efficacy of the word in the world" (8).

3.3 "Literary Mermaids": Category Dramas, Catalog Rhetoric, and Literary Studies

The dataesque quality of his poetic catalogs regularly threw doubts on the artistic merit of Whitman's poetic project. At the same time, his use of the lyric to express a 'storage desire' and to ambiguate received contours of literariness paradoxically allowed his writing to host complex and wide ranging discussions as to what constitutes the literary. As this section will show, Whitman's use of the lyric, and his catalogs in particular, regularly incited critics to perform boundary work in the literary field: arguments over why his catalogic style was indeed literary, or that and why it was not. In the process, their interpretations and reviews often fortify the data-literature divide by overlaying it with additional dichotomies, many of which signal forms of social stratification and value judgments of sorts. Whitman's self-reviews frequently engage in the same discussion of literariness, but they do so, notably, not by resolving his writings' status either way, but by inviting and entertaining questions about it, and by elevating these questions as at once important and impossible to resolve. The resulting rhetoric of suspended resolution aligns with and supports the effect his lyric catalogs generally have: to trouble the boundaries between symbolic forms. The critics' emphatic investedness in adjudicating the literary value of his catalogs, thus is as much evidence of these boundaries' cultural entrenchment as it is evidence of Whitman's success in spotlighting and challenging them.

To be clear up front, here as throughout this chapter, my point notably is not that Whitman's is a particularly 'deep' artistic project in how it questions (or even: rejects) art. This view, as it participates in adjudicating a cultural artifact's inherent artfulness, is alluded to in his own writings, and it is frequently invoked by some of his more favorable critics, for example in Oscar Wilde's 1889 assertion that "in his very rejection of art Walt Whitman is an artist. He tried to produce a certain effect by certain means and he succeeded" (Wilde). Of course, Wilde's generously broad definition of art—to successfully try to produce an effect by certain means—accommodates Whitman's work; and of course, Wilde's contention that the rejection of art can also be art prefigures a view budding at the time but becoming much more prevalent in modernism (and, in different inflections, before: in both realism and naturalism). Whether or not Whitman's work *is* art, an ultimately essentializing question in which artfulness is seen as a quality inherent in certain objects, however, is besides the point this study makes. What this chapter, in turn, is interested in is the fact that Wilde feels drawn to make this argument in the first place. Whether or not this engagement is an intended, 'artistic' project by Whitman or whether it is an unintended side effect overdetermined by many different, unrelated factors, the dataesque lyricism of *Leaves of Grass* again and again has attracted this very discussion; a discussion that is, in this study's view, not so much indicative of the literary qualities of *Leaves*, or lack thereof, as it is constitutive of the literary field (and, in a praxeological view of art and literature, of its objects).

3.3.1 Ceci n'est pas de la littérature

One of the more unusual features of *Leaves of Grass* is the amount of paratextual explanation the book's poems are couched in. The first edition features an extensive foreword, and its publication was flanked by reviews ghostwritten by Whitman himself; the second edition contains the "Leaves Droppings" section that features responses to the first; and so on all the way to the final edition's "Backward Glance." As Michael J. O'Driscoll explains, the amount of paratextual material suggests that the poems are in need of "protect[ion]" because of their remarkable "heterogeneity," a quality that stems directly from their ambiguous relationship to different symbolic forms, from them being at once poems and "archival recordings." O'Driscoll elaborates:

> As an archival recording of both a nation and a persona, each a diverse entity in its own right, *Leaves of Grass* embodies a heterogeneity that corresponds to its multifarious subject matter. In this sense, the text is

> indexical and inclusive in its attempts to gesture towards the multiplicity that is nineteenth-century American culture, but such gestures are left wide open to (mis)interpretations of every sort. The considerable number of paratexts that surround *Leaves of Grass*—self-reviews, ghostwritten criticism, innumerable prefaces and postfaces—ideally protect the poem from misprision and overt attacks. These same paratexts, however, are also proof of the supplementarity of the text: its failure to achieve a fully adequate self-presence and its inevitable recourse to calculated writings that are caught up in the historical actualities and supposedly spontaneous, expressive utterances that the poem is intended to indicate. (316-17)

The paradox that O'Driscoll points out here notably cuts both ways: the paratexts that insist on the book's literary qualities are "proof of [its] supplementarity," but to the extent that they often also cast doubt on the literary merits of *Leaves*, they paradoxically keep affirming the book's status as literary. After all, the paratexts necessarily speak within and thus in affirmation of the discursive parameters of the literary field: a field that is marked by the very practice of scrutinizing, adjudicating, and explaining the literariness of texts. The paratexts O'Driscoll refers to indeed are full of such antiphrastic statements, for example when the "Backward Glance o'er Travel'd Roads" insists that "[n]o one will get at my verses who insists upon viewing them as a literary performance, or attempt at such performance, or as aiming mainly toward art or æstheticism" (*Leaves [1891]* 438). Regardless of how emphatically statements such as these are made, the discrepancy between their content and their context necessarily undermines them and turns them into performances of literariness, regardless of how strongly they disavow the book's literary agenda. In result, many of the paratextual framings end up affirming *Leaves*'s categorical ambiguity rather than resolving it.

This dynamic is particularly visible in the reviews Whitman wrote and anonymously published in support of *Leaves*'s first edition. By way of genre, these reviews are necessarily deliberations on the literary merit of the work under consideration, and they rely on complex rhetorical strategies, at times using denials of literariness to antiphrastically assert it. For example, one such review says of Whitman that "[t]he effects he produces are no effects of artists or the arts, but effects of the original eye or arm, or the actual atmosphere of grass or brute or bird"; that "[y]ou may feel the unconscious teaching of the presence of some fine animal, but will never feel the teaching of the fine writer or speaker";

and that "[Whitman] comes to no conclusions, and does not satisfy the reader" (Whitman, "Walt Whitman, a Brooklyn Boy"). Statements such as these insist on the direct, nonrepresentational quality of the work under consideration, a work whose effects are not the result of mediation but, presumably, the "effects of the original" object that the poems store and retrieve. They address qualities that would obviously count as shortcomings within the parameters of the literary field at the time.[104] Finally, they preempt criticism of these qualities by investing them with an assumed purpose and intentionality. They thus perform a rhetoric in which the denial of artfulness in turn becomes a way of asserting the presence of (a new kind of) art.

Notably, the reviews, too, rely on catalog rhetoric, and they utilize the catalogs in ways strikingly similar to how the poems use them in the volume. As they work to justify the new poetic that they see in *Leaves*, they tie it to a distinct sense of nation, of social stratification, and of modernity, which they envision by way of extended catalogs. This is acutely exemplified in "Walt Whitman and His Poems" a self-written review that early on presents a catalog to claim a correspondence between Whitman's poems' form and the nation:

> The movement of his verses is the sweeping movement of great currents of living people, with a general government, and state and municipal governments, courts, commerce, manufactures, arsenals, steamships, railroads, telegraphs, cities with paved streets, and aqueducts, and police and gas—myriads of travellers arriving and departing—newspapers, music, elections and all the features and processes of the nineteenth century in the wholesomest race and the only stable form of politics at present upon the earth.

While it remains unclear, how exactly the "movement" of the poems relates to the "great currents of living people," the catalog is classic in its design and in its purpose.[105] After two longer, more general items, it quickly zooms in and breaks down into a loose sequence of single-word nouns that can easily be grouped into short semantic chains but that do not cohere beyond their general purpose of describing the otherwise indescribable nation. A similar catalog is used to appreciate the poems by contrasting them to the classed and gendered stratification of the literary field: a slightly longer catalog of nineteen items, it describes "our intellectual people" and their "books, poems, novels, essays, editorials, lectures, tuitions, and criticism" as insufficiently rough and manly to suit the new nation: These intellectuals "trim their hair, shave, touch not the earth barefoot, and enter not the sea except in a complete bathing-dress." These "unmistakably genteel persons, travelled, college-learned, used to be served by servants, conversing without heat or vulgarity, supported on chairs, or walking through handsomely-carpeted parlors, or along shelves bearing well-bound volumes" are disparaged as upper-class and effeminate, thus making room for the presumably working-class, masculine 'American' poet Whitman and his new, rough style. The review, thirdly, and again using a catalog, ties this new poetry to a particular vision of modernity, a "fresh mentality of this mighty age" marked by "the sciences and inventions and discoveries of the present world." The new poetry therefore is no stranger to "geology, nor mathematics, nor chemistry, nor navigation, nor astronomy, nor anatomy, nor physiology, nor engineering." The underlying vision is one in which the material innovations join with intellectual and spiritual ones, and the new poetry the review discovers in Whitman's writing captures this moment of modernity.

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[104] For a particularly compact example of this rhetoric, cf. another review in which Whitman claims that only "second-rate poems immediately [...] gratify" (Whitman, "English").

[105] Note the characteristic 'catalogic explosion' in which after naming a whole range of particulars, the explicit naming of the (overly broad) classifier of the catalog, "all the features and processes of the nineteenth century," essentially undermines the catalog. I will return to this quality below (cf. page 218).

Used in this fashion, the catalogs constitute sites in which explanation and exemplification blend: They explain to the reader Whitman's poetic, but they also perform it. They do so, notably, by explicitly addressing the blending of the presumably distinct symbolic regimes of poetry, science, and politics.[106] As "Walt Whitman and His Poems" asserts, unsurprisingly featuring another catalog, for Whitman, "the writing of poems is but a proportionate part of the whole," a whole in which "public and private performance, politics, love, friendship, behavior, the art of conversation, science, society, the American people, the reception of the great novelties of city and country" mix and blend.

Such blending, facilitated here by the three catalogs, obviously goes against a logic of systemic differentiation and field formation, yet it is at the heart of a poetic in which the literary catalog generally ambiguates rather than resolves the distinction between different cultural fields and between different symbolic forms. This is most poignantly visible in another anonymous review, "An English and an American Poet." This review duplicates many of the moves outlined above: it readily dwells on the questionable value of the catalogs in which the materials "tumble pell-mell, exhaustless and copious" with a "disregard of parts" and an "absence of special purpose"; it values *Leaves of Grass* as expressive of a national literature that is in line with a masculine, working-class Americanness vis-a-vis "dandified" British culture; it reads this as distinctly modern; and it does so in gestures that do not straightforwardly and unambiguously praise Whitman's poetics. Instead it features a familiar faux-impartiality by expressing (strategic) doubt about the project.[107] Most importantly, however, it embraces ambiguity even more emphatically and explicitly than any of the other, earlier reviews: *Leaves of Grass*, this review concludes in a dramatically open gesture, "is to prove either the most lamentable of failures or the most glorious of triumphs, in the known history of literature. And after all we have written we confess our brain-felt and heart-felt inability to decide which we think it is likely to be" (Whitman, "English").

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[106] The review hits this point hard, asserting that the sciences "underlie [Whitman's] whole superstructure" and that "the beauty of the work of the poet [...] are the tuft and final applause of science."

This closing passage encapsulates the rhetorical strategy underwriting the reviews—and it does remarkably complex work remarkably well: It doubles down on an essentializing view in which an object does or does not have literary qualities—an essentializing view of literariness. However, in doing so it operates a praxeological one: by involving *Leaves of Grass* in a discussion of (presumably questionable) literariness, it ensures that the book is treated as a literary object. Accordingly, it is not at all interested in closure but in facilitating a discussion of literariness, and its rhetoric is geared toward this goal. By upping the ante, by posing two alternative extremes, and by affectively supercharging the question of whether *Leaves* was either a spectacular success or a spectacular failure, it effectively eclipses all other possible, more nuanced outcomes, among them two that to Whitman were possibly far worse than "[failure]": that *Leaves* was a mediocre, irrelevant piece of literature, or that it was not part of the "known history of literature" at all. Thus elevating the question, secondly, prevents rather than facilitates closure: If the stakes are so high, if it has to be either one of the two extremes, and if no nuanced stance is permissible, one can indeed only

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[107] Cf. the section 2.1 for a more detailed reading of this review.

"confess [one's] [...] inability to decide." The question becomes undecidable, perpetually suspended, precisely because it presumably matters so much.[108] In effect, then, the questionable literary value of the catalogs, of the book, of the poet, and, by extension of all of American literature, emerging as it is, roll into one high-stakes moment of suspense. And while it may seem as if such a dramatic crisis would demand a resolution, the review does not facilitate but obstruct it. The result of this performance of decisive indecisiveness is, paradoxically, another moment of ambiguation: Since the literary value of the catalogic *Leaves* is undecidable, the categorical distinction between the dataesque storage-logic of the catalogs and the formal stylizing of literature necessarily blurs.

3.3.2 "Rings of Saturn" vs. "Amass[ing] Crudity Upon Crudity"

A large strand of the history of Whitman criticism (and critique) can be read as a response to and a grappling with the kind of categorical blurring that *Leaves* performs (and that Whitman's self-reviews and paratextual commentary exacerbate): For decade after decade, readers engaged the question of whether the extensive catalogs at the heart of *Leaves* are artistically well-done, whether they, in other words, conform to a set of standards of literariness, including at times the standard of a calculated violation of standards, or if they are nothing but mere inventories, a collection of facts that is indeed akin to a "telephone directory" (Burke 97). While, as should be abundantly clear by now, this study rejects the premise of this question, the dichotomy that these critics assume between the 'mere' storage of information in inventories, a data effort, vis-a-vis the formal refinement of experience, literature, speaks volumes about the evolution of the literary field and about the culturalization of data. In the following, I will read some exemplary, historical pieces of criticism for how they use *Leaves of Grass* to perform this cultural work of essentializing literature and data as two fundamentally, categorically distinct enterprises. They often do so by performing boundary work on different, overlapping binaries.

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[108] This parallels a more general treatment of the question of a national literature outlined above (sections 2.2 and 2.3). For a more sustained argument on this parallelism between the suspended judgment on American national literature and the suspended judgment of Whitman's own literary achievement, cf. my "'Songs' and 'Inventories.'"

Walker Kennedy's 1884 review is a particularly good example of how *Leaves of Grass*'s troubling of the boundaries of genres and of symbolic forms triggers an aggressive reaffirmation of these very boundaries. Intriguingly written in response to and entering into a dialog with Whitman's own discussion of his poetic in an article in *The Critic*,[109] Kennedy laments the logic of unrefined massification that informs the catalogs: In his eyes, they constitute nothing but an "enumeration of abstract and concrete things" that is meaningless and "predicates nothing." Throughout his article, his criticism turns on the lack of organization and connection in Whitman's catalogs, on the datafying morselization that, to him, is the antithesis of good literature. Missing connectivity, he decries that the words are "suspended in mid-air," that there is "bad grammar, incomplete sentences, [a] misuse of words, and [an] incoherence of ideas," as well as "about as much consecutiveness [...] as there is in a dream originating in too much shrimp salad for supper." Returning again and again to a lack of syntagmation, Kennedy complains (in catalogic form) about the "jungle of people and things," the "bare enumeration of living beings, inanimate objects, abstractions, that have no bearing on each other, obey no sequence, and teach no lesson." In his eyes, *Leaves* reads as an "unsystematic, unpruned expression of a very peculiar mind" due to a "[failure] to give us any connecting links." Pathologizing the "pure contralto" section of "Song of Myself"—"Whitman's most famous catalog" (Hartnett 163)—as merely a spasm, Kennedy observes: "Another convulsion seizes the writer at this juncture, and he gives us a catalogue of all sorts of people and professions. He jumps from a steamboat to a ball, from one of the seasons to one of the States. At one time he is in Missouri, and at another in a street-car. There is no telling where he will alight next."[110] Clearly, Kennedy's primary misgiving about Whitman's text is that it lacks "connecting links," that it merely stores impressions in a dissociated fashion rather than ordering them into a coherent, ‘systematic’ and ‘pruned,’ meaningful organization.

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[109] Kennedy vaguely speaks of "a recent issue of a New York journal," but he likely refers to the Jan. 5 article "A Backward Glance on My Own Road" in *The Critic* (cf. "Walt Whitman Camden Chronology").

[110] For a similarly visceral register, cf. Henry James's "Mr. Walt Whitman," a review of *Drum Taps* in which James complains about Whitman's tendency to "discharge the undigested contents of [his] blotting-book into the lap of the public." Throughout, the review hits on many familiar points of criticism, among them Whitman's "prosaic mind" and its attempts "to lift itself, by a prolonged muscular strain, into poetry" and a propensity to "to accept everything in general [and] to amass crudity upon crudity."

Throughout the review, Kennedy’s exasperation about the catalogic overabundance of particulars joins hands with a sense of category panic, a feeling that *Leaves* undermines the classifications that define the literary field, expressed as a frustration that it violates “certain inflexible standards for fine art and poetry.” Against this bending of presumably “inflexible standards,” Kennedy first turns to genre, narrowly and binarily understood, as one such standard. He defiantly insists that “[t]here are two kinds of literature,—prose and poetry; and, as Monsieur Jourdan says, everything written is either one or the other,”[111] and he decries that one cannot say “that the ‘Leaves’ are either prose or poetry. [...] They are literary mermaids,” perhaps enchanting but ultimately dangerous in-between creatures, incarnations of a blurring of categories that shall not be blurred. Continuing to hit on the difficulty of categorizing *Leaves*, he secondly asks about the purpose of the book and suggests a startling range of possible social contexts: “Has the author ever stated in intelligible English the purpose of his book? Is its aim moral, political, scientific, aesthetic? Is it written in the interest of democracy, or of the intellectual classes?” Especially the last question hints at the binary that is underlying all of his argument: *Leaves*, it suggests, needs to be either

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[111] Kennedy’s reference to “Monsieur Jourdan” warrants closer inspection: it seems to refer to Mr. Jourdain, the main character in Molière’s *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* and bourgeois merchant’s son, who wants to pass as aristocratic. As part of this effort, he takes lessons in all things aristocrat, among them lessons in the distinction between poetry and prose (and, since this is a comedy, is pleased to learn that he has been speaking ‘prose’ his entire life without even trying). Kennedy’s decision to cite a fictional character on the distinction between poetry and prose, and to cite a character who, in the play’s fictional universe, is a fool, introduces a moment of uncertainty as to whether he is speaking tongue-in-cheek, suggesting that only to a Mr. Jourdain is the distinction between the two so clear-cut. The rest of the review dispels this doubt. Still, the reference is richly suggestive in ways that go beyond my argument here: it invokes a ‘continental’ authority on literature (depending on the readers’ knowledge, either Molière or ‘some important French person’); and it alludes to a play that is all about social stratification and about (class) passing and that addresses the role standards of art play for holding in place a social order the two main poles of which are the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy. The reference then begs many more questions, such as: Who here, in Kennedy’s view, is ‘passing’? Whitman? Kennedy? American National Literature?

"in the interest of democracy," serving perhaps an egalitarian world view, or "aesthetic," written for "the intellectual classes." The idea that it could strive to be both, in this sense, not only violates "certain, inflexible" formal standards of how art is supposed to be organized; these standards, it seems, are tied to a particular social stratification in which the "intellectual classes" form one, 'aristocratic' group that stands in opposition to the 'masses' of democracy.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, the categorical ambiguity of *Leaves* triggers a sense of violation, insecurity, and loss of privilege against which Kennedy, throughout the review, marshals a defensive rhetoric of entitlement. Following a passage in which he admits that "at times the reader detects the gleam of the diamond in this mass of rubbish" and that perhaps the existing "verbal tools" and "established modes of composition" might be insufficient to express thoughts that are "true and clear," he all the more forcefully reaffirms the laws that govern the field: "We have a right to insist that a definite subject or story shall be selected, and that it shall be developed artistically, and in such a way as to be grasped."[112] This entitlement argument, along with the frequent return to questions of standards, underscores what kind of cultural work *Leaves of Grass* allows Kennedy to do: he is policing a field, and this field's mapping onto a social order, and the categorical ambiguities of Whitman's work trigger him to do so with particular vigor.

A similar sense of categorical wounding also informs later discussions of Whitman. John Bailey's *Walt Whitman* is a case in point. Where Kennedy framed his concerns about Whitman's categorical ambiguity primarily in a language of genre, narrowly understood as poetry vs. prose, Bailey is more concerned about the mixing of different socio-textual systems, and he sees this mixing as the main shortcoming in Whitman's work. Like many others, he laments the "auctioneering inventories of things in general" (58) even in this short phrase suggesting a social context, auctions, the selling of goods to the highest bidder, that is commercial and, thus, in this logic distinctly nonliterary.[113] Invoking two other nonliterary occupations, Bailey laments the "wildernesses of catalogue" in which the "material is left as unshaped and even untouched as if the writer were a surveyor's clerk or a compiler of statistics for a county council" (5), another frame of reference in which textuality is put to the service of practical purposes, is socially and politically embedded, and, tellingly, degraded as numbers-driven: either clerical or statistical.

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[112] Kennedy in fact recognizes the limiting effect of such rules and laws on an author's expression, but in the framework he is operating in, they productively complicate a poetic project by providing a necessary form of "ballast" without which the writer is set adrift and "may go on to Ursa Major." Kennedy's notion of ballast here resonates with Van Wyck Brooks's (cf. page 83 above).

This logic forms the basis of a more sustained argument by Bailey about how politics and journalism 'contaminate' Whitman's work: In his eyes, Whitman's poems fail to properly distance themselves from these two other decidedly socially invested, practical textual systems, both of which thus stand in opposition to literature conceptualized as a disinterested, "aesthetic" (in Kennedy's sense) project. In Bailey's eyes, Whitman's poetic voice falls short because

> [i]t at once exhibits the fatal influence which his Tammany Hall speechifying experiences and his journalistic training had on him. How different his sense of language and style might have been if its training had been left entirely in the hands of the Bible and the *Waverley Novels* and the other great books which he would take with him on his boyish rambles by the sea-shore! He might have written as pure an English as Bunyan himself. But the cheap rhetoric of political meetings and the self-important trivialities of provincial newspapers overlaid and tainted all that. (57)

The language of "[purity]" and of styles "overlaid and tainted," is telling here and again speaks of a strong sense of category panic and a concern for boundaries. Evoking an exclusively continental, mostly British genealogy of literariness, Bailey laments that Whitman was not like Scott, Bunyan, Spenser, Milton, or the Greek and Latin classics, and he blames this falling-short on the sullying of a presumably 'pure' poetic voice by

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113 The trope is not limited to Bailey. Possibly its first use regarding Whitman is in a letter Emerson sent to his friend Thomas Carlyle. In the letter, Emerson describes *Leaves* as a "nondescript monster which yet has terrible eyes & buffalo strength, & was indisputably American." The book, Emerson continues, "was written & printed by a journeyman printer in Brooklyn, N. Y. named Walter Whitman; and after you have looked into it, if you think, as you may, that it is only an auctioneer's inventory of a warehouse, you can light your pipe with it" (Emerson, *The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle* 509). Emerson reprised the trope later in life in his complaint that he had "expected [Whitman] to make the songs of the nation, but he seems content to make the inventories" (qtd. in Daiches 123).

socially embedded textual systems.[114] Further developing this argument, he traces those qualities that make Whitman's poetry dataesque—structural repetition and an egalitarian impulse toward a "miscellaneous collection" of facts—to this original sin of a mixing of socio-textual systems:

> As it was, the Tammany meetings taught [Whitman] a habit of repeating himself with a rather empty verbosity which did not always disdain the intellectual level of a Tammany audience, while the Brooklyn newspaper office left him with the notion that one fact is as good as another, and that a miscellaneous collection of them described in the language of the streets is the very thing to fill your pages with; all of which may have been useful doctrine, and even true, for the Brooklyn editor, but was false and fatal for the poet. (57-58)

Again, Bailey's remarks are riddled with efforts to draw boundaries and to set up polar opposites—between the "intellectual level" of a literary audience and that of Tammany Hall; between urban, Brooklyn newspapers and, one might assume: more bucolic, literary writing; between the "language of the streets" and the language of poetry; and between individual, selected "good" facts and their "miscellaneous collection." Whether or not these remarks productively capture qualities in Whitman's work, or whether or not its Brooklyn newspaper style makes Whitman's work particularly unpoetic (or particularly 'American') is besides the point. What matters is that his style's features, prime among them the catalogs, afford to Bailey, as they did to Kennedy, an opportunity to stage a veritable category drama in which a discussion of literary style, unwittingly or not, turns into an affirmation of social stratification around "intellectual [levels]" and, ultimately, class.

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[114] This imagination of Whitman's voice as originally pure and 'native' to the United States forms a longer tradition and gained prominence in the canonization of Whitman in the twentieth century. It is central, e.g., to George Santayana's theory of a "Poetry of Barbarism." Characterizing Whitman's method as one "of a rich, spontaneous, absolutely lazy fancy," he sees in his catalogs of people and things a (positively) primitive quality: "swarms of men and objects rendered as they might strike the retina in a sort of waking dream. It is the most sincere possible confession of the lowest—I mean the most primitive—type of perception. All ancient poets are sophisticated in comparison and give proof of longer intellectual and moral training. Walt Whitman has gone back to the innocent style of Adam, when the animals filed before him one by one and he called each of them by its name" (*Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* 177-78).

This dynamic is characteristic of a general tendency in a broad swath of Whitman criticism: a critical engagement with the perceived formal shortcomings of his paratactic style quickly ends up projecting a structure of matching binarisms in which socially embedded, modern, politically relevant but stylistically inferior, popular forms of textuality get pitted against the refined textuality of literature.[115] Such an affinity between a critique of Whitman's catalogs and a discussion, ultimately, of brow levels is overdetermined by several factors. As Günter Leypold points out, to "many of his contemporaries, Whitman's most radical aspect was not his poetic form but his sexual explicitness—which tended to be considered a sign of popular literature rather than the literary avant-garde" (99). Perhaps poised to reject *Leaves* as 'popular' by way of its content, these critics discover in the book's paratactic form another appeal to 'the popular' that they view as similarly unbefitting of art. In any case, this structure of matching binarisms and its rejection of that which enjoys (or appeals to) popular success obviously sits uneasily with any aspiration for a democratic literature.

Paradoxically, these closely associated and culturally entrenched binarisms constitute, from the beginning on, one important claim to cultural success for Whitman's work, and they point to a second 'school' of Whitman criticism. This school applauds *Leaves*'s 'democratic' aspiration as more important than questions of its literary value. In its line of thinking, Whitman's ambiguation of the 'laws' of literature can claim for itself to be 'democratic' precisely because this view of literature as regulated by "certain inflexible standards" so closely corresponds to an 'aristocratic' economy of cultural value. Flouting (or attacking) these standards thus becomes a democratizing cultural project.[116] Whitman's own paratextual explanations of his work, his self-reviews and his prefaces, postfaces, and articles frequently evoke this logic of a rebellion against cultural elites, and they lay the groundwork for this line of thinking. In 1871, Edward Dowden's major review then prominently casts Whitman's poetic as "The Poetry of Democracy," thus for the first time spelling out a coherent theory of how the unrefined, paratactic style of Whitman's poems might express a poetic program of bypassing the gatekeepers of literary taste and subverting the 'selectiveness' of more conventional literature. Section 2.2 above features an extended discussion of Dowden's review and his casting catalog rhetoric as democratic (cf. page 78). For the context of this chapter, it is important to note that the logic inaugurated by Dowden was picked up during the mid-twentieth-century canonization of Whitman and informs the thinking of the second group of Whitman critics. It, too, turns on the desire to disambiguate the ambiguity of the literary catalogs, but it is willing to view their presumed 'failure' at refinement and selection as a positive quality.

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[115] Ironically, as Leypold also observes, this dynamic gets fully reversed in the twentieth-century reception of Whitman, who now gets to be seen as positively difficult to emerge as one of the few truly literary authors: "Santayana's and Van Wyck Brooks's highbrow-lowbrow divide almost completely discredited the nineteenth-century American literary canon—Brooks's definition of the highbrow alone dismissed most of the New England tradition (not only Longfellow, Lowell, and Holmes, but also Poe, Hawthorne, and especially Emerson)" (99).

[116] Jacques Rancière, reading Whitman as a representative of a democratic modernism (*avant la lettre*) similarly notes the democracy of Whitman's catalogs (67, e.g.), and he characterizes Whitman as "the poet of plebeian America," thus openly intertwining class and democracy (Rancière 72).

A third group of critics, then, takes yet another route. Their engagements, which value *Leaves of Grass* as a literary achievement, engage in a similar affirmation of field and genre boundaries as the critical ones exemplified by Kennedy and Bailey above—they merely find ways to include the catalogs inside these boundaries—a task that is, like the one to exclude them, complicated by how it goes against the ambiguation that the text and the author's metatextual commentary keep performing but one that is similarly afforded by the indeterminacy of the catalogs.

One important strand of such criticism, particularly prolific in the middle of the twentieth century, operates by identifying hidden complexities—patterns, structures, or correspondences—in the poetic catalogs. In this logic, the catalogs only superficially appear as "[jungles] of people and things" or as a "bare enumeration" (Kennedy) and instead hide a particularly intricate and veiled complexity to be uncovered by formal analysis.[117] In a phrasing that testifies to this view's vitality at the time, Stanley K. Coffman accordingly opens his 1954 discussion of the "Catalogue Technique in Whitman's Poetry" by asserting that "[r]ecent Whitman studies have shown so conclusively the existence of formal patterns in his verse that no one is likely now to insist that he wholly abandoned himself to the vagaries of 'inspiration' when he composed" (225). While Coffman acknowledges that "the characteristics of his verse and his comments on it are so predominantly antiformalist that they persist in discouraging the kind of formal analysis that good poetry requires," he does not stay discouraged for long: Whitman, he claims, "on important occasions, [...] manipulated his lists so carefully that they are not fairly to be described as 'catalogues,' ordered them so that they became aesthetically expressive, conveyed meaning by their form" (226).[118] The rhetoric of Coffman's argument here is instructive. He lowers the bar for identifying formal qualities in Whitman by honing in on a straw man argument that Whitman had "wholly" relied on nothing but inspiration. This argument can then be refuted by finding only some few "important occasions" in which his verse is formally complex. More importantly, he overlays his argument with a matter-of-courseness in which it is particularly hard to disagree with what he paints as a consensus view on the matter. In this sense, his offhand remark that "no one is likely now" to disagree with the findings of "[r]ecent Whitman studies" is more prescriptive than it is descriptive, normative rather than analytic. All of these rhetorical tactics rely on and serve to bolster the point at the center of his argument: that literary value is determined by a text's ability to "[convey] meaning by [its] form," and that Whitman's text has this ability—even if its formal qualities are well-hidden.

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[117] Cf. above, page 75, for a discussion of this particular affordance of catalog rhetoric.

Perhaps because it is so difficult to prove that a hidden formal order is indeed present (and not projected), there is in many of the more formalist appreciations of Whitman's an undercurrent of shaming the reader into agreement with the critic's discovery of formal complexities and interconnections in the text. Randall Jarrell's *Poetry and the Age*, which identifies in Whitman's work "little systems as beautifully and astonishingly organized as the rings and satellites of Saturn" (126), at times employs this strategy quite openly, which fits the overall project of cultural pessimism his book pursues.[119] His discussion of the "pure con-

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118 It is hard to overlook the argumentative contortions Coffman needs to undertake here: apparently, if catalogs 'are' not literature, but *Leaves of Grass* is both, literature and catalogic, catalogs cannot be catalogs. For a similar dismissal of Whitman's attempts to ambiguate, cf. James Perrin Warren's blunt assertion in 1990 that "it is difficult to take the poet at his word" (Warren 2).

119 In the introduction to this collection of his essays, Randall laments that contemporary audiences conflated "obscurity" and "difficulty" in poetry, and that this discourages them from reading poetry (4). Reminiscing about "the amount of classical allusions that those polite readers, our ancestors, were expected to recognize—and did recognize" (6), he lambastes both the

tralto" catalog of "Song of Myself" is a case in point. Admitting that "[v]ery often the things presented form nothing but a list," he then qualifies:

> [B]ut what a list! And how delicately, in what different ways—likeness and opposition and continuation and climax and anticlimax—the transitions are managed, whenever Whitman wants to manage them. Notice them in the next quotation, another 'mere list':
>
> *The bride unrumples her white dress, the minute-hand of the clock moves slowly,*
> *The opium-eater reclines with rigid head and just-open'd lips,*
> *The prostitute draggles her shawl, her bonnet bobs on her tipsy and pimpled neck.*
>
> The first line is joined to the third by *unrumples* and *draggles*, *white dress* and *shawl*; the second to the third by *rigid head*, *bobs*, *tipsy*, *neck*; the first to the second by *slowly*, *just-open'd*, and the slowing-down of time in both states. And occasionally one of these lists is metamorphosed into something we have no name for; the man who would call the next quotation a mere list—anybody will feel this—would boil his babies up for soap. (120-21)

Insisting that Whitman's catalogs were indeed not mere collections but skillful, formally complex arrangements, Jarrell supports his argument by way of a number of tactical maneuvers: He, first of all, claims that the transitions are managed "whenever Whitman wants," thus suggesting that even the less-managed cases are still subject to the author's will to form—in this case, his will *not* to manage them. His mocking the allegation that Whitman's catalogs were "mere list[s]," secondly, comes without a reference and thus without context, which diminishes its credibility. The assertion that "we have no name" for the order controlling some of the catalogs, thirdly, claims that there might be an order even if it cannot be verbalized. Moreover, by asserting that the order is something that the reader must "feel," Jarrell further inhibits an argumentative engagement with the absence or presence of order in Whitman's

"ordinary reader, [...] nodding over his lunch-pail" and the "educated reader," who "to the Public's sympathetic delight" calls obscure books "[dull]" (3). In his eyes, the contemporary moment of the 1950s is one of cultural decline in which people have stopped reading (17-18). On his cultural pessimism and this notion of a crisis of reading, cf. also section 5.4 below (page 366).

lists. Lastly, he bluntly insinuates a grave form of moral corruption—having to do with babies and with soap—on behalf of those readers who still dare to disagree and thus fail to "feel" how the list's 'nameless' organization expresses Whitman's will to form.

In result, Jarrell, too, draws boundaries here: between a brute readership of Whitman's, an audience that fails to see the hidden patterns of the only superficially disjointed catalogs and that also boils up babies on the one side; and a smart one on the other, which either feels or intellectually grasps the formal intricacies that are hidden in the poet's work, even if it cannot communicate them because "we have no name for them." The affect projected by Jarrell's argument, expressed for example in the exclamation point after "what a list" and in the imperative two sentences later, does crucial work here, as does the adverb "delicately." Unwittingly or not, the language in which Jarrell here makes his argument, a language that pits two different kinds of readers against one another, ends up being the language of (class) distinction, in which the ability to appreciate formal complexity is expressive of the reader's literary taste.

Unsurprisingly, then, many of the positive valuations of the catalogs as formally well-done explicitly or implicitly end up denying them those qualities that would render them a particularly democratic device. As they work to disambiguate the liminal quality of the form, as they position the catalogs as more than a "'mere list,'" they foreground those properties that mark the catalogs as high art, skillfully disguised. The underlying notions of artfulness are hard to reconcile with an aspiration for democratic art. After all, it is at least in part the "rudimentary" quality of the device (Buell, *Literary* 166; cf. page 85 above) that makes it egalitarian, accessible, and democratic, and valuing the catalogs for their hidden formal finesse undermines just that.

3.3.3 Catalogs, Difficulty, and "Lyric Nationalism"

It is no coincidence that the debate Coffman and Jarrell engage in here (notably both by claiming that it was settled) is particularly vigorous around the time of their writing. The 1940s and '50s see a confluence of at least three different factors that are reflected in these authors' stance: The tail end of the literary period of high modernism with its investedness in formal complexity and in difficulty as positive qualities of art; the rise of formalism, expressed not least in the institutional success of

New Criticism, which similarly put a premium on identifying and discussing formally complex patterns; and a new wave of literary nationalism, this time carried forward by academic institutions, in which Whitman emerged as the iconic founding father of American poetry. Remarkably, the intersection of these three developments hosts a revival of the nineteenth-century promise of catalog rhetoric as constituting a form in-between literature and data: echoing the transcendentalists' own description of their project, it enlists the catalogs in a renewed effort to imagine a national literature that is 'democratic' at the same time that it is artistically valuable and "first-rate." It is here, in the mid-twentieth century appropriations of Whitman as the founding father of US national literature that his use of the lyric to express his storage desire in excessive catalogs truly comes full circle.

Indeed, many of the formalist discussions of Whitman's poetic success and the literary quality of the catalogs, especially in the 1940s and 1950s but also onward, read *Leaves of Grass* as if it was a piece of high modernist writing *avant la lettre*.[120] In this view, the book's partial allegiances to a data logic get identified as a form of 'difficulty' that signals literariness because it is felt to prefigure classical poems of high modernism. Writing in the 1980s, R.W. French expresses this contention in particularly programmatic a fashion:

> The problem is not what one might expect, that *Song of Myself* is difficult because it belongs to the nineteenth century; the problem is, rather, that the poem is difficult because it belongs more appropriately to the twentieth. Its analogues are not "Dover Beach" and "My Last Duchess" and *In Memoriam*, but *The Waste Land* and *Paterson* and the *Cantos*. These classics of modernism make outrageous demands on their readers, first of all by demanding nothing less than a reconsideration of the very nature of poetry; for in order to read these poems one must adopt the innovative aesthetic that they require. (76-77)

The logic French invokes here is clear: modern poetry challenges its readers by way of its obscurity and difficulty, and by its "innovative" breaking of existing aesthetic conventions.[121] Its difficulty in this logic is evidence of its artistic merit. In consequence, the impossibility of aligning *Leaves of Grass* with existing standards of (nineteenth-century) literature paradoxically comes to accentuate its literary qualities within a twentieth-century frame of reference: It can be seen as literary precisely because its troubling of the boundaries between literature and other knowledge practices, among them those of data, can be contained in a register of 'complexity.' This view of difficulty as a positive quality of poetry is by no means exclusive to the mid-twentieth-century. It even echoes claims made by Whitman himself according to which *Leaves* features an "unheard of demand for brains in the reader" (cf. Waskow 242). However, this view gains particular currency as a generation of critics trained on the classics of modernism turns to reading Whitman through this lens.

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[120] On the endurance of formalist and New Critical readings, cf. Folsom's assertion, in 1997, that "[w]e are still emerging from the legacy of New Criticism" ("Walt Whitman" 139).

[121] French making this point in the 1980s testifies to the longevity of the debate that Coffman and Jarrell claim to be largely settled in the 1950s. On the notion that the breaking of the rules of art is art itself, cf. also the Wilde

Formalism, not least in its dominant US expression of the New Criticism, obviously constitutes an uneasy fit for Whitman's work. This is true because of the poems' (and Whitman's paratextual explanations') "antiformalist" stance (Coffman 226), but it is also true considering the political baggage of New Criticism. While this critical movement, too, constitutes a response to modernization and democratization, it is almost diametrically opposed to Whitman's embrace of both, and it is, like many formalisms, deeply invested in the generation and circulation of cultural capital—a quality that does not jibe well with the egalitarianism of *Leaves of Grass*.[122] Accordingly, there is an argument to be made that formalist readings such as Coffman's or Jarrell's are misapplications of a method, appropriations made by scholars trained on the poetry of mod-

quote referenced above (page 161).

[122] As Terry Eagleton puts it, "New Criticism was the ideology of an uprooted, defensive intelligentsia" (40), a cultural elite displaced by the social and cultural transformations of industrial capitalism felt to be painfully homogenizing (or: egalitarian). As an academic movement that was successful in part because it "provided a convenient method of coping with a growing student population" (43), it did respond to the broadening of access to academia at the time, a democratization of access to education of sorts. Its roots, however, were obviously in the reactionary politics of Southern agrarianism. Notably, and relevantly so in the context of field emergence and field policing, the New Critics imagined poetry as diametrically opposed to science. In John Crowe Ransom's words, "poetic structures" are defined by how they "differ radically" from "scientific structures" (xi). This lends particular significance to New Critical appropriation as poetry of Whitman's ambiguous stance in which "the sciences underlie his whole superstructure" (cf. page 164, n. 106; chapter 5).

ernism, who now discover modernism's famed formal complexity in any object that allows for it.[123] Such an argument is made in detail by V. K. Chari's investigation of the "Structure of Whitman's Catalogue Poems." According to his reading, the "deliberate technique of fragmentation" (12) in the modernist poetic project and the "massing together of material" (6) in Whitman create similar surface structures, thus affording the same techniques of reading for formal complexity. However, as Chari shows in detail, while the "method of construction in 'Song of Myself' may suggest similarities to the 'poetic sequences' of the twentieth century, of which *The Waste Land*, *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, the *Cantos*, *The Bridge*, and *Paterson* are good examples," Whitman's poetry does not implement the same underlying project: "The modern poetic sequence [...] works by a more scrupulous grouping of its units, setting up between them a pattern of tensions that lead to a progressive consolidation of meaning." However, "such a deliberate ordering cannot be claimed for Whitman's poem. [...] Whitman proceeds [...] simply by piling [paragraphs] up into an ensemble; his method is strictly aggregative" (12). In Chari's view, the "aggregative" method of catalog rhetoric affords readings for formal complexity, but these readings, due to their investment in finding intricate patterns, end up overlooking the more manifest "paratactic" and "'loose' or 'fluid'" (4) structural principles.

Whether one agrees on the substance with formalist discussions, such as Coffman's and Jarrell's, or with the counterargument, exemplified by Chari here, the proliferation of formalist attempts to discover in Whitman's work, or to project onto it, deep structures of formal interconnectedness emphasizes the flexibility and openness of his catalogs to complementary readings. Indeed, at times one gets the sense that the catalogs constitute a kind of Rorschach pattern, encouraging generation after generation of readers to articulate their own sense of literariness by arguing over the literary merit of Whitman's work. More importantly, the proliferation of formalist readings accentuates how effectively Whitman deployed the lyric in a double troubling of boundaries: between literature and data, but also between an intellectual 'paranoid' or 'suspicious' desire to uncover deep structures, and a practical pleasure, much closer to the text's surface, to skim the text's surface as it collects and stores experience. Unsurprisingly, the discipline of literary studies, undergoing one of several waves of institutionalization and academization at the time, and doing so by turning to formalism as its core register, was ill-equipped to appreciate the latter. After all, suspicious modes of close reading, being developed, refined, and canonized at the time and informing much of contemporary literary studies today, find it inherently difficult to appreciate literature as a mere, dataesque collection of experience.

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[123] Cf. also Miller's observation on Whitman's work: "Readers educated to read poetry will naturally read it as poetry, situating even such strange poetic specimens as *Leaves of Grass* within received concepts of art, concepts that were anathema to Whitman's deeper ambitions" (M. Miller 233).

Notably, the critical registers of formalism facilitated enlisting Whitman's catalogs in the service of imagining a national literature. As Scott MacPhail points out, Whitman's "canonical apotheosis" happens exactly "at the moment that the New Criticism [begins] to inform the project of American Studies," leading to a "model of lyric nationalism that has come to shape so much recent literary and general public conceptions of American representativeness" (134). In the early days of the institutionalization of the American studies movement, Whitman's catalogs thus get enlisted in a "virtuous circle of mutual validation" in which "the aesthetic brilliance of [his] formal experiment and his cultural representativeness are connected" (Leypoldt 90; 89). Put differently, precisely because it can host formalist engagements and because it appears, in consequence, as formally innovative in ways that correspond to mid-twentieth century formal conceptualizations of literature, a modernism before its time, Whitman's poetic can be seen to validate a genuine, original American genealogy of literature; and the association of this formal logic with democracy, imagined as similarly inborn and 'American,' can in turn validate the formal engagement.[124] As Leypold puts it: "The construction of an iconic Whitman provides early-twentieth-century Americanists with [...] narratives suitable for the invention of a national literature" (92).[125]

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[124] Cf. Günter Leypold's summary of Sacvan Bercovitch's take on F. O. Matthiessen foundational work: In the imagination of an American Renaissance, "the "historical designation 'American' gains substance by association with an aesthetic 'renaissance'" while "Whitman's art seems richer for its capacity to express 'the age'" (90).

[125] For an even more sharply critical view on these appropriations, cf. O'Driscoll's characterization of such "post-war reconstructions of Whitman that, in the spirit of cold-war nationalism and the ensuing 'new world order' of U.S. domination, seek to discover in Whitman's writing practice [...] an exceptionalist foundation for the emergence of an American national identity and culture" (O'Driscoll 297).

In sum, then, Whitman's use of the lyric to live out a storage desire, to transgress the boundaries of literary forms, and to ambiguate the boundary between the dataesque storage of experience and the literary refinement of it has invited a perplexing volume and range of critical responses. Beginning with his own paratextual commentary and spanning two hundred years of critical discussion, most of these responses have kept scratching an apparently insatiable itch. They have kept trying to fix this most prominent product of Whitman's poetic, *Leaves*, as either the "most lamentable of failures or the most glorious of triumphs, in the known history of literature," as one of Whitman's own attempts to double down on the question so poignantly (and grandiosely) put it ("English"). Whatever opinion one may form on the question itself, its staying power testifies to the success of Whitman's project of ambiguation. It also testifies to the longstanding cultural investment in clarifying the boundary between the two representational desires Whitman's free verse was able to host: one for merely storing and replaying experience, and one for doing so in ways that are seen as culturally more meaningful than a mere database, an inventory, is.

3.4 *Leaves of Grass*, 1855-1891

In his preface to the 1974 *Foreground*, Floyd Stovall describes how he originally intended to write "an introduction to a detailed critical study of [Whitman's] poems themselves" and had, in the process, compiled a huge database of information on Whitman's life, his own vision of the "foreground" to *Leaves* stored on countless index cards. As he tells the story, again and again, life and professional duties intervened, and the book was never written. From time to time he would take out his "more than ten thousand cards with notes," browse them, but would be called back to other work before he could start writing. When he reached retirement, finally with the free time to write the book, he realized: "I had lost my zeal to instruct other people in the true meaning of *Leaves of Grass*. Whether from crabbed age or too much thinking on it, I had become disillusioned with literary criticism and was now content to let every reader form his own opinion and interpretation of the poems" (ix-x). Stovall's anecdote is instructive not just because of how curiously his process, based on a database of scraps from which a coherent narrative cannot be formed, mirrors Whitman's. As Stovall finds out, what could well and meaningfully be contained in a loose database of individual notes—indexed and cross-referenced perhaps, but not bound in a single, linear order—turns out to be impossible to convert into one coherent, narrative string of meaning. The perpetual deferral of the narrativization of his findings, life getting into the way of writing the book, turns out to have been a foreshadowing of the eventual impossibility of the project. Faced with this crisis—a crisis of form—he, too, turns to a democratic, egalitarian redistribution of the work: now every reader's interpretation is as good as any other's. Tellingly, this coincides with a feeling of disillusionment regarding literary criticism and a reevaluation of the search for a single "true meaning," which he now characterizes dismissively as driven by "zeal." The moment of self-doubt resonates with more contemporary, more sustained critiques of criticism; and it underscores how ill-equipped the discipline of literary studies, narrowly understood as the finding, evaluating, and transmitting of meanings of texts, is to appreciate on its own terms the dataesque quality of a work such as *Leaves of Grass*.

In this final section of this chapter, I will thus not attempt to offer a single, closely read overall interpretation of the relationship between the data imaginary and *Leaves of Grass* and instead employ the still-forming methodology of the digital humanities (DH), to 'distant read' some aspects of the dataesque quality of the book. This obviously constitutes a marked methodological deviation from the general thrust of this study, and I will use a first subsection to explain this deviation and its implications in more detail. My main point here will be that such a shifting of gears not only productively gets at some of the qualities of *Leaves of Grass* that would perhaps be impossible to get at otherwise. It moreover takes seriously my above contention that the discipline of literary studies, narrowly understood, is historically implicated in the dichotomization of data and literature to such an extent that it is ill equipped to value information storage. Shifting to a distant reading approach thus not only promises to yield results but also invites and facilitates a (thus similarly 'distanced') reflection of the epistemic configuration of these two methodological modalities: close and distant reading. The second subsection, the actual distant reading, will then trace in *Leaves of Grass* a number of different metrics that are expressive of an underlying storage desire.

3.4.1 Un/reading: Reading Close and Distant

Quantitative digital humanities methods have gained prominence in literary studies following not least the publication of Franco Moretti's *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History*, and his coinage of 'distant reading' is often used to refer to all quantitative methods. At times still derided as a merely 'auxiliary' method, as word counting, or as a brand of corpus linguistics, the digital humanities have gained acceptance over the past ten years thanks in no small part to a complex set of social developments, institutional pressures and disciplinary transformations.[126] In this particular case, inside a case study that overall employs more traditional methods of (close) reading, they come with a distinct set of advantages.

One important advantage is the ability to embrace the size of the archive that is *Leaves of Grass*, the lifelong project of Whitman's.[127] Together, the poems of the seven editions span close to fifty-thousand lines, their 681549 words would fill around 1900 pages.[128] Traditionally, scholars have responded to such textual overload by reading individual poems or by looking only at individual editions (with the early years of the late Whitman's reception tending to honor his wish to consider the 'deathbed edition' as the 'authoritative' one, and with more recent scholarship tending toward the more 'radical' early ones).[129] But as Moretti points out, and as should resonate particularly strongly with Americanists, such a selection always constitutes a form of canon formation, and DH approaches are able to read all of the material and thus offer the possibility of unsettling existing canons (4; 77). Moreover, these methods scale much better than a regular literary scholar does, meaning that they can be easily extended to include more and more material.[130]

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[126] Section 5.4 explores the socio-institutional context of the advent of digital humanities in greater detail and contextualizes the ensuing debates within this study's overall framework.

[127] Mostly for practical reasons, the selection of editions follows the selection of the Whitman Archive (www.whitmanarchive.org), including the decision to integrate the seventh edition even if it almost entirely corresponds to the sixth. In the following, I will frequently use the shorthand of the "*Leaves* project" to refer to the totality of these seven major editions: 1855, 1856, 1860, 1867, 1871, 1881, and 1891. Quotations, unless explicitly marked otherwise, refer to the 1855 edition.

[128] This estimation is based on the words-per-page ratio of the final 1891 edition (~356 words per page, counting only pages that contain poems).

[129] In his copyright notice, Whitman explained that he would "prefer and recommend this present one, complete, for future printing, if there should be any; a copy and fac-simile, indeed, of the text of these 438 pages" (Whitman, *Leaves [1891]* 2).

But apart from the brute processing power of computer aided scholarship, this methodology also brings to the fore a different set of literary objects, and it does so beyond such empirical endeavors as Moretti's inquiry into literary history. After all, some of the textual qualities of *Leaves* discussed below can only be seen from the remove of a distant reading approach. The mobility of individual lines, or of poems, for example (cf. page 204-207 below) or the flow of material (cf. the Sankey Graph in Appendix C.2) through the editions simply cannot be observed as long as one focuses one's attention to see the arrangement of words in a sentence on a page, perhaps even more narrowly restricting oneself to the semantic meaning these words make. And while seeing a visualization of the flow of material in between editions may seem like a boring and literally superficial engagement from a traditional, close-reading invested literary studies point of view, this is exactly one of the arguments this section is trying to make: There is an entire universe out there of "new kind[s] of hermeneutic[s]" and different "forms of haptic engagement" with a literary text that DH methods can facilitate (Ramsay, "On" 244), and *Leaves of Grass* is a particularly well-suited object to 'play' with such 'multitudes' of methodological engagements.

Lastly, there are two other aspects that make a digital humanities approach particularly appropriate in this case: For one, it is an approach that fully acknowledges the dataesqueness of the material it engages. If, as I argue throughout this chapter, *Leaves of Grass* is best understood as at least partially an attempt at information storage, if it is, in Ed Folsom's words, marked by moments of "data ingestion," this quality is best traced by methods that are more attuned to the dataesque than conventional literary studies methods are. A data-driven reading of *Leaves* thus exploits and embraces the dataesque quality of the material rather than trying to contain it. Secondly, and at least as importantly, a distant reading can help safeguard against the pull of those brands of formalism that have often led scholarship toward evaluative readings (cf. page 166 above). Distant-reading *Leaves of Grass*, in other words, voluntarily opts out of a logic in which formal complexity, intricacies of connections, or inherent contradictions are inquired into in search of a 'depth' of meaning that must be unearthed from or projected onto the text by the scholar and that then testifies to the value of the text (thus validating, in turn, its study).

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[130] Most, if not all, of the methods employed below could also be brought to bear on Whitman's manuscripts, his notebooks, even his letters to identify, e.g., how material traveled in and out of the editions. Such an investigation is beyond the scope of this study, but it is very feasible indeed.

This is not to suggest that either method is superior to the other—that (close) readings for form and meaning are projective in ways that presumably 'neutral' or 'objective' data-driven readings are not (or, conversely, that data-driven readings fail to produce meaning where close readings succeed). Indeed, the following subsection will discuss process and method in more detail to argue that these two methods are more similar than one might think, that they can mutually illuminate each other in instructive ways, and that their presumed categorical differences are an effect of the historically contingent data-literature divide the beginnings of which lie squarely in the nineteenth century. It is, however, to suggest that at times it is a worthy endeavor to sidestep the "zeal" for "the true meaning" (Stovall ix) and to 'unread' a text rather than to keep reading it.

3.4.1.1 Process Observations & Meta-Methodological Concerns

Including a DH reading inside a project that otherwise follows a more conventional literary-studies-as-cultural-studies outlook constitutes a methodological disruption, and in addition to finding and interpreting some quantifiable, data-related aspects in *Leaves*, this section also aims to use this disruption to let these two methodological predispositions, traditional close(r) reading and algorithmic distant reading, cast light on each other.[131] In the following, I will use four moments of doubt and/or frustration, which occurred during the production of the below distant reading, to reflect and meditate on both forms of reading, close and distant.[132]

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[131] In fact, the methodological toolbox of the computational humanities is both expanding and refining so quickly that many of the analyses performed here, feeling improvised and coarse at the time of writing, will look even more handmade and ham-fisted by the time this study is in print. The methodological and process observations they afford, however, will likely hold regardless of that.

[132] In line with the overall trajectory of this study, in which a more traditional literary studies project hosts, as a single, comparatively small section, a distant reading, these reflections will proceed from the perspective of 'ana-

One such moment of frustration, as surely is the case in many other DH projects, has to do with the difficulty of algorithmically modeling a human reader's perception of the text, even for very basic, presumably purely formal metrics. In this particular instance, both the metric for string similarity and for catalogicity proved surprisingly tricky. A metric for string similarity was required to identify how lines traveled through the different editions of *Leaves of Grass* and to distinguish between new and revised lines—depending on whether their similarity to a precursor line in a previous edition passes a given threshold. While the problem seems trivial to a human reader, the amount of (computer science) scholarship and the number of available algorithms already suggest that it is not.[133] After all, there are a number of metrics to consider, and their influence on the final similarity scores has to be balanced: how much weight should be given to a reoccurrence of rare words vis-a-vis more common ones, how much to the order of words vis-a-vis a mere similarity of the lexicon of both strings? Measured against intuitive perception, many algorithms fell short in limit cases, and they tended to fall short in ways that suggested that a human's perception of string similarity is more heavily impacted by the semantic meaning of the strings than the presumably 'formal' task of comparing them suggests.

A similar problem occurred with regard to a given line's 'catalogicity.' While there does not seem to be any previous scholarship on algorithmically identifying poetic catalogs, the problem at first glance seems like an eminently formal one: a lack of verbs, an overabundance of coor-

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log' literary studies to explain the particulars of the digital method. I will thus assume a reader trained in traditional literary studies, not DH. The role of this section for the overall book also determines the scope, depth, and thrust of this DH sub-project: As a full project in its own right, funded and staffed differently and focused only on analyzing *Leaves*, several of the metrics employed would have been further refined—most prominently, of course the catalogicity score. In the following, I will point to aspects that a full-scope project would have done differently. But even as such a sub-project of limited scope, it can deliver new insights, can serve as a first inroad inviting further study using these or related and refined metrics, and can facilitate the meta-methodological interrogation outlined above and detailed below.

[133] Notably, determining string similarity is a problem not just in natural language processing applications. DNA analysis also requires fast and robust comparison algorithms to determine the similarity of genetic sequences, as do more exotic fields such as forensics. Ultimately, fuzzy pattern matching is at the heart of an enormously broad range of computational tasks.

dinating conjunctions, or a repetition of n-grams (tuples of two or three words), should all indicate a catalog. However, many of Whitman's catalogs show micro variations that limit the significance of n-gram repetitions, his lines generally contain a lot of coordinating conjunctions even if they are not catalogic (and he at times replaced conjunctions with commas in order to make a line *more* catalogic), and a prevalence of noun phrases or an absence of verbs also did not constitute a reliable indicator, in part because of flaws in the part-of-speech (POS) tagging that identified nouns and verbs (an aspect I will return to momentarily) and in part because his poems also often contain noun-heavy passages that are not catalogic. On the other hand, sentence length, a quality that has no *causal* connection to catalogicity (another aspect I will return to), ended up being a surprisingly strong indicator of a passage forming a catalog.[134] In result, catalogicity, again a presumably purely formal quality, also proved to be more semantic than expected: In many cases, lines that were formally very similar turned out to be either catalogic or not, and the human reader's verdict typically depended on whether they were accompanied by a sense of narrative stasis.

Indeed, the vagueries of POS-tagging, the algorithmic process of identifying the syntactic function of a given word in a sentence, proved to be another important site of concern in the distant reading process. This is even more so the case since POS-tagging is only one slice in a stack of transformations that all introduce potential errors into the analysis. This begins with flaws and ambiguities in the printed material: Even though the editorial quality of most editions of *Leaves* is remarkably high, there are of course glitches in the original material, missing letters or other minor faults. In the processing pipeline of the distant reading process, these mistakes are followed by mistakes in the digitization, simple OCR misreadings (in which the optical character recognition misinterprets a character) as well as higher-level processing mistakes, in which, e.g., a human operator has improperly encoded linegroups, grouping together lines that are 'meant' to be in separate groups. Again, the editorial quality of the material, offered by the Whitman Archive, was exceedingly high, but with so large a corpus, there necessarily are flaws, and the fact that some of these could be identified suggests that, statistically, there are likely others that went undetected. This already doubly flawed material was then tagged by an automated POS-tagging / tokenizer provided by Stanford University's Natural Language Processing Group, which added another potential source of error. This tagger analyzes sentences based on a stochastic model, and while it generally has a remarkably high quality, it does at times necessarily produce blatantly wrong interpretations of a sentence's grammar.[135] More intriguingly, these stochastic classification algorithms at times tag sentences in ways that are perfectly valid albeit not plausible, or not the most logical, intuitive reading to a human reader. After all, grammar is often ambiguous, especially in a language with such weak inflection paradigms as English, and even more so in the case of poetry, and an algorithm can easily get it 'wrong.'[136]

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[134] The metric's significance grows even further if derivative metrics, such as the number of nouns per sentence, are added to the catalogicity heuristic.

This sequence of steps, which all introduce potential errors that can exacerbate one another and which all predate the engagement with a more interpretive, potentially also flawed, reading algorithm, or stack of algorithms, seems daunting at first and suited to easily disqualify any result it may yield. At the same time, DH readings work, like all statistical operations, because these mistakes, individual and comparatively (!) rare as they are, are outweighed and compensated for by the mass of material that can be considered: What would be a problematic misreading in a stanza of a poem pales once an entire volume is read thus.[137] Moreover, all of these problems are comparably 'knowable' and in many cases even quantifiable, and DH approaches come with a distinct set of procedures to compensate for them. A differently staffed and funded version of this project, for example, could have calculated margins of errors based on samplings at each step along the way and could have used these to estimate the reliability of the overall result—after all, statistical methods allow for statistical projections of the margins of error they entail, making it possible to not just produce a result but to reason about the reliability of this result. Digital projects also, more so than analog readings, can draw on methods borrowed from software development to provide 'updates' on readings if new algorithms become available, to version results in ways that ultimately approach the paradigm of 'continuous delivery' with its rapid release cycles of 'stable' versions and, perhaps, with automated tests that can ensure the integrity of data and results in face of such quick releases.[138]

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[135] Classification algorithms such as this one are trained on a model to 'learn' the probabilities of grammatical constructions. These training corpora have to be tagged by humans and are thus expensive to create. In this case, the algorithm's ability to correctly classify the sentences was doubtlessly further impacted by the fact that Whitman's poetic language is structurally, grammatically different from the language of the training corpora. In fact, if poetry is marked by a creative use of language that purposely employs unusual constructions, probabilistic parsers trained on everyday language will tend to disambiguate the ambiguities of poetic language in the direction of the more standard construction, i.e. the 'wrong' one.

[136] Such algorithmic mistakes also offer one possible inroad into close(r) readings, in which the algorithm's 'reading' of the sentence is used to reason with that of a human reader. In any case, their defamiliarizing effect is a welcome reminder of how ambiguous language is, even on the presumably logical, somewhat deterministic level of grammar.

[137] Notably, it is exactly the data imaginary's raised expectation of objectivity and mathematical precision that makes these mistakes appear as particularly troubling. In a contemporary example, autonomous vehicles already make fewer mistakes than an average driver does, but for public trust to build in autonomous driving, margins of error for automated drivers need to be lower than human ones by orders of magnitude.

Seen in contrast to these procedures of dealing with errors, it is suddenly the classical paradigm of academic work—with its grandiose fantasies of non-faulty readings enshrined in long-lasting monographs, with no culture of updating findings, with no way of quantifying its mistakes, estimating reliability, or laying bare margins of error, and with few if any established procedures for falsifying or retracting results—that seems suspect. And while these considerations might be taken to suggest that either one or the other method is superior, it is even more productive to attend to the rhetorics of confirmation and falsification that are operated by these two methodological dispositions and that are used to justify interpretive results that are at once flawed and 'sufficiently' robust. In this sense, the data-driven methodologies operate a register of presumed 'objectivity' and 'neutrality,' of an elimination or a controlling of bias and outliers. Traditional readings, on the other hand, invested in hermeneutic approximation and subjective understanding, are interested specifically in the potential meanings that outliers have.[139] Either episteme operates its own procedures of producing truth, procedures, again, that are not categorically different but that have historically grown to each validate different versions of very similar endeavors.

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[138] In this spirit, versioned source data for this chapter is available for peer review at http://www.data-imaginary.de/whitman-analytics/download; the analyses below are based on the 2019-06-06 version of the data and the 2019-06-27 revision of the algorithm source code.

[139] Cf. Rosenthal for a discussion of outlier and aggregated totality as two registers of textualizing the world, one of which aligns with fiction and one of which with data (9-11).

Questions of justification and falsification, then, are at the center of the third moment of doubt in preparing this distant reading: Both close and distant readings can run into moments in which a ‘result’ is ‘correct’ but the evidence is not, and these moments cast a particularly telling spotlight on the logics of confirmation employed. For example, quantitative analysis of the editions of *Leaves of Grass* shows that the prevalence of ‘containers’ for ‘rare nouns’ declines over the years, a finding that resonates with close reading scholars’ assessment that Whitman showed an “increasing concern through his later years with form in the conventional sense” leading him to trade “the energy of the great catalogue poems” for “artistic gains” and, perhaps, literary recognition (Chari 17). In other words, there is ‘objective’ and quantifiable evidence for a particular development in Whitman’s style, and this development fits the larger picture of his artistic career. On closer inspection, however, the decline of these storage containers closely tracks the inverse length of the overall volume (cf. Fig. 15 and page 216 generally for a more detailed discussion), suggesting that this development is not so much an expression of a will to form on Whitman’s behalf but merely a side effect of the growth of the volume. Notably, however, falsifying—within a statistical framework, as a mere statistical dependence—the causal connection between a correctly observed trajectory in Whitman’s artistic development and the, similarly correct, observation of a decline of storage areas, does not invalidate either of the two findings, nor does it invalidate the connection between the two. It just means that this connection’s causal quality cannot be proven by statistical means.

Notably, similar constellations also exist in close readings. Ed Folsom points to the ongoing interpretation of the (presumably) missing period at the end of “Song of Myself” in the 1855 edition: “Over the past century, entire readings of Whitman’s ‘Song of Myself’ have been predicated on that missing period” but the detective work of manuscript studies could show that the period in fact began wandering during the print run due to a defect in the Rome brothers’ press before eventually falling out (“Census” 79). While he appreciates these readings as “a nice idea” he invalidates them not only by pointing out that Whitman had re-added the period in the 1856 edition (a point already made by Arthur Golden) but by using a manuscript studies approach to demonstrate that it “is in fact a printing accident.” The situation Folsom describes is remarkably similar, then: The period is in fact, objectively, empirically, missing from the editions on which these readings are based, and its absence in fact 'signifies': It is fully in line with perfectly valid readings of "Song of Myself" as being invested in open-endedness and intersubjectivity, and with Whitman's poetic, which is all about not having the poem "ending when you come to the end of it" (Whitman, "English"). In Folsom's correction, it is the lack of authorial intent—the fact that Whitman had added the period in the beginning and that he inserted it for the second edition—that falsifies the causal connection between the two otherwise correct observations: an absence of a period and a presence of a particular meaning in Whitman's work. Notably, this invalidation again only holds within a certain framework. One could easily imagine a reading in which an 'assemblage' of 'human and nonhuman actors,' Whitman and the Rome brothers' printing press, conspired to produce an absence of a period that represents more faithfully than a present period could, the overall meaning of *Leaves*, a meaning that this object has, regardless of its human author's intention.

In this sense, both the quantitative and the qualitative reading are haunted by what Maurice Lee calls "evidentiary superabundance"—a problem on whose role in literary studies, he laments, "there is no sustained work" being done ("Falsifiability" 163). As he points out, this superabundance is an effect of a massification of sorts: the proliferation of both material and modes of reading that has accompanied the twentieth century media transformation of digitization, the democratization of access, and the pluralization of theory: "Texts under theory became contingent and porous; multiculturalism opened the canon; and the New Historicism made any cultural discourse fair game for critical use. Interdisciplinarity further multiplied domains of possible evidence, as did the weakening of nation and period as bounding paradigms." Put differently, what might at first appear as an effect characteristic of a distant reading—the 'invalidation' of a presumably causal connection that turns out to be a mere correlation, not causation, after all—traverses domains and methodological modalities, and it might be as much due to the dehierarchizations Lee mentions, the superabundance of evidence, as it is due to a particular choice of method.

Lastly, the basic simplicity and transparency of the operations employed constitutes a fourth site of doubt in a DH reading. After all, the fundamental operations that generate the below 'reading' are strikingly simple—a counting of words, an aggregation of numbers, a projection of numbers on bar- and line graphs. It is this reducibility to mere counting that is, no doubt, responsible in part for the disparagement of digital humanities approaches as auxiliary science. Because these operations are, at their core, so simple, the result of an algorithmic engagement with a text at times appears as nothing but a transposing of qualities that are already 'there,' a translation of textual qualities that are present in one form into another one in which they become more visible—a remediation or adaptation rather than an actual 'reading.' In this view, what seems to be missing, curiously, is a particular surplus that the interpretation is supposed to generate, a surplus that, at the same time, is highly suspect in debates about interpretation: After all, what constitutes a particularly perceptive observation for one reader appears as a projection of meaning, a 'reading of meanings *into* the text,' for another. In the end, as any translator will confirm, there is no such thing as a mere, pure translation, remediation, or adaptation. They all are forms of interpretation.

What the presumably 'trivial' quality of the DH reading then suggests is, again, a closer similarity between these two ways of engaging textuality than our investment in the literature-data-dichotomy would have us believe: In both cases, traditional and algorithmic interpretation, scrutiny is brought to bear on qualities that promise to illuminate the text in question; in both cases the underlying goal is to generate forms of meaning from a given text—and, in the context of this particular, Americanist project, to relate these meanings to a broader view on US culture. The form of the result of this methodological desire, then, is somewhat different in both cases, but it is so mostly at first glance: The traditional, close reading produces a 'story' about the text, a chain of causally related statements following a set of genre conventions that regulate both its form and its appeals to plausibility, whereas the algorithmic investigation results in data. But, as I have tried to show, this data's appeals to plausibility are just as discursive, just as rhetorical and limited to its corresponding episteme. In the end, both close reading and distant reading are "language games" (Lyotard 20), rule-bound ways of producing discourse, of producing text about texts.

Within the framework of this study, these 'forms,' the narrative produced by a conventional interpretation and the data produced by a DH approach, must then be seen as symbolic forms that are not categorically different but that are characterized by their liminal, dynamic relationship. After all, the main value of the data that my algorithmic engagement of *Leaves* yields is this data's potential narrativity: the fact that it can be turned into a story about the book(s), as well as the fact that this story, and the data on which it draws, resonates with larger frameworks —of this study, and of this discipline.[140] One partial version of this story is told in the pages below, constituting another interpretation, this time of graphs that represent the data my algorithms have produced by reading Whitman's books: Another remediation in a chain: from text to data to graph to text.

3.4.1.2 Data and the "Poem of Materials"

In-between the first and the second edition of *Leaves of Grass*, writing on wrapping paper from the first printing, Whitman sketched his vision for a new poem to come, a "poem of materials," and his remarks may well be read as indicating a more general theory of the relationship between language, objects, poems, and readers—a theory that resonates strongly with the data imaginary and one that guides the (algorithmic) inquiry later in this chapter. On the note he envisions

> The **Poem**)(? One grand, Eclipsing Poem
> Poem of Materials
> ? several poems
> Many poems on this model
>
> the bringing together of the materials
> — words, figures, suggestions
> — things — (words, as solid as timbers, stones, iron, brick, glass, planks, etc.)
> — all with reference to main central idea ideas

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[140] Apart from being turned into a story, the data sets produced in this study can also be played with on the digital companion webpage: the visualization of line similarity can be zoomed into at will, turned into a '*Leaves* explorer' that invites users to investigate individual lines, the 'raked/unraked' version of *Leaves* is animated online to better relay the dynamics of reordering, and users can change the metrics for determining rare noun containers to highlight different portions of the poems. Such playful engagements, regardless of whether they result in further stories about *Leaves* or in the ludic pleasures of interaction, constitute another modality of experiencing *Leaves of Grass*, one that capitalizes on the symbolic form of play and that thus underscores the dynamic interfaces between these symbolic forms: data, narrative, and play.

> ~~bu~~ with powerful indications
>
> yet loose, fluid-like, leaving each reader eligible to form the resultant-poem for herself or himself.— (qtd. in M. Miller 166-67)[141]

As Miller explains in an extended discussion of the note and its relevance for Whitman's work, these thoughts come at a crucial time in the young author's biography. Written at a moment in which Whitman felt encouraged by the resonance his volume had found—not least so in the form of Emerson's congratulatory letter—the note marks its author's retrospective discovery of his own poetic method. It documents Whitman's "coming to a more self-conscious understanding of an approach he had already employed intuitively in his prior work," most notably, most visibly, and most notoriously so in his catalogs (168).

In Miller's reading, the notion of "materials" here has multiple meanings: Whitman's stated objective to "[leave] each reader eligible to form the resultant-poem" points to the meaning of 'material' in the sense of 'raw material for poems,' a vision of writing as an intermediate stage in a co-production between writer and reader, as a process resulting not in a finished product but in a material resource from which readers then construe their own poems. This view, of course, is affirmed throughout Whitman's paratextual commentary on his own work,[142] most famously perhaps in his encouragement to the reader to "pursue your own flight" (434) in the "Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads" in the 1891 edition. It is part of what Miller calls Whitman's "critiquing the idea of literary authority," and it is a key element in the widespread critical contention that Whitman was particularly 'democratic' a poet. The paratactic form of the catalog, which offers up to the reader lists of related words to choose from, is expressive of that.

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[141] Miller provides a facsimile of the note from the Trent Collection of Whitmaniana at Duke University and a transcription. My transcription mostly follows Miller's but reflects my own reading of the facsimile in some minor details.

[142] Miller quotes from "a very early manuscript in which [Whitman] drafts sentences for the 1855 Preface" that directly relate to the Poem of Materials. In them, he imagines that the poet "'gives you the materials for you to form for yourself ~~the~~ poems, ~~and~~ metaphysics, politics, behavior, ~~and~~ histories, ~~and~~ romances, ~~and~~ essays ~~and~~ every thing else'" (169). In passing, note how Whitman's revisions here raise the catalogic density and paratactic quality of this catalog by striking out the coordinating conjunctions.

But "materials" here also points to the extent to which Whitman thinks of poems as 'containers,' as devices that facilitate a "bringing together of the materials" that, in itself, constitutes a worthwhile knowledge practice—one that is perhaps quite removed from what most of his (and our) contemporaries would consider good poetry. Put differently, Whitman's theorization of the "bringing together of materials," and his view that such a material collection will produce "The Poem," works to retrospectively legitimize the storage desire that I have traced to a range of other knowledge practices above; that underwrites much of the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*; and that, too, finds its most prominent expression in the excessive use of catalog rhetoric. Not incidentally does even his note, scribbled on the back of wrapping paper, jog into a double catalog at exactly this point: "words, figures, suggestions" and "timbers, stones, iron, brick, glass, planks." The latter catalog is not only indicative of Whitman's tendency to "[treat] words as things and things as words" (Belknap 95)—an aspect that shows in the effortless transition from "things" to "words" to a list of material objects and that speaks of a nonrepresentational 'realism' of sorts. The latter catalog also emphasizes the emphatically mundane quality of the "things" thus collected.[143] The former catalog, on the other hand, is noteworthy for how it implies that these very different forms of symbolization, "words, figures, suggestions," constitute one shared class of expression.

Notably, the passage also suggests a structure in which to live out this storage desire: The idea that the "words" and "things" should "all" be "with reference to main central ideas" and that they should have "powerful indications" indeed proposes a structure of indexical reference. It describes precisely the kind of rhizomatic branching, a loose network of hyponyms and hyperonyms, that characterizes many of Whitman's catalogs—both on a macro level, with the "Poem of the Broad Axe," e.g., containing "things" related to the ax; and on a micro level, with many of Whitman's catalogs not only indicating an absent classifier (as catalogs tend to do, cf. page 72 above) but including the classifier inside the poem (cf. my notion of 'catalogic explosion' on page 218 below). In this sense, the innocuous note is indeed remarkably rich:

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[143] The fact that all of these are building materials, again, suggests that they should serve as raw material for poems construed by the reader.

it expresses the ‘storage desire’ that motivates one important formal quality of Whitman’s poetic production; it describes the form that this desire is supposed to take: an indexical storage system; and it justifies this desire by imagining its ‘democratic’ uses, with readers taking the material to produce poems by themselves.[144]

Miller, too, notes the “twofold significance” (181) of this “bringing together of the materials,” as democratic practice of readerly participation on the one side and as a database of sorts on the other; but he simultaneously acknowledges that the second meaning is less easily understood and traced: “The second aspect of Whitman’s concept of the poem of materials, its emphasis on the physical materiality of language, is more difficult to locate specifically in his work” (182). This claim jibes with his observation that, speaking more generally, “the concept of a ‘poem of materials’ has been overlooked by Whitman scholars” (167). While Miller speculates that this neglect might be due to the fact that Whitman never published a poem titled “Poem of Materials,” I read this reluctance of Whitman scholarship to engage this idea, along with Miller’s professed difficulty of locating this quality in the poems, as another indication of the ill-equippedness of literary studies to fully engage with such dataesqueness and with the troubling of field boundaries inherent in Whitman’s literature-as-information-storage approach. My algorithmic search for ‘storage containers,’ for areas in which individual poems store ‘rare nouns,’ is meant to provide one route toward “[locating] specifically in his work” such a storage impulse, and to do so, as it were, by intentionally “[overlooking]” many of the textual qualities one would normally look at.

Lastly, the note on the “poem of materials” also invites a diachronic view on *Leaves of Grass*. As Miller notes, Whitman wrote down this note at a pivotal moment in his career as an author. It is only after he has published his book, after he has decided on the genre of the book of poems (rather than a “Novel?—Work of some sort [^Play?] . . . A spiritual novel?,” cf. page 135 above) that he sets down the rationale for his production. It spells out a textual program that is vast in scope and ambition, a program that is formally unbound and that explains and invites a similarly unbound and potentially endless expansion. As previous, close-reading scholarship has shown, Whitman indeed seems to double down on his poetic principles as he prepares the second edition—an aspect that also shows in my quantitative analysis below (cf. specifically my discussion of "Come Closer"/ "Poem of the Daily Work" starting on page 216). At the same time, of course, it is a program that is difficult to square with conventional understandings of literary value, and so the longer arc of Whitman's revision and expansion of *Leaves of Grass* shows conflicting impulses: to live out the storage desire expressed in his notion of a "poem of materials," or to tame it for the sake of his book's recognition as literature.[145] The comparative reading of all seven major editions of *Leaves of Grass* that a distant reading allows for and that I pursue below is meant not least to capture these two impulses as they unfold over time.

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[144] Cf. also Whitman’s plans to turn *Leaves* into a “new American Bible [...] patterned after the calendar with a poem for each day, a structure echoing lectionary prayer books” (M. Miller 163).

As my reading will further show, the impulse for data aggregation unfolds in two different modes: as a massive accrual of words, quite literally a use of the poems (or parts of poems) as containers for the "bringing together" of words as things; and as an aesthetic effect that signals 'massification' and 'storage' by way of textual strategies, a quality that I will refer to, following a similar move by Caroline Levine, as a 'storage effect.' Levine, writing about the realist and naturalist novel, observes what she calls an 'enormity effect' in extension of Roland Barthes's 'reality effect.' In her view, these late-nineteenth-century novels are fully aware of the enormity of social relations in modern societies. They, in other words, acknowledge the tension between an experience that is always individual, and the multiplication of this individuality in masses of individuals in pluralized, democratic mass cultures: "It is one of the central challenges of the nineteenth-century realist project to tack back and forth between the 'unimaginably vast' reality of ordinary life and the few small lives it can actually imagine for us" (62). These novels are similarly aware of possibility of data to 'account' for such massified experience at scale, but they refuse to "[resort] to statistics" (69) and instead "develop a discursive strategy that draws on the tradition of the sublime to train readers to extrapolate [...] the vastness of a reality that cannot be conveyed by the novel form in any direct or literal way” (62). Within the larger framework of this study, such a refusal to resort to statistics, the recourse to “a formal strategy for imagining a vast scale without actually representing the many” (62), suggest that around the high time of the realist and naturalist projects the underlying processes of the dichotomization of data and literature, the sorting of epistemes, the differentiating of fields, had progressed to such an extent that any attempt to “actually [represent] the many” had become unavailable to literary projects.

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[145] Cf. e.g. V. K. Chari's assessment already quoted above: "Of course Whitman never completely abandoned the catalogue method of construction; but he showed an increasing concern through his later years with form in the conventional sense, and had recourse to certain traditional formal types and fictional devices to give structure to his poems. The result was, no doubt, salutary for his art. The question whether the aesthetic gains he thus achieved were a sufficient compensation for the loss of the energy of the great catalogue poems need not concern us here" (17).

This is different in Whitman’s case. His project, this chapter so far, along with the reading below, suggests, is precisely to have both—an actual presence of mass, and a massification effect; an actual storage of large numbers of ‘things’ and a storage effect—realized in the poems. Invested in blurring rather than affirming the boundary between knowledge practices, his poems strive to contain both.

3.4.2 Distant *Leaves*

This chapter’s final section will now engage the notion of a “poem of materials” from two different DH-inflected perspectives, or, in a more precise metaphor: with two different focal lengths. In a first subsection, I will discuss the extent to which the seven major editions of *Leaves of Grass*, seen from a distance, project a sense of a massive, ongoing accrual of material, an increasing aggregation rather than a refinement, polishing, or updating, as subsequent editions of the same book also could. I will trace this projection of a sense of accrual through various metrics to argue that it operates on two levels: on the one hand, almost all of the individual editions incorporate more material than their predecessors, which also shows in the ratio between revision and addition and in the cumulative expansion of the overall project’s lexicon. On the other hand, the editorial practice of shuffling poems between editions aesthetically adds to the sense of an uncontrollably large archive that can hardly be contained in linear book form. I will use visualizations of the seven major editions to remediate this sense of an enormous, uncontainable archive of material into manageable and evocative visual forms. In a second subsection, I will hone in on two more narrowly formal features that can be found throughout all editions: the presence of ‘containers’ of rare nouns within individual poems and the fluctuating degrees of catalogicity. As I will argue in more detail below, both these features speak to the notion of a poem of materials, both express a storage desire, and both generate a massification effect, but they constitute different textual strategies of implementing these.

As much as this section is thus invested in arguing a specific point: the material and aesthetic implementation of a storage desire in *Leaves*, part of its more broadly conceptual work lies in transitioning, for a limited number of pages, from a more conventional project at the intersection of literary studies, literary history, and cultural studies, to a DH approach. Accordingly, its goal also is to make sure that readers more versed in traditional approaches come along for the trip. I will thus spend time with this methodological journey itself, so as not to merely arrive at a different method but to travel there together and to experience the shifts in method and in methodological disposition, in moods and registers of engagement. After all, much of the argumentative work in the pages to come consists of explaining graphs that visualize data derived from an algorithmic reading of *Leaves of Grass*. Accordingly, 'interpretation' here at times takes on the form of 'explication,' which is often considered a lesser mode of reading. It is thus important to note that one of the promises of the digital humanities is to expand the experiential registers of engaging with a text. In this view, a visualization of a particular quality in a poem, e.g., does 'analytic' or 'interpretive' work not only by facilitating verbal discussion but by operating a visual episteme: it communicates textual qualities in a language without words. The same is true for the interactive versions of the charts that are available online in the digital companion to this study. These offer the option to tweak parameters to watch the graphs change. I will come back to such alternative experiential registers, visuality and play, throughout the following pages.

3.4.2.1 Accrual and Aggregation

One of the advantages of a DH methodology is its ability to make graspable vast quantities of text, and this capability already comes to the fore with an archive as moderate as the seven editions of *Leaves of Grass* and in a visualization as simple as the following one: A basic bar graph on the number of lines and the number of words in each of the seven major editions.

Many readers have encountered *Leaves* either in the form of individual poems, or, at best, as one individual, complete edition. Such a close perspective makes it hard to understand how the individual editions relate to one another and how the overall *Leaves* project, the totality of all seven editions, emanates a sense of an enormous archive. The bar graph above thus offers something that a reading of an individual edition cannot give: a sense of the growth of the overall project from its first 1855 edition all the way to the final 1891 "Deathbed Edition."

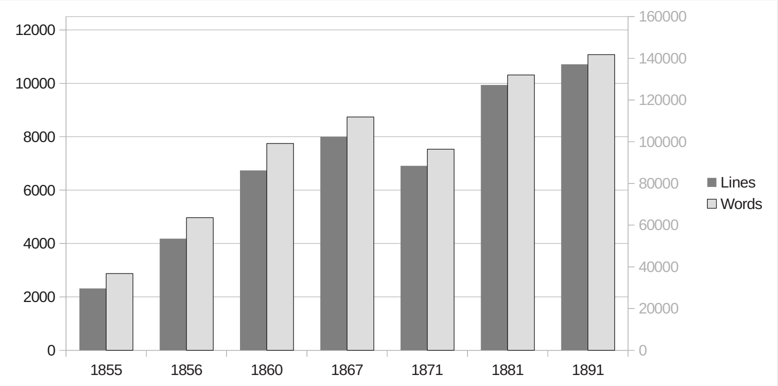

Fig. 6: Number of lines and words in the seven major editions

The graph clearly shows the remarkable and remarkably stable growth between 1855 and 1867. Even though the intervals differ, with one year, four years, and seven years passing between the first four editions respectively, the editions themselves, especially the first three, grow with near linear speed, an unexpected aspect that suggests that a certain, consistent amount of growth was needed for an edition to be completed and released; each of these editions adds around two-thousand new lines and around thirty-thousand new words. The graph also clearly shows the 1871 edition's attempt to reduce or condense *Leaves of Grass*, as well as a return to the previous dynamic of continual aggregation in the three final editions.

The same impression is reaffirmed by a closer look at the relationship between the individual editions, visualized again as a bar graph in which the overall height of a bar corresponds to the number of lines in each edition (Fig. 7). In this visualization, however, each edition is broken down by how many of its lines are similar to the previous one. The colors indicate the degree of similarity. As the graph shows, a remarkable portion of lines were kept without modification from one edition to the next (dark blue). For example, of the 1856 edition's approximately 4000 lines, around 2000 were taken from the 1855 edition without any significant modification (dark blue) and around 200 were incorporated in various degrees of modification (shown in shades of light blue to yellow to orange). Close to 2000 have no significant similarity to the previous edition and thus constitute new material (red). With the first edition being 2315 lines in length, 95% of its lines were thus kept for the following edition, signaling the kind of accrual that marks the sequence of editions as an effort at collection, not revision or refinement.[146] Unsurprisingly and in keeping with Fig. 6, the 1871 edition added only very few new lines; moreover, of the roughly 3300 lines that the 1881 edition added, around 1000 are taken from earlier editions, primarily the 1867 one, undoing a significant portion of the 1871 edition's reduction: these lines in a sense bypassed the 1871 edition to stay in the *Leaves* project: Whitman changed his mind on whether to remove them. In any event, the graph visually communicates the extent to which each subsequent edition of *Leaves* added more material to the existing ones and how the overall project is driven more by a logic of accumulation than by one of refinement or modification.

This logic of accumulation also shows in another metric that is related to the previous one but more finely grained: fluctuation on the word level, i.e., in each edition's lexicon. With word forms normalized as lemmas so that different uses of the same word (as a noun, adjective, or verb, or in inflected forms) are counted as one, the following metric shows even more starkly the extent to which words tend to stay in *Leaves* for subsequent editions once they have made it in. Breaking

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[146] Cf. Appendix A.1 for more details on the metrics of line similarity used, which also informs statements such as lines being "kept without modification." The chosen algorithm tends to overreport modifications, suggesting that the editions would seem even more similar, their growth even more aggregative, to a human reader. N.b.: The 1881 edition (and, to a far lesser extent, the 1871 edition) also contain lines from editions earlier than their immediate predecessor. For these editions, the asterisked columns show the breakdown for lines that were taken from *any* of the earlier editions. Particularly for the 1881 edition, this results in a far lower count of entirely new lines, visible in the reduced red area.

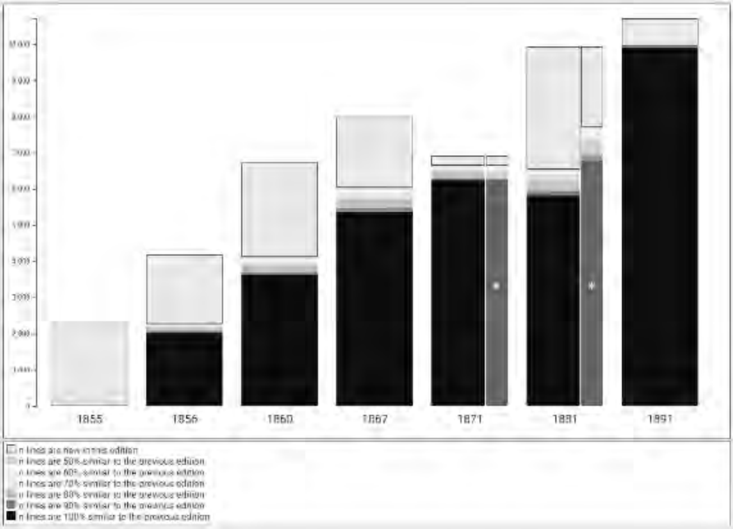

Fig. 7: New, modified, and kept lines in the seven major editions

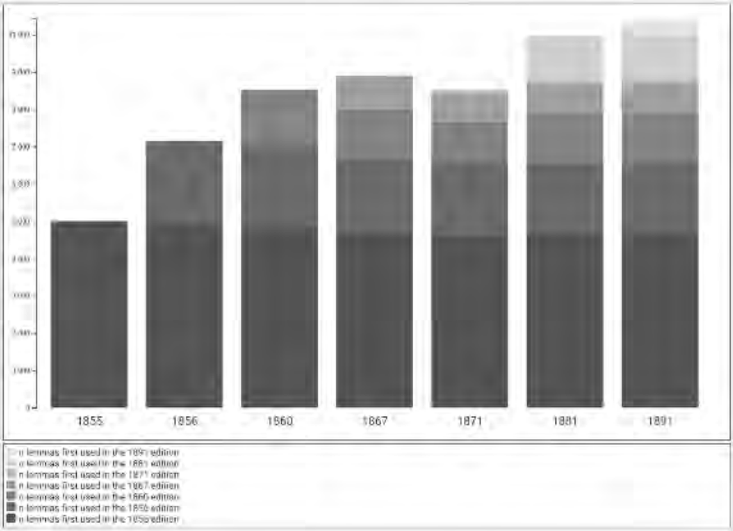

Fig. 8: Lemma composition of each edition color-coded to show the edition in which a lemma was first used

down the composition of each edition to show when the individual words used in them entered the project's lexicon shows how much the succession of editions of *Leaves of Grass* constitutes a project of sedimentation in which new words are collected and accrued from one edition to the next: Lemmas, once introduced, tend to stay in the *Leaves* project for the remainder of its lifetime.

The graph also shows that the fluctuation in terms of lemmas is less volatile than the fluctuation in terms of lines (as shown in Fig. 7), especially so for the later, larger editions. In part, this is to be expected: After all, natural language works by recombining a fairly small set of lemmas into infinite combinations, and so the number of lines from one edition to the next can easily increase with the words being used hardly changing at all.[147] Indeed, the growth of the overall lexicon between the three editions of 1856, 1860, and 1867, with each edition adding approximately half the amount of new lemmas that the previous one adds, suggests such a 'natural' growth (cf. Fig. 8). However, the massive influx of new lemmas in 1881 on the other hand underscores that a more radical expansion of the lexicon was still possible even toward the end of the overall project's life span.

Indeed, the fact that *Leaves* tended to grow more strongly in length, the number of lines that comprise each edition, than in the breadth of its lexicon can be read as one metric of the blunting of the book's original radicalism. The first edition contained about twice as many distinct words as lines, with the ratio even increasing in the following year, which indicates exactly the kind of "data ingestion" in which the amount of particulars of the world described grows even faster than its description. This suggests that Whitman, having successfully tried out his poetic method in 1855, doubled down on it in the following year (cf. my discussion of "Come Closer" starting on page 216). After the 1856 edition, however, *Leaves* grew faster in lines than it grew in lemmas, with an explosive addition of new lines in the penultimate edition, the edition that is, in terms of structure and content, the immediate predecessor to the final, deathbed edition, and that is even more than others perhaps marked by its author's desire for recognition as a writer.[148] By 1891, with the addition of the “Inscriptions” section, the number of lines overtakes the number of distinct lemmas, suggesting that the textualization of experience has overtaken the amount of material to be incorporated.

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[147] Accordingly, the first edition necessarily establishes a basic set of lemmas, including the most basic words, that obviously continue to be used throughout.

[148] The effect is increased by changes in the length of lines (cf. C.1), but the impact of this development is minimal. The average line length steadily de-

Throughout most of the editions of *Leaves of Grass*, this material aggregation from one edition to the next is stylistically accentuated by an enormous mobility of the individual poems, many of which get reshuffled from one edition to the next. The following graphs (Fig. 10 and Fig. 11) are designed to illustrate that in an evocative way. Fig. 10 shows the lines of the seven major editions connected to their most similar counterparts in the adjacent editions. This visualizes how dynamically individual lines traveled over the thirty-six years that Whitman kept publishing new editions, where in the respective book new lines entered, and where existing lines ceased to be part of the larger *Leaves* project.[149] Seen from such distance, it is easy to identify “Song of Myself” as the bedrock of all seven editions, traveling without noteworthy permutation as a broad

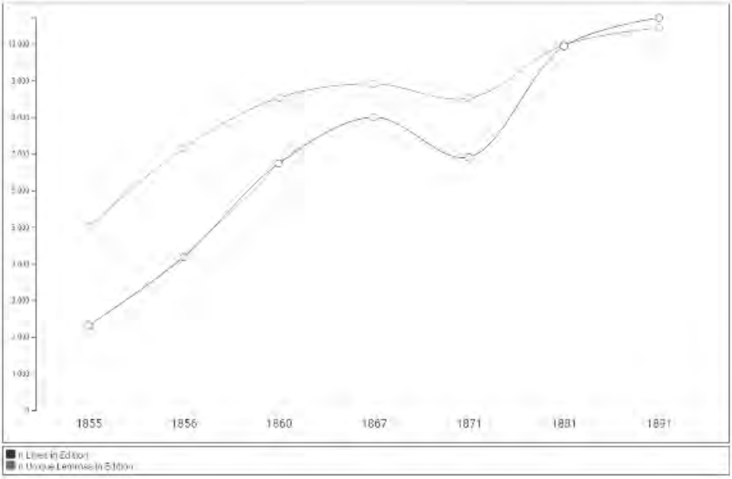

Fig. 9: Number of lines / of unique lemmas in the seven major editions

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creases throughout all of the seven editions, gradually declining from 15.9 to 13.2 words per line.

[149] For overall readability, the visualization does not who lines bypassing editions, which would be most relevant in the context of the 1871 edition. Cf. the Sankey graph, Appendix C.2.

band from the first to the last one. Other poems, however, do get moved around dramatically, at times ricocheting across the range of entire editions.[150]

Where Fig. 10 focuses on line mobility, thus giving a sense of how enormously dynamic this shuffling was, or highlighting, for example, how much "Song of Myself" lends some sense of basic stability to the chaos of moving materials, Fig. 11 shows the relationship between individual poems rather than between lines. Representing each poem as a box of the same size diminishes the role of long poems vis-a-vis shorter ones and gives an even starker sense of the extent of reordering going on.[151] It also shows several branchings and mergings where Whitman split up poems or combined them to form a single new one. And it shows where groups of poems were moved *en-bloc* between individual editions. Taken together, the two graphs express visually that very quality of textual mobility that has led scholars to claim that Whitman "saw all language as 'moveable type'" (M. Miller 46).[152] This kind of textual mobility, the shuffling around of blocks of material, constitutes at least as important a creative principle as revision does for the individual editions of the book.

While it is theoretically possible to read this shuffling as a search for the proper sequence, an investedness in order rather than a denial of it, the visualizations show that the process does not 'cool down' as it would if Whitman had found substantial correspondences between poems—a convincing order that he would gradually approximate. At times, larger units form, such as a block of poems spanning from "To the Garden the World" to "Salut au Monde!" in the 1891 edition (marked A in Fig. 11 and containing all of the "Children of Adam" cluster and parts of "Calamus"). Most of the poems of this block enter *Leaves* in the middle of the

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[150] There is an unavoidable artifact starting with the 1871 edition. Starting with this revision, the 1867 poem "O Pioneers" features a repeating line "Pioneers! O Pioneers!" all iterations of which in one edition are necessarily 'highly similar' (i.e. identical) to all of its iterations in the following one. The resulting multiple, crossing connections make this poem stand out between the final three editions.

[151] The digital companion to this study allows for an animated reordering of the poems to semi-automatically determine a sequence in which poems *never* switch their place throughout the lifespan of *Leaves*, resulting in an imagined 'raked' version of each of the seven editions of *Leaves of Grass*. Cf. www.data-imaginary.de/whitman-analytics/poems-raked.php?raked.

[152] Cf. also page 149 above.

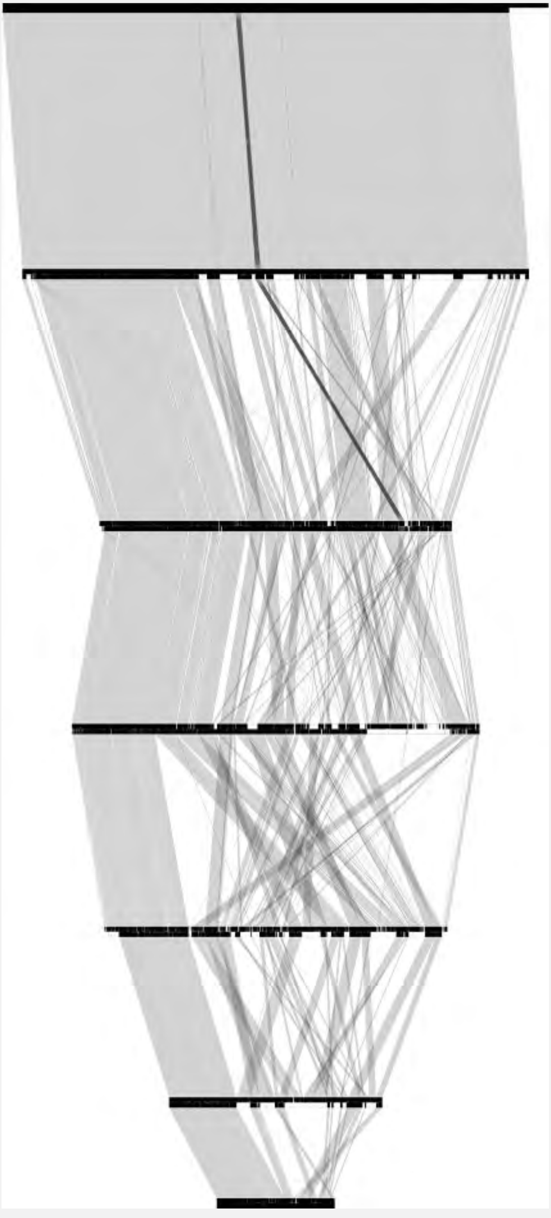

Fig. 10: Mobility of lines in the seven major editions, based on similarity ≥ 50

1860 edition and most travel with relatively little permutation all the way to the end. But even here, there is too much movement, even more so later in the process (right before the 1881 edition) than earlier (before 1871), to suggest that this shuffling speaks of a process of finding a desired sequence. Rather, these reshufflings suggest that, at least to their author and despite their being grouped together in a single book, the individual poems were autonomous objects that could move around freely.

More important, then, are the aesthetic effects this reordering has. Along with the branching and merging of poems and along with their renaming, the portability of the poems generates for the reader the impression of an even larger body of material than the individual volumes already cover. As much as Whitman reused existing poems, renaming and reordering them further increases the sense both of an enormous productivity on behalf of the poet and of an enormously large material archive, the world, that each volume attempts to textualize: The world is too large and too unruly to be contained within the order of a book, and each round of reordering the material highlights this very quality. Put differently, Whitman aimed at "producing the effect of diffusion, copiousness, vista, or fluid impression" (Chari 5) within his individual poems, and the sheer growth of the volumes, the reorderings, the branching and merging of poems, and their renaming, further adds to this effect on a higher structural level.

What emerges, then, from these observations on the macro structure of the seven editions of *Leaves of Grass* is a double project of massification. In terms of its material composition, (almost) each edition adds to a cumulative growth of this database of the world, a database that continues to grow by way of an ongoing addition to its overall lexicon of experience (and hence, quite literally, of words: total word counts and distinct lemmas). This material accumulation, massification, is complemented by an aesthetic process, the shuffling of poems that generates a 'massification effect,' which parallels and supports the material one: the poem's multiple mobilities further increase the impression of a massive, overflowing, unruly material reality that is best captured not by syntagmatically confining it, but by putting it into free-moving containers that can be pushed around at will. To Whitman, the proper way of storing catalog poems, obviously, is a catalog book.

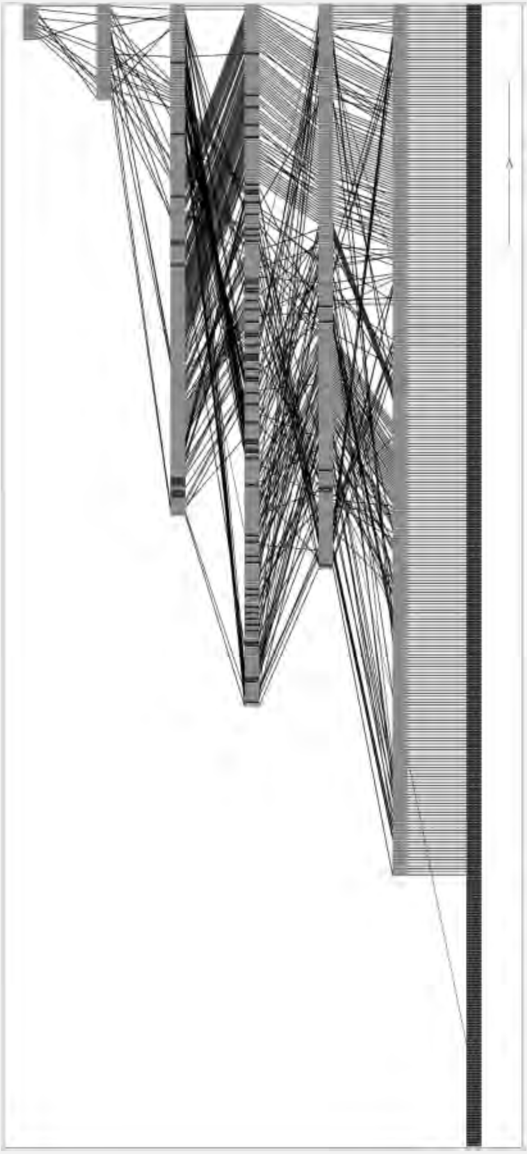

Fig. 11: The poems of the seven major editions linked to their predecessors and successors

3.4.2.2 Structures and Forms: Rare Noun Density and Catalogicity

A similar double structure can be observed when looking more closely at the internal organization of individual poems. As the following analysis shows, many of the poems in *Leaves of Grass* use two different strategies, one more 'material' and the other more 'aesthetic,' to implement the "poem of materials." The following pages will use two quantitative metrics developed for the occasion, rare noun density and catalogicity, to further explore this double structure.

Throughout its seven major editions, many of the poems in *Leaves of Grass* contain nouns that are used in no other poem within the respective edition, suggesting that these poems serve as repositories for the objects that these 'rare nouns' denote.[153] For many of these poems, these nouns are somewhat evenly distributed throughout the lines, but for some poems, these rare nouns are concentrated in distinct topographical areas, sets of lines that are accordingly marked by a high 'rare noun density.' I view these rare noun dense areas as 'containers' that have the purpose of storing a large number of 'objects,' "materials" that could not be contained in *Leaves* otherwise and that are stored here to be retrieved by the reader. Identifying these rare noun dense passages within a poem yields a fingerprint of that poem's storage structure. It shows the topographical locations at which it most emphatically performs one particular storage operation: the ingestion of concepts that are unique within a given edition. These rare noun dense containers thus implement data ingestion; they constitute one textual technology for inventorying the nation and for collecting otherwise rare materials, which are not easily suited for inclusion in literary texts. After all, by definition, the words in these containers are unusual enough not to reappear in any other poem throughout the respective edition.

There are different methods of visualizing rare noun density, but they typically yield similar structures.[154] For the 1855 edition's version of

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[153] Cf. Appendix C.3 for a chart of which edition contains how many such rare-noun-storing poems.

[154] The digital companion to this study allows for trying out different combinations of metrics. All visualizations included in this print version are generated with a 'skipping window' of ten lines with no threshold but a scaling according to the standard deviation. The below visualization (Fig. 12) can accordingly be found online at: www.data-imaginary.de/whitman-analytics/poem-catalog.php?pid=1&segmentation=skipping-

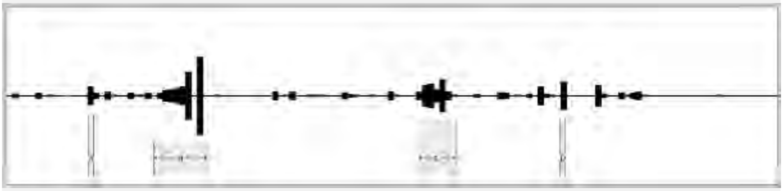

Fig. 12: Rare Noun Containers in “Song of Myself” (1855)

“Song of Myself,” several rare noun containers are immediately visible,[155] many which are unsurprising to anyone familiar with the poem: The first one (A) is from a description of urban life that contains the famous (and obviously rare) phrasing of the “blab of the pave”:

> The suicide sprawls on the bloody floor of the bedroom,
> It is so . . . . I witnessed the corpse . . . . there the pistol had fallen.
> The blab of the pave . . . . the tires of carts and sluff of bootsoles and talk of the promenaders,
> The heavy omnibus, the driver with his interrogating thumb, the clank of the shod horses on the granite floor,
> The carnival of sleighs, the clinking and shouted jokes and pelts of snowballs;
> The hurrahs for popular favorites . . . . the fury of roused mobs,
> The flap of the curtained litter—the sick man inside, borne to the hospital,
> The meeting of enemies, the sudden oath, the blows and fall,
> The excited crowd—the policeman with his star quickly working his passage to the centre of the crowd; (*Leaves of Grass* 17-18)

Although these nine lines constitute only 0.6% of the overall poem (its 142 words correspond to 0.8% of the poem’s 18459 words), they contain 28, i.e. 1.6%, of the poem’s total of 1698 rare nouns, which gives these lines a significantly raised rare noun density: each line here contains, on average 3.11 rare nouns, where the average line in “Song of Myself” overall only contains 1.27 rare nouns. The second passage, marked as “B” in Fig. 12 above, also is one of the usual suspects. It begins with the famous “pure contralto” catalog (21) and continues for three pages before ending with “I resist anything better than my own diversity, / And breathe the air and leave plenty after me / And am not stuck up, and am

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[155] Appendix B.7 contains a listing of the rare nouns in each of the four containers discussed here.

in my place" (24). The third container marked up above (C) is another description of scenery. Beginning "[b]y the city's quadrangular houses" (35) and ending "[w]andering the same afternoon with my face turned up to the clouds; / My right and left arms round the sides of two friends and I in the middle" (37) it has an overall lower rare noun density, registering around 2.28 rare nouns per line, but still clearly stands out. Lastly, ten lines toward the end of the poem's third quarter (D) give a sense of the metric's limitations. Spanning the lines from "I remember . . . . I resume the overstaid fraction" to "I see the approach of your numberless gangs . . . . I see you understand yourselves and me" (43-44), these lines draw much of their (statistical) significance from the list of states in the middle. They all are mentioned only in "Song of Myself," and so their concentrated presence alone leads to an elevated rare noun count in this line. The remaining nine lines have a relatively low rare noun density with eleven rare nouns: they average 1.2 rare nouns per line, slightly below the average of "Song of Myself." This fits the overall impression of the passage that is not descriptive, like the other containers are, but, to the extent that this can be said about lyrical poetry, more narrative.

In many cases, then, the passages that form rare noun containers are not only descriptive in content but catalogic in form, which is more difficult to determine algorithmically and more difficult to quantify. For the purpose of this study, 22 different stylistics metrics are used to estimate the catalogicity of any given line, ranging from the number of coordinating conjunctions to the number of nouns in the line to the similarity of the neighboring lines' beginnings.[156] Even though several of these features are interrelated—the first nine, for example, are all impacted by sentence length—their aggregate result sufficiently approximates a human reader's assessment of a given line's catalogicity. Fig. 13 shows how these individual metrics respond to the catalog of impressions that begins "[t]he smoke of my own breath" and ends "the song of me rising from bed and meeting the sun" (13). The length of this sentence, the many determiners at the beginning of its lines, and the sparsity of verbs clearly all contribute to the sentence's catalogic quality, expressed in darker shades of red for the corresponding squares. The algorithm clearly marks the passage as catalogic, and it clearly differentiates it from the surrounding lines, even though the preceding lines, too, form a longer sentence that consists of underconnected fragments featuring an elevated density of noun phrases, and even though the following lines, the quadruple question identically beginning with "Have you," do have a certain catalogic appeal.

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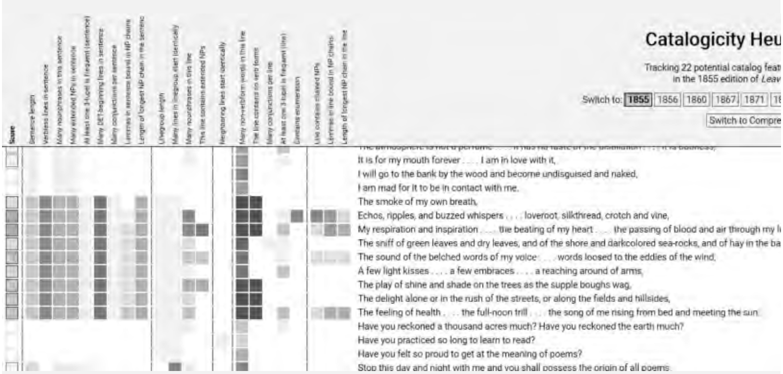
[156] Cf. Appendix A.3 for more details on the metrics, their relative merits, and their conversion into a single catalogicity score, ranging from 0 to 1, which I will rely on in the discussion from here on forward.


Score
Sentence length
Verbless lines in sentence
Many nounphrases in this sentence
Many extended NPs in sentence
At least one 3-tupel is frequent (sentence)
Many DET-beginning lines in sentence
Many conjunctions per sentence
Lemmas in sentence bound in NP chains
Length of longest NP chain in the sentence
Linegroup length
Many lines in linegroup start identically
Many nounphrases in this line
This line contains extended NPs
Neighboring lines start identically
Many non-verb form words in this line
The line contains no verb forms
Many conjunctions per line
At least one 3-tupel is frequent (line)
Contains enumeration
Line contains chained NPs
Lemmas in line bound in NP chains
Length of longest NP chain in the line
Switch to:
1855
1856
1860
1867
1871
Switch to Compre

Catalogicity Heu

Tracking 22 potential catalog feat
in the 1855 edition of *Leav*

It is for my mouth forever . . . . I am in love with it,
I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked,
I am mad for it to be in contact with me.
The smoke of my own breath,
Echos, ripples, and buzzed whispers . . . . loveroot, silkthread, crotch and vine,
My respiration and inspiration . . . . the beating of my heart . . . . the passing of blood and air through my l
The sniff of green leaves and dry leaves, and of the shore and darkcolored sea-rocks, and of hay in the ba
The sound of the belched words of my voice . . . . words loosed to the eddies of the wind,
A few light kisses . . . . a few embraces . . . . a reaching around of arms,
The play of shine and shade on the trees as the supple boughs wag,
The delight alone or in the rush of the streets, or along the fields and hillsides,
The feeling of health . . . . the full-noon trill . . . . the song of me rising from bed and meeting the sun.
Have you reckoned a thousand acres much? Have you reckoned the earth much?
Have you practiced so long to learn to read?
Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?
Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems,

Fig. 13: Catalogicity Metrics

Throughout *Leaves of Grass*, and unsurprisingly so, catalogicity and an elevated rare noun density often coincide. Put differently, throughout the seven major editions, many of the books' rare noun containers are also written in a catalog style, suggesting a functional correlation between these two features: Oftentimes, catalogs happen to store large quantities of rare nouns; often, the formal means to store nouns is a catalog (cf. Fig. 16 for more on the correlation throughout the seven editions). The short poem "A Young Man Came to Me" is an excellent example to illustrate both this correlation and its restrictions, because it contains two longer catalogic passages, only one of which clearly forms a rare noun container. Briefly after opening, the poem features a first passage (A) that is catalogic by the standard of the algorithm applied (as indicated by the visualization of individual catalog metrics in shades of red and the rising blue composite line in the lower half of Fig. 14). It begins around "[h]im they accept . . . . in him lave . . . . in him perceive themselves as amid light," and it peaks in two longer sentences that clearly collect a number of 'objects':

> Beautiful women, the haughtiest nations, laws, the landscape, people and animals,
> The profound earth and its attributes, and the unquiet ocean,

> All enjoyments and properties, and money, and whatever money will buy,
> The best farms . . . . others toiling and planting, and he unavoidably reaps,
> The noblest and costliest cities . . . . others grading and building, and he domiciles there;
> Nothing for any one but what is for him . . . . near and far are for him,
> The ships in the offing . . . . the perpetual shows and marches on land are for him if they are for any body.
> He puts things in their attitudes,
> He puts today out of himself with plasticity and love,
> He places his own city, times, reminiscences, parents, brothers and sisters, associations employment and politics, so that the rest never shame them afterward, nor assume to command them. (85-86)

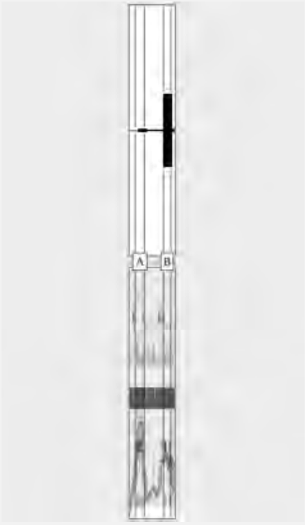


Fig. 14: "A Young Man Came to Me"

Notably, while the passage is clearly catalogic in its paratactic enumeration of things, people, and actions, it's catalogic quality is interrupted repeatedly by a recurring narrative thread related to the poem's "young man" figure. The insertion that "he unavoidably reaps" and that "he domiciles there," and the assertion that "he puts things in their attitudes," injects the narrative frame, the motivation and justification for the catalog to exist inside the poem in the first place, into the catalog itself, thus reducing its formal rigidity. At the same time, the passage has a relatively low rare noun density. Even though there are some rare nouns here (with "toiling" and "planting" being false positives[157]), the passage, making up 17% of the overall poem (in lines), only contains 14.3 percent of its rare nouns.

The second catalogic passage (B) in the poem works differently: Even though it clocks a lower catalogicity (resulting in a composite score about half as high as the previous segment, indicated again by the blue line in Fig. 14), and even though it is marked by a similar intrusions of the narrative frame into the catalog, the following 13.2% of the poem contain almost half (42.9%) of its rare nouns:

> The English believe he comes of their English stock,
> A Jew to the Jew he seems . . . . a Russ to the Russ . . . . usual and near . . removed from none.
> Whoever he looks at in the traveler's coffeehouse claims him,
> The Italian or Frenchman is sure, and the German is sure, and the Spaniard is sure . . . . and the island Cuban is sure.
> The engineer, the deckhand on the great lakes or on the Mississippi or St Lawrence or Sacramento or Hudson or Delaware claims him.
> The gentleman of perfect blood acknowledges his perfect blood,
> The insulter, the prostitute, the angry person, the beggar, see themselves in the ways of him . . . . he strangely transmutes them,
> They are not vile any more . . . . they hardly know themselves, they are so grown. (88)

Many of the words featured in this rare noun container are either geographic descriptions relating a sense of the pluralism of US society and of its geographic spread, or they are, as in other instances (cf. e.g. the "blab of the pave" passage above on page 210) words one would not typically consider the material of nineteenth-century poems, such as "the insulter," "the prostitute," or "the angry person."

In both cases, then, the passages mark an expression of an underlying storage desire: they both stand out for how they give up on a more syntagmatic development of a theme (or even: plot) and instead collect large numbers of redundant items in ways that test the readers' patience and attention span. The fact that catalogs and rare noun containers are functionally and rhetorically related but can appear both together and separately suggests that they are different expressions of the same underlying impulse: the storage of information. The rare noun dense containers often (around 55% on average) use a catalogic structure to realize this impulse and to thus store large quantities of words that would otherwise be difficult to integrate into a poem. The catalogs, on the other hand, frequently (around 53% on average) store significant numbers of rare nouns. But in around 47% of their use, they rhetorically signal storage without doing the same kind of storage work that the rare noun containers do. They create what could be called a 'storage effect.'

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[157] Taken by themselves, "toiling" and "planting" indeed could be nouns. The context makes clear, however, that "are" has been omitted here, and that both words are thus parts of a verb phrase. On the problem of mistakes in the POS-tagging employed in this study, cf. my discussion in Appendix A or above.

Notably, these two different expressions of a storage desire respond differently to the textual expansion of the archive that marks the overall *Leaves of Grass* project. After all, the larger the corpus, the more difficult it is to still maintain rare noun containers: With every line added, the likelihood of a word reappearing in it grows, thus invalidating its status as a 'rare' word. This also shows in the diachronic development of these two devices over the course of the seven editions of *Leaves of Grass*. As Fig. 15 shows, the 'containericity' of the seven editions (red), calculated here as the standard deviation of rare noun density for 10-line windows, closely tracks the inverse length of the edition (gray). It markedly deviates only for the 1855-1856 revision, suggesting that Whitman indeed doubled down on his storage desires here, increasing the container-like quality more quickly than it was countered by the growth of the edition. The catalogicity (blue), the average of the aggregate of the 22 catalog metrics employed, sets out similarly but, following 1871, is able to withstand the growth of the overall volume, returning to the level of earlier editions toward the end of the overall project. The impression is underscored by Fig. 16, which shows the percentage of each edition that is a non-catalogic container (red), a mere, i.e. non rare-noun-dense catalog (blue), or a catalogic container (purple).[158] While the percentage that implements some storage strategy, be it by way of catalogs or by way of containers, is remarkably stable at 36% throughout all editions, this stability is achieved primarily by a modulation of the catalogic areas noticeable in the near-steady growth of 'pure' catalogs (blue) that are not marked by an above-average rare noun density.

A similar development can also be observed by looking more closely at a single poem that is particularly dynamic in its use of storage de-

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[158] The graph shows the number of ten-line windows for which the average catalogicity or the average of the rare noun density is above the poem's average.

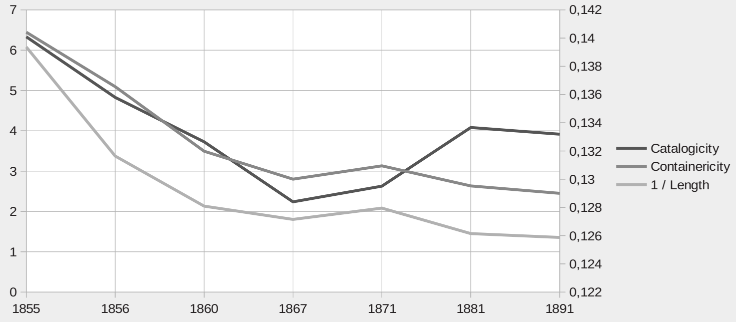

Fig. 15: Catalogicity and containericity in the seven major editions

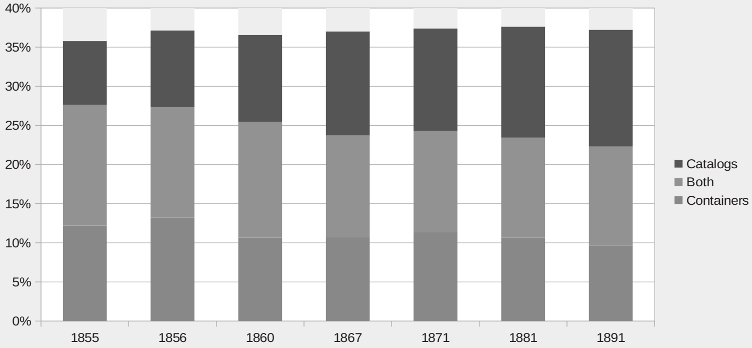

Fig. 16: Percentage of each edition that is catalogic, containery, or both

vices, the poem that is titled “Come Closer to Me” in the 1855 edition.[159] This poem is built around one extended catalog that contains an enormous number of rare nouns, objects that are apparently often brought together by way of functional association: “Grains and manures . . marl, clay, loam . . the subsoil plough . . the shovel and pick and rake and hoe . . irrigation and draining” (61), to give just one example. As Fig. 17 shows, and as a look at the poem itself confirms, Whitman extended the poem after its initial publication, mostly by adding material to its main catalog. From one edition to the next, this catalog, ranging from "The old forever new things" to "the going home, and the purchases" grows from 58 to 73 lines, which also increases its relative presence in the overall poem from 32.8% in the 1855 edition to 37.4% in 1856. This expansion by 15 lines yields an additional 527 words, 54 of which are new rare nouns, which also raises the catalog's contribution to the poem's overall storage of rare nouns: In the 1855 edition, 66.1% of the poem's rare nouns are stored in this catalog; by 1856, this number goes up to 76.3%. This expansion of the poem's main storage container from one edition to the next mostly maintains the section's catalogic quality.

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[159] The poem is titled “Poem of the Daily Work of the Workmen and Workwomen of These States” in 1856, “Chants Democratic 3” in 1860, “To Workingmen” in 1867, and goes by various variations of its final, 1891, title “A Song for Occupations,” after that.

Content-wise, the additions reflect the underlying storage desire in how they frequently add lines with topically related material in between existing ones, thus increasing the paratactic replaceability and redundancy of the text and expressing a dataesque drive toward massification and completeness. For example, the line "[t]he column of wants in the one-cent paper . . the news by telegraph . . . . the amusements and operas and shows" gets prefaced by a line that expands on the "one-cent paper" ("Cheap literature, maps, charts, lithographs, daily and weekly newspapers") and is now followed by one on more urbanity ("The business parts of a city, the trottoirs of a city when thousands of well-dressed people walk up and down"). In other cases, existing associations, such as the "[i]ronworks" and other factories from "[i]ronworks or whitelead-works . . the sugarhouse . . steam-saws, and the great mills and facto-

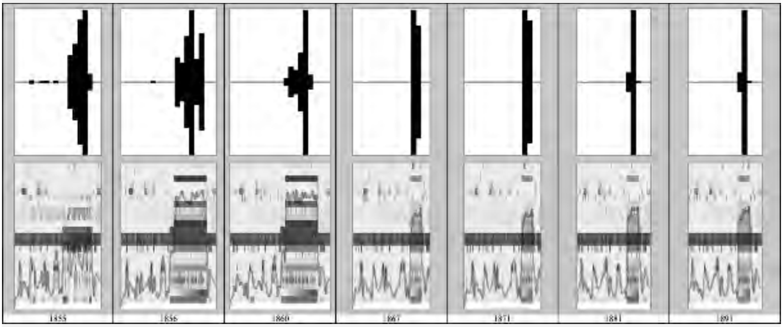

Fig. 17: Rare Noun Density (top) and Catalogicity (bottom) of "Come Closer to Me"

ries" are broken up into individual lines, giving more room to their metonymic expansion

> Iron-works, forge-fires in the mountains or by river-banks, men around feeling the melt with huge crowbars—lumps of ore, the due combining of ore, limestone, coal—the blast-furnace and the puddling-furnace, the loup-lump at the bottom of the melt at last — the rolling-mill, the stumpy bars of pig-iron, the strong clean-shaped T rail for railroads,
> Oil-works, silk-works, white-lead-works, the sugar-house, steam-saws, the great mills and factories.

At times, these expansions suggest a process of association, frequently documented in (closer reading) discussions of Whitman's poetic, that results in an indexical structure in which related concepts branch out from what Whitman calls a "main central idea" in his description of the "Poem of Materials" (cf. above on page 193). In other places, no guiding principle is recognizable—for example in the moving of the steam engine from one context to another (the only such act of ordering by relocation), or in its expansion from five to sixteen machine parts, from "[t]he walkingbeam of the steam-engine . . the throttle and governors, and the up and down rods" to "[t]he steam-engine, lever, crank, axle, piston, shaft, air-pump, boiler, beam, pulley, hinge, flange, band, bolt, throttle, governors, up and down rods." Again, this expansion seems to primarily stem from a drive toward completeness, a desire to include *all* the parts.

Notably, the expansion of the catalog is also accompanied by an increase of devices that perform a 'catalogic explosion' on the semantic level: Frequently, and more so in the 1856 edition than in the previous one, the lists freely mix hyponyms and hyperonyms, subverting the idea that the individual instances of, say, "plum-orchard," "apple-orchard," "seedlings," "cuttings," "flowers," "vines" together signified "gardening." With the latter, categorical word similarly appearing in the middle of the catalog, the list of items looses its rationale of signifying gardening by way of examples. Similarly, phrases such as "Coal-mines, all that is down there" or "Lead-mines, and all that is done in lead-mines, or with the lead afterward" suggest that the operative desire in this case is one of total storage, a "data ingestion" (Folsom, "Database" 1575) that captures the world in its totality and in its details: It at once makes sure that everything is named via such catch-all phrases, and it still injects as many particulars as possible.

After this formally radical expansion, a stuffing-in of additional words and concepts into an existing poem, the following, 1860 edition sees a significant reduction of this container (cf. the third box in Fig. 17). This reduction, however, is not due to a change in the catalog's wording. In fact, there are only minimal edits in this section of the poem between 1856 and 1860. Rather, it is the overall expansion of *Leaves of Grass* which atrophies the otherwise unchanged container: with the increase of the overall volume and its lexicon, a considerable number of the rare words stop being rare, thus decreasing the rare noun density of the respective lines. Notably, and unsurprisingly, the catalog score is much more robust.

The 1867 edition, then, radically cuts back on the container, actually removing many of its lines, slimming down the entire poem not least by reducing this particular section. This reduction coincides with other important changes. One is the introduction of contractions ("unfinished" to "unfinish'd," "displayed" to "display'd") which suggests an increased investment in (the appearance) of an intentional rhythm or meter, "Song," not "Inventory." Another one is the reframing of the overall poem, most starkly visible in the introduction of the line "[t]his is the poem of occupations." The line, which is part of the poem only in the 1867 and 1871 editions, inaugurates its new name. Called "To Workingmen" in 1867, it is renamed to "Carol of Occupations" in 1871 and to "A Song for Occupations" in 1881, where the eponymous line is then dropped from its body.

The original expansion and eventual contraction of the main catalog in "Come Closer" / "Song for Occupations" thus illustrates two conflicting impulses. One is the desire to capture the world by way of a massified storage of particulars. It is this quality that this entire section has traced quantitatively throughout the seven major editions of *Leaves of Grass*, be it as an actual attempt at massified storage or as a textual effect generating a sense of massification. The other is an investment in the literary quality of the resulting book. After all, *Leaves* is not an encyclopedia or an inventory, and the reduction of the already atrophied main storage, the scaling-back of the main catalog in "To Workingmen" may well be read as this second impulse gaining the upper hand.

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This quantifying, (mostly) distant reading of *Leaves of Grass* has traced the notion of the "Poem of Materials" in two different focal lengths: by looking at the overall expansion of the material archive that is *Leaves* on the level of full poems, and by looking at rare noun containers and catalogs as two formal structures that operate inside individual poems. Both perspectives indicate a double structure in which an overall expansion of the material archive that is *Leaves* is complemented by stylistic devices that create a massification effect. Accordingly, I read the sheer aggregative growth of the individual editions, the expansion of its lexicon as corresponding to the kind of textual work that the containers do: a capturing of the world by capturing its particulars, objects, simply by including them, storing them for future use regardless of their syntagmatic relationships. Similarly, the shuffling of poems, in this view, does similar work as the catalogs do: both devices create a massification effect, a sense of a vast, potentially endless archive. Relatively independent of the actual material, and relatively robust in the face of the ongoing expansion of the archive, they aesthetically express the same underlying logic of textualization by way of storage. Indeed, the four areas this section has engaged—aggregative growth, shuffling, rare noun containers, and catalogs—then express the same underlying storage desire: a belief that the world is best captured by archiving its particulars.

□■■ ■□■

Working to enlist Whitman's work in a revised genealogy of modernism that is not built around a presumed autonomy of art, its being split from (social) life, but that is instead characterized by a "shuttling between art and life" (Bernardini 97), Jacques Rancière writes:

> Whitman wants 'neither verse nor prose': neither the account book that maintains things in their commodity value, nor the poetic speech that separates its chosen subjects and rhythms from commonplace occupations. The modernist axiom [...] can be summed up here: there is a mode of presenting common things that subtracts them both from the logic of the economic and social order and from the artificiality of poetic exception. (72)

Similar to what this chapter has done, Rancière identifies in Whitman a rejection of binaries, an unwillingness to settle for either verse or prose, and he, too, notes the presence of a data practice, the "account book," in this dilemma: poetic speech, in this logic, may be able to free objects from the commodifying power of accounting, but it ends up in the process dissociating them from the commonplace. What Rancière thus calls "poetic speech," or "verse" in this particular case, is what I have called "literary" above; and his "prose," the language of the "account book," is aligned with data. Interested in the widening rift between data and literature in the nineteenth century, this chapter has identified Whitman's refusal to choose, his "want[ing] 'neither verse nor prose,'" as an unusual, powerful contribution to the discourses US culture spun around this very rift.

In this, the lyric, a literary form that is only loosely defined by its quality of being "not mimetic," played a crucial role. It allowed Whitman to escape the linear and hierarchizing logics of more narrative genres; it formed the ecosystem in which his free verse could thrive; it helped ambiguate the boundaries between literature and data; and it allowed him to live out an insatiable storage desire, a desire to inhale and exhale the world in all its particulars. The lyric allowed Whitman to unsubscribe from a view, prevalent already at the time and hardening in the decades after, that a given text is either "song" or "inventory" and that it cannot possibly be both. This view, of course, was Emerson's, who retracted some of his initial praise for Whitman's work later in life, complaining that "I expected him to make the songs of the nation, but he seems content to make the inventories" (qtd. in Daiches 123).

To appreciate Whitman's project of ambiguation, this chapter has proceeded in three steps. It has, first, participated in a related blurring of boundaries, countering the perception, widespread in Whitman scholarship, that the author's poetic creativity was categorically separable from his earlier, more hands-on knowledge work as a printer, journalist, or teacher. Building on previous work in manuscript studies and on biographical scholarship, it has instead traced the many connections between Whitman's training, his fascination with collecting and organizing information, and his writing.

In a second section, this chapter has then engaged paratextual discussions of *Leaves of Grass*, both by Whitman himself and by scholars and critics who turned to the book in the decades after its original publication. In doing so it has identified two contradictory movements: one by the author himself, who continuously advertised his book by pointing out its in-betweenness, its inability to fit into established categories, and who thus kept ambiguating its generic status as well as its literary value, conventionally understood. More often than not, readers and critics of *Leaves*, this section has also shown, responded to this ambiguation by resolutely trying to fix the book. The resulting debates, category dramas indeed, typically layer various other binaries on top of one another, demonstrating how the data-literature binary attracts other, far reaching cultural negotiations, not least about the literary and its role in the stratification of society.

Lastly, this chapter has used a digital humanities engagement with the entirety of *Leaves of Grass*, all seven major editions, for a dual purpose. Using two metrics, one for the storage of rare nouns in poems and one for a given line's catalogicity, it has demonstrated that *Leaves* implements an underlying 'storage desire' by way of a material aggregation of objects and by way of a 'storage effect,' an aesthetic effect that creates the impression of a storage of particulars. Secondly, and as importantly, turning to the DH method of distant or algorithmic reading allowed for a meta-methodological reflection and for a crucial shifting of gears. Considering the extent to which Whitman scholarship has, again and again, succumbed to the lure of evaluative readings for formal finesse (or a lack thereof), the distancing effect of a DH reading came with a particular promise. Rather than trying to fix Whitman, to settle his careful ambiguation of the data-literature divide by containing his book in a reading *as literature*, engaging it via the hybrid tool set of DH thus strives for alternative, more haptic, more playful, or more visual registers of engagement.

Together, these sections have thus worked to sympathetically join Whitman's project of ambiguation, to facilitate rather than to restrain his book's "want[ing to be] 'neither verse nor prose.'" After all, it is this willingness to be situated in between verse and prose that has made *Leaves*'s use of the lyric truly stand out. Ultimately, it is this embrace of ambiguity that also makes it such an unusual, telling contribution to the emergence and institutionalization of the data-literature divide in American culture.

4 “Facts and Testimony”: Abolitionism and the Data Imaginary

4.1 Sentimental Data?

“Of what manner, then, is this discourse? It tells a story, to be sure, but conveys no ostensible plot. The narratives structuring the text are relentless, yet ‘progress’ is neither promised nor evident” (287). This is how Stephen Browne characterizes *American Slavery as It Is*, published in 1839 by Theodore Dwight Weld, Sarah Grimké, and Angelina Grimké, in his 1997 paper on the book. As he notes, this compendium, despite being “ranked as the largest-selling antislavery tract in American history” remains understudied and “unaccountably obscure” (277), and this obscure quality, for him, has everything to do with its unusual, categorically ambiguous form. After all, *American Slavery as It Is* is not a coherent narrative description of what slavery looks like, despite it containing many individual, small but “relentless,” narratives. Rather, to borrow from the volume’s self description, it is a large compendium of “facts” relating to US-American slavery, a sprawling compilation of cutouts from newspapers mixed with decontextualized narrative vignettes sent to the compilers by mail, resulting in a mass of fragmented bits that all describe individual, horrible aspects of slavery. These ‘narratoids’ are topically arranged into encyclopedic categories of cruelty, with a detailed index providing fast and effective access to different classes of horror. It is this vast, fragmented, mosaic quality with no narrative thread tying things together, that makes the book hard to classify and that triggers Brown to ask for the “manner” of “this discourse.”

Browne’s query, with its emphasis on narrative depletion—he speaks, after all, of a form of symbolic communication, a “discourse,” that paradoxically “tells a story” but “conveys no [...] plot”—directly points to some of the qualities I read as dataesque in this book, and indeed media historian Ellen Gruber Garvey has convincingly described *American Slavery* as the result of complex and long-running abolitionist data efforts—structured information gathering and data mining—resulting in a veritable database: the “Grimké-Weld database” (“Nineteenth”

361). In the politically charged representational struggle over what slavery 'actually' looked like, these data practices, turning on the presumably unmediated reproduction of masses of 'raw' information, promised a new and effective strategy for signaling 'reality' and for privileging one discursive version of reality over others. So effective was this strategy, as Garvey points out, that readers used it "to 'stump' slaveholders—one said he related incidents of cruelty from the book, and when the slaveholders said they were lies, 'he would pull Weld's volume from his pocket and give names, places, and dates from Southern papers'" ("Nineteenth" 360). The book, Garvey's account suggests, was politically and culturally salient thanks to two properties of its data form: by offering masses of decontextualized, "morselized," "isolated bits of data" that mutually corroborated each other (363), it imparted a sense of objective irrefutability that could effectively counter Southern allegations that the resistance to slavery was based on misconceptions and individual, invented or exaggerated tales of atrocities. At the same time, the denarrativized data form invited (re-)narrativization: abolitionist speakers used it to authoritatively speak of slavery, and authors such as Dickens and Stowe grounded their narratives in the thus mobilized, nimble, and 'usable' facts it provided and the proto-realist gestures of social documentation this facilitated.[160] In this sense, the book's diminished narrativity, a quality produced by and aligned with its dataesque quality, is key to its success.

Notably, Browne, too, reads the book's turning away from narrative as responding to a crisis of representation, but he takes the resulting formal and rhetorical qualities in a very different and less favorable direction. For him, the book's formal design was indeed "shaped by the realization that [abolitionism] faced a crisis in its ability to represent sufficiently the realities of slavery." Like Garvey, he sees the book as "part of a more general campaign to make slavery meaningful, to make vivid and compelling an evil to which most Northerners had never born witness. *American Slavery* is a product of that desire." Where Garvey, however, sees the book as foregrounding the data form, Browne sees something else: "In its answer to the question, How can slavery be more forcefully represented? the text resorts to a style which I shall here stipulate as *sentimental*" (277).

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[160] Charles Dickens also copied content, argumentative stance, and method from the book in writing his *American Notes* (cf. Johnson).

The volume's compositional process, he suggests, allowed its creators to reduce slavery to its starkest, most jarring and emotionally gripping representations, a 'concentrated' "staging of sin and its spectacles" that turns on the horror the readers feel. But this intensification, he claims, comes at a price. After all, in how Browne understands the sentimental style, emotional investment displaces political action, and *American Slavery* thus does not help the readers understand slavery's causal operations and its social ramifications, nor does it trigger them to acknowledge the victims and their own responsibility for these victims' condition. Sentimentalism, thus understood, is built around spectacular displays of pain and suffering. In these displays, it "seeks emotional response and, by engaging it, ultimately secures its end not in action, but in moral judgment." As Browne puts it, "[t]his is, more specifically, the very essence of sentimentality: a confusion of the emotional with the moral, [of] condemnation with action"—in consequence, "sentimentalism extends no further than its own exhaustion" (286; 278). In this view, then, the same quality of diminished narrativity that leads Garvey to read *American Slavery* as a successful data effort with tangible socio-political effects marks its politico-textual failure as literature in Browne's eyes—a view that by no means is his alone.[161] Understood here as "sentimental" or as indicative of mere "spectacle," the text's narrative depletion renders it (to use a phrasing that acknowledges the problematically gendered registers at work in many discussions of sentimentalism) politically impotent. In other words: In this view, the book's diminished narrativity is key to explaining its failure.

Garvey's and Browne's seemingly contradictory assessments go to the heart of the questions this chapter is interested in. Within this study's larger argument that the middle of the nineteenth century saw the troubled and laborious differentiation of data- and literary practices into distinct cultural enterprises, abolitionism marks an arena in which the political valencies of these different symbolic practices and their separation were tested out and negotiated. As I will argue in this chapter, denarrativization and renarrativization, fundamental operations to the data imaginary, play a crucial role in this. Situated in a historical context in which the uses of textuality—fundamentally being altered by the advent of mass print, of mass reading publics, and of pluralistic, diverse, and democratic nation states—were being newly figured out, the two main exemplary texts I will read in this chapter, *American Slavery as It Is* and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, both are deeply invested in the value of denarrativized, dataesque material, in the literariness (or lack thereof) of such material, in its conversion into narrative form, and in its 'elevation' to the ranks of 'literature.'

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[161] For this use of the term 'narrativity' as a gradable category that texts (or other cultural artifacts) may have to varying degrees, cf. Ryan (*Avatars* 7).

Dwelling at an ever-widening rift between symbolic forms, these two texts' liminal narrativity aligns them with several textual dispositions that have become coded as 'minor' for how they fail to fulfill expectations of literariness emerging and solidifying at the time. Among these 'minor dispositions' are sentimentalism, seriality, and realism. Browne's characterization of *American Slavery as It Is* as 'sentimental' thus is a case in point; and Stowe's books—*Uncle Tom's Cabin*, of course, more so than the frequently overlooked *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*—have been at the center of debates about (the literary value of) sentimentalism as well. In fact, the pigeonholing of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as sentimental was key to keeping this immensely successful book out of the literary canon, and the reevaluation of its sentimental efficacy was at the core of the canon debates in American studies in the 1980s.

In debates of sentimentalism's literary shortcomings, disparagements of the mode often focus on its penchant for 'spectacle' and on its formulaic repetitiveness, both of which are facets of denarrativization, giving a first sense of how the dataesque and the sentimental might dovetail in an attenuation of narrativity. The notion of formulaic repetitiveness, moreover, directly points to a second 'minor' disposition that the dataesque texts in this chapter are indebted to: that of seriality. If, as I will argue below, both *American Slavery* and *Key* can be read as databases of the horrors of slavery, they necessarily consist of elements that are similar to one another and, hence, paradigmatically replaceable with one another. This quality of structural redundancy is captured, in literary terms, by notions of serial repetition—and much like sentimentalism, seriality has also seen drastically shifting degrees of appreciation. Serving for the longest time as a foil against which modernist conceptions of literature could boost their visions of artistic 'originality,' serial writing has only recently been rehabilitated by revisionist scholarship, which emerged in the 1980s but boomed in the 2000s.

A third disposition that these dataesque texts align with are early incarnations of realism. In terms of its reception throughout literary history, this mode has, of course, not been coded as 'minor' at all.

However, in realism's full-fledged emergence after the Civil War and around the turn of the century, its proponents nevertheless defined their practice in emphatic (at times *avant-garde*) opposition to then-established notions of literariness, often pointing out how the realist mode violated norms of imaginative writing for the sake of documentation in ways that often reduce realist texts' narrativity.

In all three of these dispositions, their distance to now-established conceptions of literariness thus notably coincides with their diminished narrativity. In other words: for all three, being situated on the fringes of the literary establishment coincides with dwelling in the borderlands between narrative and data. This observation suggests that the displacement of these 'minor dispositions' happened in relation to that of data: As the literary field kept forming, and as the outlines of the literary grew firmer, these dispositions underwent a form of 'minoritizing' that notably parallels that of data: their flagging as 'sub-literary' and data's flagging as non-literary happened in the same cultural and discursive ecosystem.

In the following, I will explore these processes in three large sections. I will first position abolitionism in relationship to two genealogical strands: As a politico-textual struggle that emphatically drew on and was organized around data practices, and as a politico-textual hotbed that helped incubate the three literary dispositions mentioned above. As I will thus explain in more detail, representing slavery constituted an enormous problem for the young republic for a number of different reasons, and data practices promised to help solve this problem of representation in politically potent ways. At the same time, focusing on the cultural presence of these data practices also perspectivizes the particular liminality of these three literary dispositions—sentimental writing, seriality, and a proto-realist documentary drive—that all shaped abolitionist texts. Typically coded as 'minor,' as failing or flouting the times' emerging and refining standards of literariness, these dispositions were crucial to these texts' social resonance and political effect. In a second section, I will then read *American Slavery as It Is*, the "abolitionist database" (Garvey) *par excellence*, to demonstrate how its project of giving the "facts and testimony" of slavery (Weld et al. iii) relied on the symbolic form of data generally and on the denarrativization and massification of information in particular, tying the book to abolitionism's data practices while retaining a textual form. As I will also show, the book is invested in the relationship between data and narrative, and in what it imagines its audience to do with dataesque, factual information it offers: It uses the terminology of legal discourse to interpellate its readers into a politically active, data-parsing reading position, and to sidestep a potentially difficult discussion of its own relationship to the social institution of literature. In this chapter's third, final section, I will then look at Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The book, coming on the heels of her immensely successful novel and advertised as a source book of sorts, is part of a veritable universe of 'Tomitudes,' tie-ins to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, that often operated by denarrativizing the original novel, reducing it to a collection of interchangeable, sentimentalist displays of pain. Like the Tomitudes do generally, *Key* thus spotlights a paratactic quality in the novel that can be read variously as sentimental formulaicness, serial repetition, a foregrounding of referential realism, or a dataesque moment of redundancy: a massification of similar data points that is fundamental to how data operates.

Together, these three sections argue that the debate around slavery, marked by a crisis of representation, facilitated a particular textual practice that is inherently tied to both the representational affordances and aspirations of the data form and to this form's liminality with narrative. The triggering crisis of representation crystallized around the question of abolition, but it had more fundamental roots in the emerging structures of the republican public sphere. Americans on both sides of the question regarded this crisis in the representation of slavery as a crisis of narrative and of literature, and they mobilized a data-driven rhetoric of factuality in response to it. However, in doing so, they did not simply strive to replace one symbolic logic, narrative, or one representational institution, literature, by another: data. Instead, the antebellum recourse to the representational prowess of the symbolic form of data turns on a double operation, a dialectic of denarrativization and renarrativization, a conversion of experience into dataesque facts that readers are expected to individually piece together again and invest with coherence and meaning. In operating this model, these texts develop, engage in, and practice with their readers a decidedly modern, active, individualizing, republican textual practice.

4.2 Abolitionism, Politics, and Data

The struggle over slavery and its abolition constitutes a most consequential politico-textual nexus in US culture. It was a veritable engine of textual productivity and innovation, and a context in which the social and political salience of the written and spoken word in general, and of print culture in particular, was tested, celebrated, and figured out. In this, it offered an outlet for and gave shape to a fundamental and widespread "common preoccupation" in nineteenth-century America "with the authority of writing," as Michael T. Gilmore notes. This preoccupation dates back to the American Revolution, but it resurfaces in this heated moment of national controversy. Tracing commonalities between Harriet Beecher Stowe's sentimentalism and the writings of the canonized romantic writers, Gilmore claims that nineteenth-century writers across the board

> were haunted by the previous century's seemingly effortless integration of "poetry and policy," or language and action. Their native literary forebears were not first and foremost specialized craftsmen of the word, distilling their thoughts into high art for a select audience, but statesmen and ministers who used writing, quite literally, to transform the world. For these predecessors, the discursive was not an end in itself but a tool to accomplish other objectives. Stowe and the romantics never ceased sparring with this notion of literary efficacy.
>
> [...] [T]he Revolutionary era's understanding of utterance did not simply disappear with the new century. It went into temporary dormancy and then was revitalized in the crucible of the slavery crisis. (58-59)

The genealogy Gilmore sketches here is of triple import for this study: It highlights a particular focal interest—the socio-political functions of text—that also fed into, and can thus help illuminate, American culture's efforts of separating data and literature into distinct cultural enterprises. It, moreover, serves as a reminder that the literary field—this, in hindsight, orderly-seeming assemblage of discourses and practices, modes and genres—was still emerging at the time, and that it was born from a much more messy intermingling of all manner of (written) discourse, including the data practices and dataesque forms that are central to this study. It, lastly, points to "linguistic agency" as a desire that runs through American culture across the presumed boundaries of period, genre, mode, medium, or symbolic form, and that can thus help perspectivize these.

As much as the debate about slavery, in Gilmore's view, allowed for a particular model of textual efficacy to (re)surface, it also tested it: The struggle over the abolition of slavery could provide an arena in which to live out these “[dormant]” desires for textual efficacy precisely because it simultaneously marked a crisis of representation, a starkly visible failure of words to effect social change or even just to facilitate an understanding across the cultural fissures between North and South. This is where Gilmore’s observations dovetail with Browne’s, cited above. If, as Browne notes, “Northerners” were wondering, “How can slavery be more forcefully represented?” this vision of ‘forceful representation’ speaks at once to the desire for linguistic agency and to the difficulty of achieving it. Over half a century into independence, neither side had so far managed to convince the other of its view of the ‘peculiar institution.’ In nineteenth-century America, slavery thus emerged as a limit case for representation, and the difficulty of “forcefully represent[ing]” it was perceived as a problem casting doubt on representation generally, and on both the (emerging) institution of literature in its modern sense and on the symbolic form of narrative in particular.

Two additional points are then worth making in this preliminary overview: One is that data’s promise to represent reality without resorting to narrative necessarily gained additional currency in light of this sense of crisis. In fact, both abolitionists and pro-slavery advocates turned to data to make their representations of the presumed reality of slavery more “forceful” by opting out of the narrative form, by marshaling heaps of factual information, data, or by deploying “facts” in what I will call a ‘data rhetoric’ below (cf. page 235). Secondly, as Gilmore notes, the nineteenth-century desire for linguistic agency stands in marked opposition to another model of literariness in which literary value resides precisely in art’s aesthetic autonomy, its detachment from society and politics.[162] This model, already existing at the time and exerting influence, became more dominant later on. Gilmore invokes this strand by pointing to the “antithetical [...] modernist credo” by W. H. Auden, “poetry makes nothing happen.” The diminishment as artistically minor of commercially successful and politically influential modes, such as sentimentalism or serially produced writing, are aligned with this vision of the aesthetic as ‘autonomous,’ i.e. as marked by a detachment from the social.

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162 Gilmore’s observations here jibe with Arac’s notion of “national narrative” as a register of ‘literary’ production that was not yet ‘autonomous’ in its references to a literary field but derived its standing and function from its concern with “‘policy’” or “action.”

In the following I will continue to use Gilmore's interest in "linguistic agency" to focus on these two developments, devoting one subsection to each genealogical strand: the rise of data practices and of a data rhetoric as seen against the backdrop of a newly (re-)forming public sphere of antebellum America, and this rise's relationship to literary modalities that were defined, or defined themselves, in contrast to an emerging, solidifying sense of literature as primarily an aesthetic, autonomous, and apolitical project.

4.2.1 Representing Slavery

Gilmore offers several examples of 'impactful' eighteenth-century speech that served as templates for nineteenth-century writers' ambitions to be similarly consequential. Identifying "two especially influential models of linguistic agency: the republican or libertarian, and the Biblical," he points to the Declaration of Independence as an example that epitomizes text's potential for undeniable social and political effects (59). However, these enshrined models of linguistic agency had operated in a radically different setting: They were typically examples of elite writing manifesting in a comparatively homogeneous context still marked by relative textual scarcity: comparatively limited circulation and comparatively small, coherent communities of producers and consumers.[163] In contrast, any nineteenth-century 'renaissance' of "literary efficacy" now had to happen under the drastically different conditions of mass print and of a diverse, pluralistic, and rapidly expanding public sphere.

Indeed, countless scholars have worked to highlight just how transformative the changes to the American national public sphere were during the middle of the nineteenth century.[164] The rapid geographic expansion of the ever-vaster young nation met with complementary movements of a massive urbanization and of powerful communicative integration, while an unparalleled explosion of textuality was facilitated by new printing technologies and was powered along by the commercial mass-distribution of printed matter. The middle of the 1800s thus saw the emergence of the specific configuration of public sphere, print culture, publishing, and the literary market—the nexus of textuality, of market, and of the emerging national public sphere that Trish Loughran, playing on Theodor W. Adorno's term, calls a "[then-]new kind of culture industry" (360). In Loughran's telling, this newly emerging mass public sphere, crucial to the formation of US national identity and a distinctly American flavor of modernity, is marked by a poignant moment of self-reflexivity. "In the 1830s and 1840s," she claims, "the expanding republic had finally been introduced to itself for the very first time, and that meeting sets the stage for the great socio-literary problems of the 1850s" (361).

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[163] The "relative" is key here: As Michael Warner points out in his study on *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America*, the print culture of the early republican years was already prolific, making the "letters of the republic" even before print's massification, a crucial element in the advent of American modernity. Warner writes: While "few still have unqualified faith in the period's claims to reason and progress [...] almost all consider it to have been a period that brought about the styles of rationalization and progressive thinking that we call modernity. And almost all would consider the letters of the republic to have played a role in the emergence of that modernity" (ix).

[164] It bears noting that the debate around abolitionism was a decidedly transnational one and that abolitionist texts frequently hail their readers as mem-

Loughran's phrasing of how a "new kind of culture industry" introduced the "expanding republic" to itself is particularly felicitous in the context of this chapter for two reasons. The notion of a "culture industry" spotlights the ambivalences around this fusion of commercialization and mass production on the one side, and culture on the (presumably) other. Put in dialog with Gilmore's "linguistic agency," it means that the (re)surfacing desire for textual signification to be impactful now imagines impact not simply as being historically consequential but as also expressed in the ability to touch masses of readers, and to have commercial success. Loughran's phrasing, secondly, highlights the importance of these two, essentially contradictory movements: in nineteenth-century America, an expansion, which includes a pluralization and diversification of the public sphere and a massification of potentially incompatible pieces of information, coincided with a need and a desire to represent this pluralizing social body to itself, which demands a certain degree of communicative homogenization and coherence. Indeed, the nineteenth century saw the rise of a plurality of technologies of information distribution and representation required for imagining (and governing) the na-

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bers of a transnational public sphere. I will nevertheless continue to use the term national public sphere in the following, partly because this study is focused on developments in the US and partly because the phrase has come to refer to the Habermasian '(bürgerliche) Öffentlichkeit' even when the focus is not limited to one nation.

tion ‘at scale’ and for processing the rapid dynamization, integration and pluralization of society.

The symbolic form of data was a crucial technological and cultural factor in—and provided an important conceptual framework to—this: Data, discontinuous, reduced, aggregate information, promised to be able to imagine and manage enormous geographical and cultural expanses. Its narratively depleted form allowed for information to travel between vastly different interpretive communities. And despite (or because of) the symbolic form’s totalizing desire to capture all, data is a form ever incomplete and thus uniquely suited to navigate and manage a cultural moment in which improved and improving, powerfully integrating networks of communication cast a stark light on the fragmentary, contradictory, and always incompletely understood quality of the social body and of experience more generally.

4.2.1.1 Crises of Representation

In this vast, fragmented, and expanding republican public sphere, a sphere that was simultaneously marked by ever-widening textual circulation and an increasing communicative integration, slavery emerged as a politico-textual representational problem in terms that are strikingly familiar to us today. To nineteenth-century Americans, the inability to forge a national consensus on slavery, not just on whether to abolish it but also on what “it is”—a benign missionary project, a form of organizing labor, the ultimate commodification of human beings, a sin, etc.—presented a vexing problem. Both groups formed “interpretive communities” (Fish, *Is There*), in which very different, in parts incompatible, sets of truths were held to be self-evident, and these communities, similar to the ‘filter bubbles’ prominently discussed in the second decade of the two-thousands, made it difficult to agree even on what slavery ‘is.’[165]

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[165] The notion of the ‘filter bubble’ was brought into broad circulation by Eli Pariser’s *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding From You*. Interest in the concept soared after the 2016 election of Donald Trump as US President. It originally refers to search algorithms’ ability to find ‘relevant’ information based on previous internet activity. This leads to a clustering, in which groups of users have vastly diverging experiences of the internet, of the news, and, by extension, of reality, and in which these groups’ preconceived notions get reinforced rather than questioned or dialogued with one another. Following the election and the impression that coastal elites had failed to even see the support Trump was enjoying with groups of voters in

The resulting sense of a crisis of representation has a number of different facets.

In the most basic terms, slavery registered a representational crisis because it constituted a knowledge problem for many of the producers and recipients of abolitionist texts. Few Northerners had firsthand experience with the system of slavery, and those who had traveled to the Southern States could not be sure if they had really fully seen or understood the system in its entirety, or if they had just barely scratched the surface of the lived (white) experience of slavery.[166] After all, there was an acute sense that slavery was not just a way of organizing labor, but that it was intertwined with an entire way of life, a culture, a mind set, and that these depths were difficult to meaningfully penetrate. In addition, many aspects of slavery were simply difficult to know at scale, thus poignantly concretizing the more general problem of the evolving national, republican public sphere: the problem of knowing social totality. In result, many debates between North and South turned on the question of whether individual experiences of slavery, relayed by or to Northerners, correctly captured the essence or entirety of the system or whether they were isolated cases, aberrations, outliers—whether they, in other words, were representative of the whole.

These problems of 'knowability' cast light on a more fundamental problem: the difficulty of adequately portraying one faction's worldview within another. In Stephen Browne's words, abolitionists felt that they were faced with "interpretive barriers, perceived spaces between Northern audiences and Southern practices that undermined the North's ability to 'read' slavery." Noticing these barriers, they hoped that these "might be overcome by deploying a new mode of representing slavery" (280), and this new mode took its inspiration from the data practices of statistics. As Patricia Cline Cohen explains, from the early nineteenth century on statistics had been invested with the hope of "[eliminating] factionalism and [allowing] government to rule in the best interest of the public"

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the 'heartland,' the term morphed into a chiffre for overlapping social fissures around political affiliation, class, education, region, or sociotope and the inability to transgress these fissures through communication.

[166] Obviously this does not even begin to address the difficulty of representing the black experience of slavery to a white audience; I will return to this point repeatedly throughout the chapter, but the main focus of this chapter will be on the intersection of white informational and publishing practices, literature, and data.

(55). They were invested with this hope because they split up the representation of experience into two presumably unrelated layers: an objective, irrefutable reality of facts, stripped of all their meaning-making context, bare information, raw data, on the one side; and the kind of contextual, narrative information that gave these facts their meanings and determined the possible and necessary consequences on the other. For the two primary texts discussed in this chapter, as for many other texts at the time, this distinction is crucial to how they imagine their own workings. For the young nation, denarrativizing experience, stripping it of meaningful context, and renarrativizing it were thus particularly important symbolic operations.

4.2.1.2 "As It Is": A Data Rhetoric of Fact

It is against this backdrop that nineteenth-century American's political discussions in general and abolitionist discourse in particular turn to the category of 'fact.' In the complex, dynamic textual landscape of the young republic's public sphere, and in face of the crises of representation that mark it, invoking facts promises a particularly salient form of textual expression.[167] As I will show in more detail below, 'fact' here refers to an informational entity that is not simply defined by its referential relationship to reality, as it is often thought to be, but by its (emphatically nonnarrative) form. As much as we have come to identify 'fact' with 'reality,' the US antebellum's infatuation with the term underscores how much the term denotes not a particular, ontologically distinct kind of information (the truthful kind) but a particular form of capturing / storing / transmitting information (the decontextualized, morselized form).

In consequence, 'facts,' as abolitionist discourse deploys them, frequently correspond to what we would call data today. They are denarrativized pieces of experience, reduced either to quantifiable, discrete, abstract information or to mere narratoids, short segments of experience stripped of their context and of the webs of causal interconnectedness they originally came in and that gave them rich meaning. In the data imaginary, the concomitant depletion of meaning is (at first glance somewhat paradoxically) imagined to heighten the value of the resulting product. After all, reducing experience to facts presumably makes it more mobile. Because of their reduced size, facts use less bandwidth than rich narratives do, and they can travel greater distances more easily.[168] More importantly even, facts can traverse social, cultural, and political fault lines because they come with less evaluative baggage of context and meaning. Lastly, such dataesque facts can be more easily compared: due to the elimination of meaningful, individual context, facts are somewhat uniform pieces of information, which not only makes it easier to compare multiple instances but which also is the precondition for aggregation and mutual verification. Precisely because facts are imagined as schematic, dry information, the true informational value here lies not in the remarkable, extraordinary case, the outlier, but in the accumulated masses of individual pieces of information that all say more or less the same thing. Facts, in this logic, become unassailable if there are more, quasi-identical instances, and the drab uniformity of information thus comes to vouch for its veracity. All of these qualities mark facts, the category that the discourse around slavery returns to again and again, as tied to the form of data.

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[167] For a discussion of the resulting, larger "mania for facts," cf. Shi (66).

The resulting data rhetoric of abolitionist (and, frequently, of proslavery) discourse thus imagines that experience can be split in two: a specific and individual, contextual component of narrative, and a factual, dry, reduced and decontextualized component of data. The resulting rhetoric insists on the irrefutability of “a mass of incontrovertible facts” (Birney 124), which it imagines as argumentatively superior to narrative. More fundamentally, it turns on two crucial operations of conversion: the denarrativization of experience on the one hand, and its renarrativization on the other. After all, the masses of facts that are being volleyed at the recipient in abolitionist debate are always imagined to have a meaningful impact only after they have been made (narrative) sense of. As I will show in my two readings below, this impact is typically tied to a process of narrativization in which the dataesque facts are used to project entire storyworlds of causally interrelated events. By so emphatically turning on the double move of denarrativization and renarrativization, the data rhetoric of the slavery debates emphatically dwells in the liminal gray zones between the symbolic form of data and that of narrative, mapping its visions of social impact—the resolution of the

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168 The ‘telegraph style’ that some scholars relate variously to the rise of realism or to the objectivity norm in journalism, quite literally has to do with the limited bandwidth of telegraph lines. With a relatively high cost for each unit of information, telegraphic information had to be stripped down to the necessary bits.

slavery question—as stemming from the traveling back and forth between dataesque and narrative forms of expression.

4.2.1.3 Four Censuses: Slavery, Data, and the Social Experience at Scale

As much as slavery might have invited data arguments due to its unique commodification of human lives,[169] the presence of data arguments in debates about slavery has thus more to do with the discovery, not least by abolitionists, of how politically powerful a data argument can be. These data arguments typically invoke a data collection of some sort, but they turn on a dialectic between data and narrative. In the following pages, I will briefly discuss four examples, all taking as their point of departure a census of sorts, to illustrate and expand this claim.

A particularly early case illustrating the salience of data arguments in abolitionist discourse can be found in Great Britain. In the early nineteenth century, after the abolition of slave trade in 1807, much of the British debate on slavery and emancipation focused on the Caribbean and on the impact the end of slave trade would have on slavery as such. In face of public debate the British government thus sought to "create an accurate means of assessing the real impact of the abolition of the slave trade." The result of this effort, after "bitter parliamentary debate" was a registration, or, census, of all Caribbean slaves. As the *Oxford Companion to Black British History* explains, "[t]hough the data were slow to accumulate, after 1820 indisputable demographic evidence began to emerge about the exact impact of abolition." In a prototypical move, British abolitionists then "used the access to raw demographic data" to shift the debate "from the impressionistic and hearsay to the specific and indisputable" as they pushed on for emancipation ("Emancipation"). It is this use of data to first of all establish the "indisputable" existence of slavery and to thus facilitate, in a second step, public debate, that is characteristic of the abolitionist movement's argumentative use of data.

[169] The commercial nature of the slave trade, and the treatment of slaves as commodities that could be inventoried, adds to the ties between slavery and data. At the same time, the slave trade's data footprint contrasts with the silencing of black voices enforced by slavery and in its aftermath. As an archive, the data traces of slavery come with their own distortions and aphasias, and it remains to be seen if and how new technologies will be able to make this archive speak. Cf. Lauren F. Klein for an attempt to wrestle the presence of a single, muted black voice from the "archival silence" about James Heming in the letters of Thomas Jefferson (662).

The US-American debate on abolition mirrored and massively expanded this pattern, and the decennial US census, mandated by the constitution, provided an important basis for this. Representing slavery from the beginning on,[170] the census' relevance for debates on slavery peaked with the 1840 and the 1850 iteration. The 1840 census "included for the first time an attempt to enumerate the mentally diseased and the mentally defective," and the resulting numbers were seized upon as an "apparently incontrovertible source" by pro-slavery activists (Deutsch 471).[171] Comparing the numbers for black and white persons with mental illnesses in the slave-holding and the free states, they claimed that "the rate of mental disease and defect among free Negroes was about 11 times higher than it was among enslaved Negroes" (472). This claim's power stemmed from the way in which it weaponized seemingly non-partisan, objective data to make a highly partisan case: Abolitionists, as Albert Deutsch summarizes their response, initially "were too stunned to launch an inquiry into the truth of the census returns" (474). Notably, their reply, when it came, engaged in a veritable data argument: Edward Jarvis, one of the co-founders of the American Statistical Association, had realized that in many cases the numbers of mentally ill blacks were higher than those for blacks overall (Jarvis 7).[172] Attempts to have the census nullified or corrected, made by John Quincy Adams and others, were "frustrated in both houses" of Congress (Deutsch 478), letting this data debate over slavery continue for years after.

[170] The early iterations, going back to an initiative by James Madison, projected onto the population a taxonomy that grouped people into either of "five categories—free white males over and under the age of sixteen, free white females, free blacks, and slaves" (Cohen 45). By the 1820s, however, (and thus curiously in sync with developments in Britain), "the growing complexity of the economy, along with changing conceptions of the public good and a rising interest in statistics as a scientific tool, encouraged an expansion of the census enumeration data" (Schulten 8), and this increasing availability of raw data facilitated its use in political debate. As Schulten puts it, increasingly detailed statistics in which "sectional divisions" were "revealed—or even sought," fueled the rise of a new political rhetoric.

[171] Stowe's *Key* explicitly mentions this debate, cf. note 210 on page 285.

[172] Jarvis's text is one of the few to use the term "data," for example when claiming that "more accurate data" has shown the "national return to fall short of the truth" (11). For a detailed explanation of how the census' mistakes came about, most likely as a result of a poorly chosen layout of report cards, cf. Krieger (1093).

The 1850 US census was then even more politicized than the previous one. With conflict intensifying between North and South over the future status of the annexed Mexican territory, the proposed questions already were particularly loaded: The Southern states feared that the data gathered would make it possible to project the "demographic shift of the slave population over time" (Schulten 9), and, more intriguingly, that any detailed inquiry into information on slaves—name, place of birth, and number of children—"challenged [the slaves'] status as aggregate property" (10). Unsurprisingly, the US Senate thus scaled back the proposed questions, but the resulting data was still extraordinarily rich.[173] In an early case of 'open data,' these results of the 1850 census then circulated globally, reaching Europe where statistical cartography, the visualization of data by converting it into maps, had "proliferated" for quite some time.[174] "German cartographer August Petermann [used] the opportunity to translate this mountain of data into visual language. In 1855 Petermann published the first atlas in his series that showcased exploration and geographic research from around the world" (Schulten 13-14). It was Petermann who made the first attempt to visualize and "map slavery based on the census." The result was a deeply political translation of data into visual form, a transformation that showed that "the 'life germ' in the United States [...] lay within non-slaveholding areas," not least because that was were intellectual culture, "libraries, universities, and circulation of newspapers and magazines" thrived (14).[175] Even though Petermann's most lasting achievement was his visualization of data as maps, his more narrative explanation of the data and his instructions on how to read the tables of data he provided, exemplify the appeal of a data rhetoric. The power of his depictions, be they visual or textual, stems from how they integrate with the underlying data. Interweaving visual maps, narrative text, and tables of data, they make an impression because they transparently showcase the seamless conversion of one into the other.

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[173] However, as Susan Schulten points out, "the 1850 census schedules were still far more extensive than their predecessors" even though Southerners had been "able to limit the information collected about slavery. Before the counting had even begun, the census was mired in sectional politics" (Schulten 10).

[174] As Schulten elaborates in much more depth, statistical cartography blossomed in Europe but was not matched by similar, organized efforts on the other side of the Atlantic. Nevertheless, "the geopolitical upheavals of the decade produced a wave of political maps in the North, many of which used data from the Seventh Census to make a case against the spread of slavery" and the "the territorial changes" in the context of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill "were uniquely suited to cartographic illustration" (14). In the wake of the failed revolution of 1848, liberal cartographers emigrated to the United States and boosted statistical cartography and the (political) uses of data visualization there just in time for the run-up to the Civil War (20).

[175] Petermann's publication consisted of five maps and text spanning fifteen pages. These pages contain numerous tables of data, but they also feature a

The 1850 Census also formed the basis for another abolitionist data project, Hinton Helper's 1857 *The Impending Crisis of the South: How to Meet It*, to some "probably the most influential antislavery work of nonfiction" (Boorstin 171).[176] Using not maps but heaps of 'raw' data in tabular and in list form, the book aims to show that slavery economically hogties the South and that, in effect, "the South as a whole, and especially the free white laborer, was being impoverished by slavery." According to Daniel Boorstin, the book "created a stir even greater than that of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* five years before." Perhaps in part because it was written by a Southerner, it rejected slavery while emphatically opting out of the moral or "humanitarian" concerns of Northern abolitionist discourse. It did so by associating these concerns with the symbolic form of narrative:

> [I]t has been no part of my purpose to cast unmerited opprobrium upon slaveholders, or to display any special friendliness or sympathy for the blacks. I have considered my subject more particularly with reference to

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running explanatory text. The assertion that "[d]er eigentliche Lebenskeim in den Vereinigten Staaten aber liegt in den Nicht-Sklaven-Staaten" (133) is taken from this more narrative text.

[176] This use of statistics was by no means limited to abolitionists. As Joan D. Hedrick points out, George Fitzhugh, "the most outspoken defender of southern slavery cited the same statistics on the working class that Karl Marx used in *Capital*; but while Marx used the figures to show the oppression of wage slavery, [Fitzhugh] used them to argue that black slavery was more humanitarian than capitalism" (243). Notably, in his argument, Fitzhugh relates his project in regard to the "newly-coined word Sociology" (v), and claims that sociology had been founded in Europe to talk about a "disease, long lurking in the system of free society" which is foreign to the slave-owning South. For a recent incarnation of a data argument relativizing slavery, cf. Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman's 1974 *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery*; for a critical reply, Herbert George's 1975 *Slavery and the Numbers Game: A Critique of* Time on the Cross.

> its economic aspects as regards the whites—not with reference, except in a very slight degree, to its humanitarian or religious aspects. To the latter side of the question, Northern writers have already done full and timely justice. The genius of the North has also most ably and eloquently discussed the subject in the form of novels. Yankee wives have written the most popular anti-slavery literature of the day. Against this I have nothing to say; it is all well enough for women to give the fictions of slavery; men should give the facts. (v-vi)

Obviously, these lines do intriguing and complex work, and they do so by asserting and layering five binaries: North and South, black and white, female and male, moral and economic, and narrative and data. These binaries are given additional force by how Helper uses long, syntactically more complex sentences to describe the narrative side of the argument while addressing the other side with a crisp, laconic "men should give the facts." Perhaps most stunning, however, is his sarcasm when he aligns the "full justice" that the "genius of the North" has "eloquently" done to the subject with the "Yankee wives [who] have written the most popular anti-slavery literature of the day." In his jab against the economic market success, the popularity, of books written by women, and in disparaging the narrative form by disparaging (this version of) literature, he not only uncomfortably echoes Nathaniel Hawthorne's famous complaint about a mob of scribbling women.[177] More importantly, he emphatically situates his data-driven argument against slavery inside a very different debate about the social and political functions of narrative, about the social and political valency of literature, and about what constitutes literary success or failure in this newly emerging commercial public sphere.

Notably, using statistical data for arguments about slavery was not just a white practice, as this third example shows: a series in Thomas Hamilton's *Anglo-African Magazine*. This series, titled "Statistical View of the Colored Population of the United States—From 1790 to 1850," had several argumentative and political goals, among them refuting the pro-slavery myth "that the black man, because he is black, is fitted to undergo severe labor under a tropical sun" (100); transposing an argument from the British 1820 census of slaves to US soil: the question of whether the abolition of slave trade would eventually end the system of slavery entirely (36); or relating the increase of the slave population in

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177 In a letter to his publisher, Hawthorne lamented that "America [was] now given over to a d—d mob of scribbling women (qtd. in Mott, *Golden* 122).

the South to the "semi barbarous state" of the Southern society in which "all females, as soon as they arrive at the child-bearing age, are rendered productive by the lust, or interest of their owners" (143). Throughout, the series mixes tables of statistical information, sometimes directly inserted into the paragraphs, sometimes spanning a page of its own, with long-form explanatory text to produce a 'guided reading' of statistics. The purpose of the series, then, is not so much to convince the readers, many of whom will likely hold the same views as the author to begin with. Rather, it is to repeat these views in a different form, to ground them in statistical material, and to performatively, repetitively reassert the link between facts and their interpretation. Hamilton summarizes this operation succinctly: "Fortunately, we have within the United States, data which will adequately prove what we assert" (98).

There is, however, another rationale behind the "Statistical View" having to do with the *Anglo-African Magazine*'s overall purpose and connecting it to my earlier remarks on the emerging, modern, republican public sphere and its self-reflexive quality: Published for "political advocacy and cultural self-representation" (Weir and Lorang), the magazine described its mission as aiming to give the black community "a press of our own." As Hamilton explained, "[w]e need to know something else of ourselves through the press than the every-day statements made up to suit the feelings of the base or the interests of our opponents" (qtd. in Weir and Lorang). In part, the "Statistical View" served exactly this purpose: to offer its black readers definitive knowledge "of ourselves," knowledge that was fortified by way of statistical tables and rows of numbers.

A very similar use of data by black abolitionists can finally be seen in the work of the Colored National Conventions.[178] Aiming to advance free blacks, to build networks of support, and to consolidate and integrate a free black presence in a republic "yet in its infancy" (Colored National Convention 18),[179] the 1855 Colored National Convention in

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[178] For yet another, later effort to enlist data in a project of black liberation, cf. "[W. E. B.] Du Bois's data portraits, a set of richly colored diagrams that represented an early and impressive example of data visualization" (Bering-Porter 262),

[179] The activist work at these black national conventions has recently been made widely available by the Colored Conventions digital humanities project. On the work these conventions did apart from white abolitionist efforts, e.g. in terms of community building, cf. Casey's "A Committee of the Whole."

Philadelphia, for example, considered statistics an important tool, both practically and discursively. It thus appointed a committee on statistics (9) whose members sought to publish the "copious statistics in relation to the colored population, free and slave [...] as a reply to the many slanders recently heaped upon us" (34). Being able to produce and distribute statistical knowledge about the black community is part of a representational struggle against "many slanders." At least as importantly, however, it also constitutes a means to self-reflexively affirm the black community and to hail it as one of the many "statistical communities" that made up the young republic (Boorstin 166). The appeal to reliable numbers, to the 'facts' created by way of data collection, here allowed activists such as Hamilton to assert a particular civic presence, to introduce, in Loughran's words, a black public to itself.

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In all all of these exemplary cases, the appeal to data is expressive of a particular set of representational desires—and of their crisis: All of the texts referenced here aim to have tangible, social and political effects, they strive for "linguistic agency," and they acknowledge that these effects cannot be generated simply by telling a story of what the world is like. Advocating a view of reality that they realize as contested, they turn to the symbolic form of data. However, they do not simply offer tabular information. Instead, they showcase to their readers the dual process of denarrativizing and renarrativizing reality. In doing so they recognize that narrative is an imperfect form when it comes to imagining communities of the size and diversity of the young United States. In its place, they evoke a representational regime that resides in the liminal space between narrative and data: they engage the public sphere by turning data into narrative, and by doing so conspicuously—so as to instruct their readers in how to do just that. The result is a pluralistic, individual and individualizing, modern, republican textual practice at the core of which lies the operative fantasy that experience can be split up into facts and their interpretation: with the data of reality that is objective, irrefutable, raw, and that all citizens, North and South ought to be able to agree on on one side; and with the narratives based on this data, the realm of meaning, consequence, and evaluation that is subject to debate on the other.

4.2.2 Fringe Literariness and the Abolitionist Data Imaginary

The sense that the narrative form is limited in its political impact and in its possibilities to effect social change, so immensely productive for the emergence of public, political uses of statistics, also filtered into debates about literariness. These debates often sprang forth from a recognition of the difficulties of representing slavery, as my reading of *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* below shows. In the following pages, I will trace an additional genealogy by focusing on three different modal dispositions, sentimentalism, seriality, and realism. All three are intertwined with the abolitionist project of representing slavery, at once furthering this project and being shaped by it; all three are marked by a diminishment of narrativity that aligns them with data; all three have hosted debates about the social impact of literature; and all three have typically been coded as minor or peripheral vis-a-vis the emerging, dominant notions of literariness at the time—not least because of their attenuation of narrativity.

These three dispositions inform my discussion of the two main primary texts below. After all, *American Slavery* has repeatedly been read as a sentimental text, and *Key* invokes the sentimental mode for itself but also relies on *Uncle Tom's Cabin*'s sentimental qualities to situate its own textual work. Similarly, the very manifest dataesque structures of both *American Slavery* and *Key* resonate with forms of serial writing rising to prominence in the highly dynamic mass print market of the US antebellum, and this meshing of data and seriality, both marked by an attenuation of narrativity and by a repetitive massification of similar, paradigmatically interchangeable elements, can thus help illuminate both. Lastly, both texts express a desire to make documenting reality a literary project, and both signal realness by favoring massified data over narrative. This modus operandi aligns them with the realist mode that is still frequently seen as a postbellum literary development but that increasing numbers of scholars trace to earlier literary developments in the middle of the nineteenth century. Notably, many of the academic debates of these three dispositions evoke a text that thus enjoys a very present absence in this subsection: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a book that stands in-between my main primary texts, having “crystallized” out of *American Slavery* and being explained by *Key*; a book that was an unprecedented publishing success, that was praised, at the time, not only for its wide circulation or its impact, but for its literary qualities[180]; a book that has been rigorously sidelined and purged from the canon, and the re-canonization of which has spearheaded a most fundamental rethinking of the politics of canonization, and of literary studies generally.

As will become clearer in the following pages, these three dispositions, standing as it were on the fringes of the literary in different ways, are all marked by qualities that I read as similarly dataesque. As much as we are used to thinking about sentimentalism, seriality, and realism as operating on independent axes, focusing on the symbolic form of data—and on how the corralling of this symbolic form in only some, presumably 'nonliterary' textual practices accompanied the emergence of a particular modern notion of literariness during romanticism—thus indicates a set of consonances in the genealogies of all three. In this view, the disparagement as nonliterary of sentimental fiction and of serially produced literature, for example, look surprisingly similar, and are similarly implicated in the evolution of a romantic understanding of literature into a modernist one; similarly, the ways in which serially produced texts integrate into their readers' reality are surprisingly akin to those of realist texts; and so on. Ultimately, what this perspective underscores, then, is how arbitrary and questionable a number of set demarcations *inside* the literary field are, distinctions between presumably different modes or genres, or distinctions between different periods.

Notably, these three fringe dispositions have hosted rich and vigorous debates not only about the outlines of the literary but also about the relationship between literature and politics, and the operative divisions, by period, by mode, or by symbolic form are accordingly also politically charged. For example, as Suzanne Clark points out, the demarcation and disparagement of sentimentalism and the concomitant rise of modernism, constituted a veritable

> machine for cultural loss of memory. Consider the forgetfulness about Emma Goldman's presence in the modernist community. Her [...] writing does not come into consideration as material for a course on modernist literature, on the assumption which has come to prevail that the revolution of poetic language had nothing to do with a revolution in

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[180] Harriet Beecher Stowe "purportedly claimed to have kept *American Slavery as It I*s [...] in her word basket by day, and slept with it under her pillow by night, till its facts crystallized into Uncle Tom" (DeLombard 155). On the "chorus of extravagant praise" that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* received, cf. Nichols (328). Cf. also Briggs (98-100).

> human society, that anarchic poetics could be separated from the advocacy of anarchy, or indeed from any attempt to influence an audience. (6)

Similarly, Christopher Hager and Cody Marrs poignantly remark:

> It is clear what interests would have been served by imagining continuity from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to *The Jungle*, and the economic history of the United States gives us one explanation for what has kept those novels distant. It is also clear that such a continuity makes sense in American literary history. Both narratives are instantiations of a particular vein of the realist novel in which veracity promotes social uplift and even political transformation. Although they were composed more than half a century apart, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Jungle* share crucial generic features and, in certain respects, occupy the same line of development—a kind of realist subset—in literary history. (280)

This subsection will accordingly use this study's interest in the nineteenth century's emerging data imaginary to triangulate some of the "[shared] crucial generic features" that, I contend, cut across period, style, or mode. These features, that can be variously seen as sentimental, as a "realist subset," or as a form of seriality, are rarely cobbled together in such a fashion. In fact, it is worth pointing out that Hager and Marrs turn to, and thus validate one category (that of 'genre') in their effort to question another (that of periodization). In their argument, a generic quality, realism, transgresses boundaries of period. Clarks argument, in turn, is synchronous, but it entails a similar trade-off. Here, the category of temporality is upheld to destabilize a generic pigeonholing of Goldman's writings as political rather than poetic. Bringing in the liminality of the dataesque, a quality that in itself has been relegated to the fringes of the literary, promises to not trade one set of boundaries for another.

4.2.2.1 Sentimentalism

Some of American Studies' most vigorous and consequential debates about the possibilities and limitations of literature, and about what is to be included in the category of the 'literary,' or excluded from it, have turned on conflicting assessments of sentimentalism. Valuing the "cultural work" (Tompkins) of sentimental texts facilitated the feminist revision of the literary canon and the reintroduction of sentimental 'women's writing,' but it also helped pave the way for a more general critique of the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that shape the literary field.[181] Suzanne Clark, for example, attributes sentimental writings' exclusion from the canon to a clustering together of femininity, mass culture, and social effect during modernism, and the following dismissal of all three from the realm of the literary: "The term sentimental," she asserts, "makes a shorthand for everything modernism would exclude, the other of its literary/nonliterary dualism" (9). Modernism's disparagement of sentimentalism thus "reversed the increasing influence of women's writing," and "it gendered mass culture, identifying woman with the mass and regarding its productions as 'kitsch,' as 'camp,' and, like advertising, as objects of critical disdain" (1; 4).[182] As much as these exclusionary processes were epitomized by (certain brands of) modernism, they take their beginnings in the antebellum struggles over who gets to successfully write into the public sphere, and in which modes, media, and symbolic forms the literary can properly enter the public sphere.

Notably, then, critiques of the presumed literary shortcomings of the sentimental mode often accentuate 'defects' that align with a denarrativization that I read as dataesque in the context of this study, which aligns the sidelining of sentimentalism—if not causally then certainly structurally—with the exclusion of data from the emerging notions of literariness. Complaints that sentimental texts use formulaic tropes to trigger a recall of conventionalized emotional responses, for example, focus on a lack of originality, but in doing so they imagine a database of paradigmatically interchangeable elements from which the writer chooses. Similarly, if Stephen Browne laments the sentimentalism of *American Slavery* by claiming that it "tells a story [...] but conveys no

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181 For a concise discussion of these self-reflexive discussions, cf. Elizabeth Maddock Dillon. Dillon describes how, at the end of the 20th century, "a burgeoning field of scholarship has focused on reevaluating sentimental writing," and she notes "a critical divide between the evaluative standards of an aesthetic criticism—in which sentimental literature retains an aura of failure—and the standards of cultural studies—in which, by virtue of its pervasiveness and popularity in the mid-nineteenth century, sentimental literature is a wellspring of cultural meaning and value" (496).

182 Clark references Jennifer Wicke's *Advertising Fictions* here, a book that asserts that the rise of advertising was "concurrent" with the establishment of the novel. In the resulting "dialectic between advertising and the novel," advertising, a form of "mass communication," served as a foil to literariness in ways that are structurally similar to the role that data played in defining the literary (Wicke 1).

ostensible plot" (287) or that completing the book feels less like having "read this text" and more like "[having] been subjected to it" (289), he dismisses the book's lack of narrativity and aligns this lack with its sentimentalism. Indeed, even the more favorable discussions of the sentimental mode focus on this emphatically denarrativized quality: In Karen Halttunen's discussion of "novels, plays, and poems," sentimentalism "offered tableau after tableau of pitiful suffering," and such isolated, fragmented impressions then "took precedence over narrative coherence." For her, this observation jibes with how sentimentalism "emphasized emotional response rather than rational judgment as the proper criterion for evaluation" (307),[183] a charge that fits the frequent, contemporaneous allegation that sentimentalism was "sensationalist" (313), or that it provided a voyeuristic "spectacle of suffering" (327).[184] Notably all of these allegations share an important aspect: They posit a relationship between narrative, understood as a string of events joined by causal relations, and "rational judgment," and they identify sentimentalism with a kind of narrative depletion that, in this view, is meant to trigger raw affect that would otherwise be contained and tempered by narrative contextualization. It is this conventional association, then, that leads Browne and Halttunen to identify the denarrativized style of, say, *American Slavery* not with an encyclopedic but with a sentimental modus operandi.

The sense that sentimentalism taps into nonnarrative textual dynamics then also informs discussions of sentimentalism's "linguistic agency" (Gilmore). These discussions testify to both the energy that had to be expended to displace sentimentalism to the fringes of the literary, an operation facilitated by its narratively depleted qualities, and to the longstanding moral fantasies about the power of literature that underwrite this displacement and that are, in turn, powered by it. As Shirley Samuels poignantly observes, the standard allegation against sentimentalism—that it is all (interior, private) feeling and no (exterior, political) action—is a striking one: It "both indicts [sentimentalists] for their powerlessness and accuses them of not exercising power." This results in a conflicting accusation, a "double sense of power and powerlessness," in which the presumably impotent mode of sentimental writing is imagined as having a *theoretical*, potential power that it fails to wield (3).[185] It is this failure to exert literary power—power that then is paradoxically ascribed to less popular, aesthetically more demanding modes by imagining true literary power to only work on a smaller elite audience and in far more abstract, aesthetic terms, dissociated from broader society—that has frequently justified sentimentalism's exclusion and disparagement. Correspondingly, it is the reassertion of the mode's textual power, under the chiffre of its "cultural work," that typically facilitates revisions of the (modernist) canon, and has done so from the 1980 onward. As Dillon puts it, the "vital and growing body of scholarship" reappraising sentimentalism and the body of work disparaging it "thus might be seen as itself emblematic of a critical divide between the evaluative standards of an aesthetic criticism—in which sentimental literature retains an aura of failure—and the standards of cultural studies—in which, by virtue of its pervasiveness and popularity in the mid-nineteenth century, sentimental literature is a wellspring of cultural meaning and value" (496). In other words, criticism here and continuing until today reproduces a cultural split, which begins in the 1850s and deepens during modernism. In this split, the sentimental gets aligned with widespread, popular success, but also with social and cultural effects, a matter more of sociological interest; the less 'popular,' non-sentimental modes, in turn, are elevated to a smaller cultural subset of literariness—a process of sorting that notably overlays the sorting of data and literature.

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[183] Cf. also Browne, according to whom American Slavery's effect "depends not on conclusions reached or actions prompted, but on images rendered and emotions exacted" (289).

[184] Notably, 'spectacle' is frequently also associated with a backgrounding of narrativity (cf. Gunning 66; Kanzler 150).

4.2.2.2 Seriality

Many aspects from the above discussion of sentimentalism then also feature in an otherwise very different register of thinking about narrative depletion, literariness, popularity, and textual efficacy: seriality. Like sentimentalism, seriality is marked by an inherent diminution of narrativity, and it, too, relies on conventionalized tropes, "stock figures and genre formulas," that are at times seen as "evidence of banal production and consumption" (Stein 57). As with sentimentalism, these perceived shortcomings have allowed for the sidelining of serial texts as popular culture undeserving of critical appreciation, but they have also invited revisionary scholarship to reevaluate these texts for their cultural work and political effects.

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[185] Cf. O'Connell on how the "discussion of sentimental literature [asserts] its impotence as a generic attribute" (17). Note also how this impotence is framed as a such only because there is an assumption of a potential power, and how this potential power here coincides with the potential narrativity of tableaux and vignettes.

The serial production of a text inherently attenuates its narrativity: As Susan Belasco Smith remarks in her discussion of the serialized original version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, serial production leads to a narrative structure that "contrasts with the progressive linearity of a novel envisioned, written, and published as a whole text" (71). "The serial form," she adds, "discourages a straightforward, linear story line; instead, it invites the creation of scenes, tableaux, and parallel organizations of plot" (72). After all, "the serial novelist, [...] [is] more concerned with scenes that [have] to work as independent installments than with the direct linkage of plot lines" (74).[186] Traced here to a very different source, the textual features Smith sees as flowing from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*'s originally serial form closely correspond to Halttunen's description of how, in sentimentalism, the presentation of individual tableaux takes "precedence over narrative coherence" (307). Often written under tight time constraints and for readers who might not have read the previous installment, serial texts, rather than constituting a single, long-running yet tightly constructed narrative chain, tend to form somewhat loosely organized conglomerates of often repetitive scenes and conventional characters.

In this aggregate form, serially produced texts can retain unique affordances for linguistic agency precisely because they are not composed as preconceived, rounded, and coherent narratives but are typically still under construction while publication and reception are already in progress. As Daniel Stein points out: "[S]erial narratives are well-equipped to involve authors and readers in political debates that are anchored in the depicted storyworld but ultimately encourage readers 'to turn outward' to the world at large" (64-65).[187] Indeed, because the "consumption of serial texts [is] structured by shared rhythms of reading, waiting, and often actively responding to the ongoing narrative," readers feel that they are "part of a readership that extend[s] beyond their immediate social environment and constitute[s] an interpretive community" (67). In this view, the absence of signification in the gaps in-between episodes forms an interface at which the text can mesh with the readers' social reality, so that the broken, fragmented, narratively diminished form invites political investments. However, as Stein also remarks, the lack of narrative closure and, at times, of narrative progression can also be seen as hindering political action. This results in an "inherent tension" in which serial texts, on the one hand, aim "at immediate and fundamental political action (and, thus, closure)" while requiring "an open-ended narrative trajectory that gains traction from the very denial—or at least continuing delay—of story closure" (62). This leaves serially produced texts subject to a "double sense of power and powerlessness" similar to the one that Samuels diagnoses for sentimental texts (3). Again, the texts' reduced narrativity leads to a particular potential for political and social efficacy, and again the narrative 'shortcomings' are faulted for keeping this potential from coming to fruition.

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[186] As Smith points out, the novel somewhat self-reflexively comments on itself as a disorderly collection rather than a well-designed coherent narrative by applauding the "motley assemblage" in Tom's cabin: Here, "the slaves spend the evening gossiping, exchanging news, singing, and, of course, telling stories. Stowe explains that 'Various exhortations, or relations of experience, followed, and intermingled with the singing' (1). In this black slaves' parlor, there is no orderly progression of events and stories but rather a collage of diverse fragments of experience and ideas" (76-77). The effect is heightened here by the individual installments' publication in the *National Era*, where they indeed sat side by side with other "stories," "gossiping," and "news" (cf. 79).

At the same time, the failure to present a "well-wrought" narrative arc has been used to sideline serial fiction as failing the standards of literariness, and to pigeonhole, for example, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, "for most of the twentieth century[,] as a book for children, a piece of propaganda, or a sentimental woman's novel" (S. B. Smith 69).[188] As Smith's casual reference to Cleanth Brooks already suggests, however, the dismissal of seriality as insufficiently artistic is, again, a historically contingent one. Umberto Eco accordingly explains: It is part of a "modern aesthetics and a modern theory of art," with 'modern' here referring to sensibilities "born with Mannerism, developed through Romanticism, and provocatively restated by the early-twentieth-century avant-gardes" (161). The concept of originality, with which seriality most fundamentally clashes, in this view is "a contemporary one, born with Romanticism" but gaining traction in the decades after, peaking perhaps in modernism and finding its most emphatic support and theorization in the New Criticism (178). In Eco's view it comes to the fore in response to modernization, to the mechanization and industrialization of crafts, and the massification of cultural production.

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[187] Cf. also, in a related argument, Smith: "These and other letters suggest the intimacy of serialized publication; as in no other literary form, literature became a part of the day-to-day lives of readers" (71).

[188] This pigeonholing is in contrast to early responses to the book that praised it for its literary qualities. For a brief selection of those, cf. Nichols (228-29). In a contemporaneous review, Briggs acknowledges the lack of "the delicacies of language which impart so great a charm to the writings of Irving and Hawthorne," of the "descriptions of scenery such as abound in the romances of Cooper," and the "bewildering sensuousness of *Typee* Melville," but still considers the book "[i]n all the great requisites of a romance [as] decidedly superior to any other production of an American pen" and insists that no book has "finer delineations of character, a wider scope of observation, a more purely American spirit, and a more vigorous narrative faculty" (102).

Indeed, Eco's 1985 defense of seriality is particularly productive in this context not only for how he historicizes the displacement of seriality to the sidelines of the literary but because he does so in a framework that meshes particularly well with this study's interest in the nineteenth-century's data imaginary. Eco, too, notes that seriality backgrounds narrativity, leaving the audience to "derive pleasure from the non-story." Rather than enjoying hearing something new, recipients of a serial text derive pleasure from how the text activates and plays on their database of previous knowledge: "readers continuously recover, point by point, what they already know, and what they want to know again" (164). In Eco's framework, the pleasure here partly has to do with forms of self-affirmation and distinction—readers enjoy the flattering realization that the text plays on what he calls their own, private "encyclopedia" of cultural and intertextual knowledge, and they enjoy how that makes them "part of the treasury of the collective imagination" (170).

But in Eco's understanding, art also fulfills a much more basic, older function of storing and transmitting experience, and here the formulaicness and repetition of serial art serves the purposes of improving retention and transmission. Accordingly, there are rich overtones of Claude Shannon's information theory, one of the cornerstones of modern data technologies, when Eco observes that "[t]he modern criterion for recognizing [...] artistic value was *novelty*, high information" and that, in consequence, "[t]he pleasurable repetition of an already-known pattern was considered, by modem theories of art, typical of Crafts—not of Art—and of industry" (161). Seriality, repetition with a difference, in this logic, constitutes a form of "redundancy" (162), a condition that im-proves a transmission's quality at the cost of its information density, thus reducing a text's 'bandwidth.' This view corresponds to the representational logic of data, in which the massification of similar, mutually corroborative data points indicates truth, but it also evokes older poetics that viewed art as producing 'tokens' of an ideal 'type.' As Eco points out, "classical aesthetics was not so anxious for innovation at any cost: on the contrary, it frequently appreciated as 'beautiful' the good tokens of an everlasting type" (162).

In this view, then, a serially produced text like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* may certainly 'fail' by standards that understand originality and innovation as the primary markers of literariness.[189] Eco's focus on literature's ability to transmit experience, inflected through an information theory framework as it is, however, highlights another aspect. The novel that Stowe variously referred to as a "series of sketches" or a "series of articles" indeed keeps making the same points again and again (S. B. Smith 73; Hedrick 218), but this ensures that they do come across. In this sense, the book plays on more than one database at once. Readers certainly recognize in a given installment of the novel the repetition of elements from a previous one. The novel's reliance on more broadly cultural stereotypes, formulaic plot developments and characters, secondly plays on and affirms the readers' genre knowledge. Lastly, the novel repeats many of the "facts" that constituted abolitionist lore, and its original, serial publication in the *National Era*, where the individual installments sat side by side with news reports on slavery, amplified this latter aspect. As Smith points out, the serialized novel's factual "local paratexts" (Looby qtd. in Stein 64), news reports, letters, and other nonfiction formats, bore "more than a passing resemblance" to later plot and character developments (S. B. Smith 79). As I will discuss in more detail below, *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, offering a database of factual incidents of slavery, and claiming to form a serial, intertextual relationship with the novel, broadens and deepens this dynamic considerably.

4.2.2.3 Realism

Within this survey of literary dispositions shaping abolitionism's discussion of literariness vis-a-vis data, the place of realism is, at first glance, doubly dubious. After all, as Augusta Rohrbach points out, “most literary histories of the United States” claim that “realism emerged after the Civil War,” and that it only “became a full-fledged genre by the 1880s” (xiii), a periodization that implicitly or explicitly enlists the Civil War as a prime cause for the emergence of this literary style, and that is invested more in demarcating literary styles, or in magnifying historical ruptures, than in tracing cultural continuities. Realism, moreover, does not necessarily come to mind as having been cast as ‘minor,’ dismissed as insufficiently literary in the way that serial writing and sentimentalism have been. On second thought, however, realism fits exceedingly well into this survey: After all, the realist movement did pit itself against an established sense of literariness, thus emphatically claiming for itself a fringe position between literature and social documentation. It did so not least by favoring the inclusion of ‘facts,’ at times masses of facts, over narrative coherence, and by justifying this preference for documentation via its social and political ambitions. And as for realism’s presumed postwar quality, a still growing body of scholarly work is questioning the realist periodization narrative in which a clean break between romanticism and realism conveniently lines up with the national cataclysm of the Civil War, claiming instead that the US-American brand of realism evolved from a plurality of literary, social, cultural, and media developments in the first half and middle of the nineteenth century, where its early, ‘proto-realist’ stirrings thus coincide with the sorting-out of the cultural and representational functions of literature and data, respectively.

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[189] Cf. also Smith's observation of the "repetitions and parallels in scenes and plots as well as in detailed descriptions of settings and in lengthy depictions of clothing and other physical attribute of characters" (74).

A range of these aspects is addressed by Christopher Hager and Cody Marrs, who question the periodizing rupture narrative of 1865 and accordingly highlight the “heterogeneous trajectories” along which realism developed in the US. They identify abolitionism as one such trajectory that, in itself, consists of different strands. Acknowledging that they are making a counter-intuitive claim in terms of mode and genre, they elevate Stowe’s “famously sentimental novel,” *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, to “a central position in a decades-long story, stretching well beyond the Civil War in both directions, about the rise of literary realism.” As they see it, the novel, along with the two primary texts this chapter focuses on, is part of a longer cultural development in which

> anti- and pro-slavery writers progressively [upped] the ante on claims to veracity—from Theodore Dwight Weld’s *American Slavery As It Is*, to

> southern "anti-Tom" novels [...], to Stowe's own rejoinder, *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which compiled documentation to defend her novel as "a mosaic of facts." In this context, realism was becoming both a generic feature of the novel and an imperative for discursive credibility in the debate over slavery. Slave narratives had been struggling for that credibility from the genre's inception. Formerly enslaved autobiographers' widely studied efforts to authenticate their stories are also essential in accounting for how and why certain standards of verisimilitude took shape in later nineteenth-century literature. (268)

Hager and Marrs' account is instructive for this chapter not only because it illuminates realism's beginnings in the abolitionist movement, or because it situates *American Slavery*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and *Key* in a shared developmental strand in the evolution of realism. More importantly, in their reference to an outbidding of writers "progressively upping the ante" and to slave narratives,[190] Hager and Marrs point to two important, intertwining discursive developments here: One is a dynamic inside the literary market in which offering 'reality' to readers sells books; the other is the success of the slave narrative, a genre that reaches outside of literary narrative in an effort to advance social and political change.

The former development is discussed by David Shi, who, quoting from a contemporary 1858 statement by Charles Godfrey Leland, takes note of the antebellum's "rapturous devotion to 'literal *facts*'" (3) as a crucial factor in the emergence of realism in the United States. Acknowledging that "[m]ost accounts of nineteenth-century cultural life claim that a realistic consciousness first surfaced at the end of the Civil War," he instead "trace[s] its roots to the 1850s" from when on a "rage for 'facts' and the appeal of mimetic representation grew in scope and intensity" (10). In Shi's wide-angle view—he sets out to trace the emergence of realism in "natural and social sciences, philosophy, literature, art, and architecture" and to embrace its "ambiguity and inconsistent application" (4)—this development is intimately tied to a particular social and political program and rotates around a firm "moral axis" (6). More than by commonalities in style, realists were united in their “ambitious ideal of a democratic culture” that positioned them in opposition to established forms of literature. Regardless of their differences, “[w]hat all realists held in common was a language of rebellion against the genteel elite governing American taste” (6). However, their social and political program “raised a daunting conceptual dilemma: how could the writer, artist, or architect presume to represent the ‘real world’ in all its polyglot variety?” (7). It is here that, in Shi’s telling, the emergence of realism dovetails with the “rapturous devotion to ‘literal *facts*’”: As an “intellectual stance and cultural style” marked by “an uncritical equation of the visible and tangible with the true” (4; 5), realism devalued interpretation and explanation, operations located firmly in the domain of narrative, in favor of the raw data of experience. “The facts,” in this frame of mind, “spoke for themselves” (5), and the emerging realism latched on to this idea, presenting to its readers facts rather than explanations.

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[190] Note how this dynamic of outbidding resonates with the concept of "serial outbidding" (Jahn-Sudmann and Kelleter) in which the texts of a series refer to each other and try to outdo each other. Stowe's paratextual references to *American Slavery* and *Key*'s attempts to offer even more "reality" than the novel show that even within this one strand such an intertextual dynamic of serial outbidding exists.

In many ways, then, Rohrbach’s discussion of the relationship between realism and abolitionism builds on these points and addresses more explicitly the second genealogical strand proposed by Hager and Marrs above. She, too, claims that abolitionist and realist writers are “[u]nited by an ethos rather than a literary aesthetic,” and that these “practitioners—no matter how distinct in other ways—share the belief that literature has a social purpose. They view the pen as, perhaps, not mightier than the sword, but certainly as a powerful instrument capable of transforming the hearts and minds of readers” (xiv; xv). Part of this self-confidence, in her telling, stems from (Garrisonian) abolitionism’s integration with a market of abolitionist commodities, material and textual. This market integrated the literary with the everyday practices of readers, inviting them, for example, to buy “free labor shoes,” and it thus lent a particular, practical realness to abolitionist texts.

More importantly, abolitionism was a marketplace in which authors could successfully sell books, and this marketplace was marked by a particular skepticism toward fiction. Reading William Lloyd Garrison’s *The Liberator*, she notes, among many similar advertisements, a particularly “startling ad for ‘a history’ by Charles Emory Stevens,” in which

> the reader is told in bold, all caps agate type, “NO ANTI-SLAVERY NOVELS NEEDED, When the Truth is So Much Stronger and Stranger than Fiction.” This ad, like the one printed below, plays on a value judgement that fiction is sensationalistic and without inherent merit, a view that had long troubled American cultural commentators on both

> sides of the color line. Fiction—made popular by its sentimental and sensationalistic plots of gothic novels—is supplanted by this new form of prose heralded as "stronger and stranger than fiction." (21)

Whether the desire for "truth [...] stronger and stranger than fiction" here was a backlash to the success of Gothic novels, as Rohrbach suggests, or whether it was a more complex response to a confluence of developments—among them: an intensification and widening of the literary market, an influx of new classes of readers, rising success by female authors, and a more long-running desire for "linguistic agency," to name just some—the debate around slavery provided a crucial frame for the disparagement of fiction and the recognition of nonfiction. Notably, the underlying distinction was, in many genres, a matter not merely of degrees of referentiality but of varying degrees of narrativity. It is this constellation that determines abolitionism's contribution to a realist style in American literature.

The role of abolitionism for the emergence of realism is discussed in more depth by Barbara Foley. Interested in the "uses of the documentary mode in black literature,"[191] she notes that African American attempts to document reality were always confronted with two distinct challenges: Similar to the events that white authors considered too traumatic to represent in narrative—the Holocaust, My Lai, Hiroshima, to name just three—"reality" in the US "has always had a certain horrific quality." Accordingly, "black writers—and [...] a number of white writers who [were] particularly aware of American racism" at once felt compelled to relay the experience of slavery and racism while they were simultaneously acutely, painfully aware of the difficulty of doing so within the existing frameworks of literature (390).[192] This observation adds another layer to the abolitionist crisis of representation, and it adds to the conspicuous skepticism toward fiction: pointing to, or insisting on, the inadequacy of literature (or poetry, or narrative)[193] to represent the horrors of reality now becomes part of a rhetoric acknowledging these horrors. Both primary texts discussed below explain their decision to go beyond a more regular, narrative form by pointing to this impasse in which the decision not to tell a full story becomes an ethical choice.

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[191] The overall thrust of Foley's project is to trace the origins of the documentary novel, a "literary phenomenon [presumably] peculiar to the post-World War II period," and to thus identify an even longer trajectory, connecting African American writings in the antebellum through the rise of realism to the twentieth-century documentary mode. Stepping further back for a moment, it seems that, for every period of American literature, we literary studies scholars can make the forever new, 'surprising' discovery that literature was more realist, or more documentary, or more invested in 'factually' documenting reality, than one would commonly think. If nothing else, this suggests how porous the border is that presumably demarcates the literary, how much the othering of fact discourses as non-literary requires a constant effort at boundary drawing, and how much we are, wittingly or not, often implicated in the reaffirmation of this boundary so that the presence of the documentary dimension of literature continues to forever startle us.

Secondly, descriptions of the black experience by authors of color (but also, albeit to a lesser extent, by white authors) frequently met with the "disbelief of a predominantly white audience." In face of such disbelief, these authors turned to supplementary authentication outside of the narrative proper, either by including "assurances of referential accuracy in the paratexts" (392, cf. also 394), prefaces by respected white members of the public testifying to the truthfulness of the narrative; or by heightening their rhetoric of fact and by turning to the symbolic form of data, authentication-by-denarrativization.[194] Both strategies assume that narrative alone is not successfully signaling realness and that it needs supplementary support. The former strategy rests on the personal credibility of the witnesses it enlists. The latter, formal one, in turn, assumes a correlation between fiction, artifice, and the polished narrative form, so that an attenuation of the text's narrativity can end up bolstering its documentary appeals. Abolitionist texts, Foley accordingly explains, thus often employed an "episodic and rambling form in which the narrator, alternately a participant in, and spectator of, the social situation, piles up a series of vignettes that together constitute an indictment of slavery"

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[192] Additionally, female authors faced an additional difficulty in relaying the horrors of slavery due to a number of "conventional proscriptions on women's speech. A true woman would not acknowledge that slaves were stripped and beaten, that bondwomen were the sexual as well as the legal slaves of their masters, that slave masters fathered children of all colors" (Hedrick 231).

[193] Cf. Stamelman on Auschwitz as announcing "the death-knell of narrative as it has traditionally been known" (269). Cf. esp. his note 14 on page 278 for a list of such proclamations. Theodor W. Adorno's famous dictum of the impossibility of poetry after Auschwitz needs no reference.

[194] Notably, "[t]he presumed historical truth of such documents also was—and is—central to their aesthetic effect: the explicit and concrete detail that produces powerful denunciation in autobiographical discourse would easily seem crude sensationalism in the realm of fiction" (392).

(394). Both the "series" and the "[piling] up" here suggest a logic of massification, whereas the "vignettes" underscore that the individual installments are static, unconnected, denarrativized. Foley offers as an example Martin Delany's *Blake; or, The Huts of America*, a book that "has been [...] criticized for the disjunctiveness of its story line" but one that, "like the slave narratives on which it is based, [...] places greater importance on the completeness of its indictment of slavery than on the plausibility of its story line" (395). It is also true for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, whose "sprawling plot [...] gains a certain effectiveness from its power to indict the slave system on many fronts" (394). Clearly, an "episodic" form, and a "[piling] up" of a "series of vignettes" correspond to those formal features that I identify as dataesque throughout this study.

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In result, then, the presence of dataesque textual features permeates these three literary dispositions and cuts across demarcations such as mode, genre, or period, suggesting that the negotiation of the role of data vis-a-vis literature underwrites all three, sentimentalism, seriality, and realism. Focalizing this negotiation highlights the shared representational desires and the political concerns that regulate and motivate abolitionist textual production in the antebellum as well as the organizational and representational challenges that the crisis of the representation of slavery entailed.

The closing paragraph of Stephen Browne's discussion of American Slavery indeed exemplifies the difficulty of phrasing the textual dynamics at stake in one register alone: "Weld's is a deeply ironic text," he concludes, "its legacy at once compelling and ambivalent. In striving to be authentic, it appealed to sentiment alone; its facts, far from standing by themselves, were real only as they were sentimentalized" (291). What Browne notes here as a failure of sorts, an ambivalence, in the book, is precisely the dynamism I am after in this section: In all their insistence to deliver nothing but the raw data of experience, facts, many abolitionist texts, and quite a number of pro-slavery ones, dwelt not on one single symbolic form, data instead of narrative, or one 'genre' of textuality alone, documentary reportage instead of fictional literature. Instead they dwelt on the exchanges between the two, inviting their readers, again and again, to engage in the modern, republican reading practice they advertised, a reading practice that traffics *between* data and narrative.

4.3 A Is for “Arbitrary Power, Cruelty of”: *American Slavery as It Is*

In a series of publications, media historian Ellen Gruber Garvey has prominently positioned the 1839 compendium *American Slavery as It Is* as an early abolitionist data effort, indicative of more fundamental social and media transformations. Specifically, she looks at “nineteenth-century abolitionists and the databases they created” in the context of a larger discussion of new media practices, emerging in the antebellum, that all flowed from the massification and cheapening of print and that all depended on (at times literally) cutting up and morselizing printed matter so as to repurpose, recontextualize, reorganize, find, retrieve and reuse information more effectively. The example of such media change that she discusses most extensively is the scrapbook,[195] but she also lists a number of other, related practices and institutions:

> Scrapbooks, newspaper collections, clipping services, library cataloging systems, filing systems, and even pigeonhole desks embody overlapping modes of thinking about information, how to concentrate it, and how to find it again. [...] Each technology understands that pieces of information [...] are detachable, movable, and classifiable under multiple headings. Although the clipping scrapbook seems solidly grounded in the materiality of paper and paste, it leads toward the understanding that items can be detached from their original sources. (*Writing* 235)

In Garvey’s view, these practices all “understand the press as a source for sortable, extractable data” (235), which, for her, positions *American Slavery* at the confluence of two developmental strands. She notes on the one hand, like this study has above, the data affinity of abolitionism generally, the abolitionists’ “discover[y] that compiling concrete facts and statistics [...] was far more effective in turning public opinion than appeals to sentiment” (“Facts” 90); and, on the other, the discovery that the slaveholders’ own textual production could be enlisted to speak against them: “William Lloyd Garrison’s Boston-based paper the *Liberator* [...] reprinted ads for runaway slaves and slave auctions in a section called “Slavery Record.” [...] Soon, other journals took up the practice of using such “self-subverting quotation[s]” (“Nineteenth” 358). Seen thus, *American Slavery* indeed combines these two practices not least by way of a sheer massification: The book, too, reproduced ads and other material furnished by slaveholders, but by collecting masses of such materials and by organizing it topically, it "shifted from treating these ads as anecdotes to reinterpreting them as data about the brutality of slavery" (358).

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[195] As Garvey explains, scrapbooking was an immensely popular practice at the time. Readers would cut out newspapers snippets, collect them in a book, and often amend them with content of their own. So popular was the practice at the time that Samuel Clemens obtained a patent for a self-adhesive scrapbook, marketed as *Mark Twain’s Adhesive Scrap Book*.

In the following, I will further explore the database quality of *American Slavery as It Is*. Specifically, I will show how the book's structure and its use of indexes corresponds to the data-driven information work it imagines its readers to do. I will, secondly, discuss how *American Slavery* celebrates its own ability to amass information and to give "proofs innumerable" (9), imagining its own textual work as markedly different from the textual work of literature, while simultaneously registering a creeping concern about the devaluation of individual accounts of slavery this entails. Finally, I will show how the book imagines readerly activity, cognitive and emotional, as an indispensable facet of its own presentation of datafied information. *American Slavery*, I will thus argue, attempts to resolve the crisis in representing slavery that abolitionists encountered by evoking a dialectic of denarrativization and renarrativization: The book presents masses of morselized, normalized, denarrativized content, data, and it asks its readers to renarrativize this content in deeply politicizing ways. It motivates this operation by evoking the metaphorical framework of a court of law in which it presents evidence. This not only invests the book with a source of "linguistic agency." It also allows it to mostly sidestep questions as to the relationship between its own textual project and more literary abolitionist endeavors.

4.3.1 A Database: Structure and Indexes

Compiled by the famous Northern abolitionist Theodore Dwight Weld, his wife, Angelina Grimké, and her sister, Sarah Grimké, *American Slavery* is indeed a fascinating and unusual book. Most of its content consists of material written by others that is compiled for the occasion: personal narratives of 'eyewitnesses' of slavery; a variety of different texts from other sources such as legal documents, public statements, sermons, etc.; and large quantities of newspaper clippings—all organized as a vast collation that bills itself as a collection of individual "facts" about slavery. It was produced partly by soliciting first-hand accounts of slavery through a lithographed mass mailing (cf. Loughran 355) and partly by collecting material already in circulation and repurposing it for the abolitionist cause. As for the latter, Weld and the Grimké sisters went through twenty-thousand newspapers to identify material that they would then process editorially,[196] anonymize it where necessary to protect the identity of the slaves mentioned or of the informant, reduce it to the relevant information, and include it in the volume. The result is a massive collection of morselized materials, "facts" in the terminology of the book, organized for random rather than linear access and offering not a coherent account of what slavery is like but an impressionistic, fragmented, oftentimes repetitive, mass of documentary evidence that seems tiring and overwhelming, and that is exhausting to read linearly for an extended period of time.

4.3.1.1 A Database Structure

The book's overall structure speaks to its database quality, not least in how it displays the difficulty of meaningfully organizing the enormous masses of materials it is designed to hold (cf. Fig. 18 below). Its body consists of two large parts of roughly equal size (B, C), one more strictly data-driven part of "facts and testimony" (B) and a more openly editorializing part called "Objections Considered" (C), both spanning roughly one hundred pages each. These two parts are framed by paratextual sections, four in the beginning—an "Advertisement to the Reader," a "Note," a Table of Contents, and an "Introduction" (A)—and one in the end: a detailed and complex index (D). The first half of the body, in turn, consists of topically organized sections on "Privations of the Slaves" and "Punishments" interspersed with three sets of "Personal Narratives." The two topically organized sections contain subsections most of which are composed of tabular lists of 'facts' and slightly more long-form narratoids. The second half of the body is less rigidly organized, held together primarily by the impersonal editorial voice that walks through seven typical arguments by proponents of slavery ("objections" against the abolitionist argument), exemplarily refuting each, typically by walking the reader through cascades of evidence, decontextualized, highly repetitive bits of material from a variety of sources only loosely strung together by an argumentative thread. Both of these major sections B and C are similar in that their basic operating principle is the presentation of enormous amounts of material, but the emphasis is different, as is also

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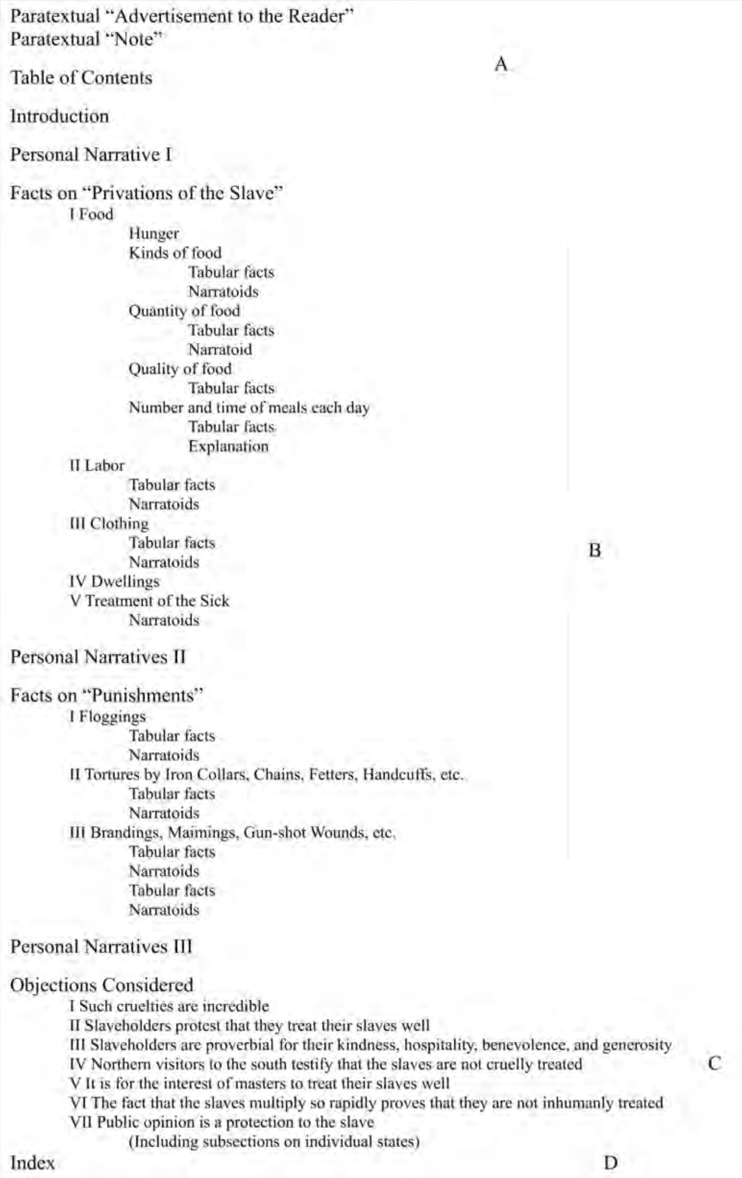
[196] On the book's production process, cf. Abzug (134-35).



Paratextual "Advertisement to the Reader"
Paratextual "Note"

Table of Contents

Introduction

Personal Narrative I

Facts on "Privations of the Slave"

- I Food
  - Hunger
  - Kinds of food
    - Tabular facts
    - Narratoids
  - Quantity of food
    - Tabular facts
    - Narratoid
  - Quality of food
    - Tabular facts
  - Number and time of meals each day
    - Tabular facts
    - Explanation
- II Labor
  - Tabular facts
  - Narratoids
- III Clothing
  - Tabular facts
  - Narratoids
- IV Dwellings
- V Treatment of the Sick
  - Narratoids

Personal Narratives II

Facts on "Punishments"

- I Floggings
  - Tabular facts
  - Narratoids
- II Tortures by Iron Collars, Chains, Fetters, Handcuffs, etc.
  - Tabular facts
  - Narratoids
- III Brandings, Maimings, Gun-shot Wounds, etc.
  - Tabular facts
  - Narratoids
  - Tabular facts
  - Narratoids

Personal Narratives III

Objections Considered

- I Such cruelties are incredible
- II Slaveholders protest that they treat their slaves well
- III Slaveholders are proverbial for their kindness, hospitality, benevolence, and generosity
- IV Northern visitors to the south testify that the slaves are not cruelly treated
- V It is for the interest of masters to treat their slaves well
- VI The fact that the slaves multiply so rapidly proves that they are not inhumanly treated
- VII Public opinion is a protection to the slave
  - (Including subsections on individual states)

Index

Fig. 18: Structure of American Slavery

shown in the different degrees of organizational depth. The first part, especially so in its two collections on “Privations” and “Punishments,” employs more of a tree-like structure, whereas the second part on “Objections Considered” is more linear.

American Slavery’s dataesque quality does not result from it presenting numerical, tabular data, as, for example, Hinton Helper’s *Impending Crisis of the South* does (cf. page 240 above). Instead, the book constitutes a database in how it harvests narratives for the ‘factual’ information they contain and organizes them so as to highlight the resulting pieces of information as comparable, mutually corroborating data points of sorts. Several aspects are important here: A reduction of the narrative to its salient point(s), which typically entails decontextualizing these points by omitting much of the surrounding material; an amassing of similar, and similarly treated, fragments of narrative, which further accentuates the informational value of the piece at stake because the reader now recognizes similar, recurring facts in different narratives; and a more broadly argumentative context that again highlights the aspect for which the fragment has been selected. Together, these steps turn individual narratives into a more uniform shape of similar, paradigmatically replaceable, abstract data points: Nothing would change if more fragments were to be added, or existing ones removed or reshuffled.

Implementing this logic, *American Slavery* contains outside material in different stages of narrative depletion, often but not always sorted into distinct sections: The “Personal Narratives” are full-fledged, biographical stories of an individual’s encounters with slavery. They, too, are obviously focused on the book’s topic, but they are self-contained, complete, longer sequences of events connected by causality. They derive their narrativity not just from their length but from a distinct narratorial presence that colors the text, from characters, atmosphere, setting, etc. The second group consists of heavily reduced narratoids, short segments, typically a few sentences or a few paragraphs in length. These texts, often opening with a short description of the author, are much more focused and reduced to only answer to one, narrow question. For example, in the section on “III Clothing”:

> Rev. H. Lyman, late pastor of the Free Presbyterian Church, in Buffalo, N. Y., in describing a tour down and up the Mississippi river in the winter of 1832-3, says, “At the wood yards where the boats stop, it is not uncommon to see female slaves employed in carrying wood. Their dress which was quite uniform was provided without any reference to comfort.

> They had no covering for their heads ; the stuff which constituted the outer garment was sackcloth, similar to that in which brown domestic goods are done up. It was then December, and I thought that in such a dress, and being as they were, without stockings, they must suffer from the cold." (42)

This vignette inside the quotation marks clearly is a narrative: it has a setting, a homodiegetic narrator, and it contains several events, but it is simultaneously reduced to the parts that contain relevant information on the clothing of slaves. Encountering this vignette in a context of 'information on clothing,' this is what the reader looks for in the paragraph, which, together with the narrative depletion of the story, backgrounds all non-informational aspects.[197] Lastly, there are even more condensed pieces, often consisting only of a single sentence, that are mostly being used in the tabular lists of facts. From the same section, these for example simply say: "The slaves, *naked* and starved, often fall victims to the inclemencies of weather" or "The apparel of the slaves is of the coarsest sort and *exceedingly deficient* in quantity. I have been on many plantations, where children of eight and ten years old were in a state of *perfect nudity*. Slaves are *in general wretchedly clad*" (40). As the examples show, these different degrees of narrative depletion do not form categorically distinct classes but indicate a continuum.

Presenting its material in various stages of narrative depletion, *American Slavery* indeed demonstrates the process of turning narrative into data, of extracting 'factual' information from experience. This effect is heightened by the tabular presentation of some of the highly condensed pieces (cf. Fig. 19). Even without resorting to numerical data or statistics, these tabular sections forcefully project a data aesthetic, a regime of highly generalizable knowledge organized in an—at least in theory—infinitely expendable form.

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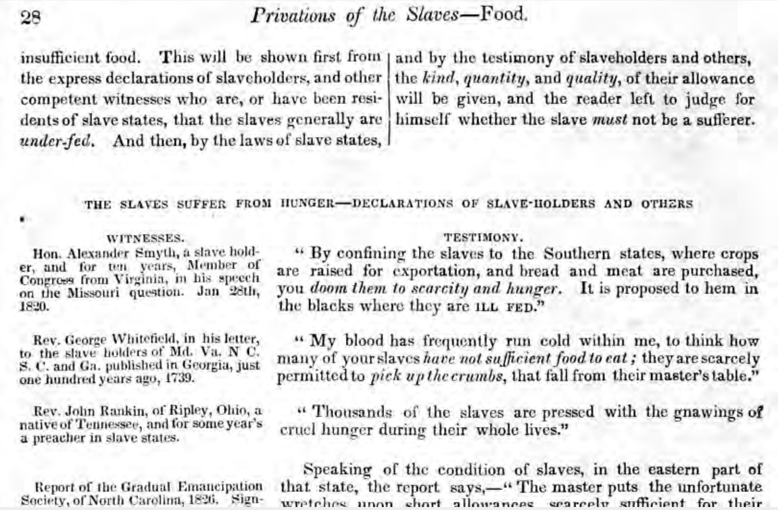
[197] This effect is heightened even more when the book is accessed via either of its indexes. This is also how *American Slavery* invites a particular, 'superficial' skim reading: Looking, for example, for "slave burned alive" in the story changes the reading process into a reading for information, a refocusing of the eye to disregard plot and suspense and instead focus on a single item.



28 *Privations of the Slaves*—Food.

insufficient food. This will be shown first from the express declarations of slaveholders, and other competent witnesses who are, or have been residents of slave states, that the slaves generally are *under-fed*. And then, by the laws of slave states, and by the testimony of slaveholders and others, the *kind*, *quantity*, and *quality*, of their allowance will be given, and the reader left to judge for himself whether the slave *must* not be a sufferer.

THE SLAVES SUFFER FROM HUNGER—DECLARATIONS OF SLAVE-HOLDERS AND OTHERS

WITNESSES.	TESTIMONY.
Hon. Alexander Smyth, a slave holder, and for ten years, Member of Congress from Virginia, in his speech on the Missouri question. Jan 28th, 1820.	" By confining the slaves to the Southern states, where crops are raised for exportation, and bread and meat are purchased, you *doom them to scarcity and hunger*. It is proposed to hem in the blacks where they are ILL FED."
Rev. George Whitefield, in his letter, to the slave holders of Md. Va. N C. S. C. and Ga. published in Georgia, just one hundred years ago, 1739.	" My blood has frequently run cold within me, to think how many of your slaves *have not sufficient food to eat*; they are scarcely permitted to *pick up the crumbs*, that fall from their master's table."
Rev. John Rankin, of Ripley, Ohio, a native of Tennessee, and for some year's a preacher in slave states.	" Thousands of the slaves are pressed with the gnawings of cruel hunger during their whole lives."
Report of the Gradual Emancipation Society, of North Carolina, 1826. Sign-	Speaking of the condition of slaves, in the eastern part of that state, the report says,—" The master puts the unfortunate wretches upon short allowances, scarcely sufficient for their

Fig. 19: Tabular presentation of 'facts' in American Slavery

4.3.1.2 Nonlinear Reading and Complex Indexes

This effect is further heightened by the multiple indexes the book contains. Its closing, fourteen page index does not only facilitate looking up material by subject matter (such as "Slave-children, clothing" or "Mothers of slaves"). It also branches out into subindexes, e.g. by listing between "Bones dislocated" and "Books of slaves stolen" under the innocuous heading "Books" an alphabetized list of the books referenced, or under "Witnesses" a full, alphabetized list of all approximately six-hundred contributors. But also the topical categories of the index at times branch out, suggesting a tree structure of associations. For example, under the heading "Runaway Slaves," between the subcategories "Runaway Slaves : Advertisements for" and "Runaway Slaves : Many, annually shot," the index contains a listing "Man" with eleven further subcategories: "buried / dragged by horse / maimed / murdered / severe punishments of / shot / shot by Baptist preacher / taken from jail / tied and driven / to his wife / whipped to death" (216). At times, the entries in the index also go beyond simple denominators, constituting instead oddly specific categories such as "Outrageous Felonies perpetrated with impunity" (215), or full sentences that already have a certain narrative flavor, such as: “Female slave whipped to death by a Methodist preacher” (213). In result, the index can be used not only to look up individual details, for example when preparing an abolitionist stump speech or tract. Traveling between different functions and different shades of narrativity, it also emphatically invites and teases readers to engage in a nonlinear, exploratory reading.

The same holds for the table of contents. It does not simply contain individual chapters’ headlines along with the corresponding page numbers. Instead, each chapter’s entry is followed by a list of particularly relevant points, either given as a keyword (“Tread-mills”), as a category (“Meals of slaves”), or as a particularly important, memorable miniature narrative (“Young man beaten to epilepsy and insanity”). The entry for the personal narrative of Angelina Grimké-Weld in the table of contents accordingly reads:

> TESTIMONY OF ANGELINA GRIMKE WELD, 52 ; Houseservants, 52 ; Slave-driving female professors of religion at Charleston, S. C. 53 ; Whipping women and prayer in the same room, 53 ; Tread-mills 53 ; *Slaveholding religion*, 54 ; Slave-driving mistress prayed for the divine blessing upon her whipping of an aged woman, 54 ; Girl killed with impunity, 54 ; Jewish law, 54 ; Barbarities, 54 ; Medical attendance upon slaves, 55 ; Young man beaten to epilepsy and insanity, 55 ; Mistresses flog their slaves, 55 ; Blood-bought luxuries, 55 ; Borrowing of slaves, 55 ; Meals of slaves, 55; All comfort of slaves disregarded, 56 ; Severance of companion lovers, 56 ; Separation of parents and children, 56 ; Slave espionage, 57 ; Sufferings of slaves, 57 ; Horrors of slavery undesirable, 56. (v)

As with the index, this structure has a multiple functions: for readers who have read (parts of) the book before, this helps finding individual aspects that they recall and want to read again. It also invites nonlinear, exploratory access: browsing the table of contents, they eye might get caught, e.g., by “Mistresses flog their slaves,” and, similar to a sensationalist newspaper heading or to today’s clickbait, the reader might be intrigued to read more, turning to page 55, and starting to follow Grimké-Weld’s narrative from there. Lastly, it demonstrates a particular reading practice: the table of contents de-emphasizes any narrative coherence in the personal narrative. There is no recognizable connection between “Girl killed with impunity,” “Jewish law,” and “Barbarities,” all of which are to be found on page 54. Presenting this particular, indexing, fact- and category oriented summary of a biographical story suggests that the individual parts of the story are somewhat interchangeable, and it trains the reader to read other texts in the same fashion: to read for information, and to turn narrative into data.

4.3.1.3 Information Work

What is at the center of *American Slavery*, then, is a particular textual practice, reading and writing, that turns on the bare informational value of narratives, the form's ability to store and transmit experience. This textual practice constitutes a kind of knowledge work that we, today, associate with data, not literature. In reducing the personal narrative to a collection of data points, it moreover entails an absenting of individuals on the one side of the process, but it enables the resurrection of individuality on the other: as other scholars have pointed out, the book, anonymously published through the American Anti-Slavery Society, avoids any sense of a strong personal, authorial presence and it hides its own operations of production in favor of the fantasy of an entirely objective, transparent, neutral collection of facts. As Trish Loughran, for example, remarks: While the book is frequently remembered as Weld's creation, most of the—presumably menial, clerical—data work was done by the Grimké sisters. But "those dear souls [who] spent six months, averaging more than six hours a day, in searching through thousands upon thousands of Southern newspapers" (Weld qtd. in Loughran 257) are as absent from the book as are any individual black voices.[198] In Franny Nudelman's words, "testimony of slaves themselves is conspicuously absent; these are tales of suffering witnessed rather than suffering endured" (948). Indeed, the white observers of black suffering are given a voice, and they are given a voice *en masse*: They are typically listed with their name, their occupation and their city of residence. But these (normalized) identities blur in face of their massification: in the end, even their witnessing of the cruelty of slavery is oddly kept at a distance by the text's form; even the white spectators' experience matters not as individual, lived experience with personal consequences for the witnesses but as a source for ever more, ever abstract, mutually corroborative data points.

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[198] Note how this widespread silence on the Grimké sisters' work corresponds to a more general cultural pattern in which such information work was at once devalued and gendered. Discussing a later, related context, newspaper clipping bureaus, Garvey notes that these employed large numbers of early information workers, who would read, cut out, and retroactively index newspapers to prepare them for later retrieval. She notes the "lower status of the mainly female corps of clipping bureau reader/markers" and adds: "Atomizing or rationalizing the work of clipping the paper, as on an assembly line, and defining some of the tasks as women's work deskilled and downgraded it and had the effect of allowing bureaus to keep wages low, as in factory work. The claim that women were more able to mechanically scan and not get caught up in reading the papers played on the earlier stereotypes that asserted that women did not read newspapers" (*Writing* 239-40).

The resolution to the abolitionist crisis of representation that *American Slavery* imagines thus is an ambivalent one. Realizing that slavery, for most Northerners, happens at a remove, it doubles down on this remove. In doing so, it necessarily foregoes several potential sources for authenticating its narrative in individuals: neither a relatable victim nor an individual witness nor an identifiable author now vouch for the truth of the information presented.[199] Such personal regimes of authentication are replaced by the invisible bureaucratic process of reducing experience to "facts," by these facts' massive aggregation, and by the individual reader's work of turning these masses of facts back into meaning. Nudelman rightly observes that *American Slavery* "offers an insistent example of how a white spectator's confrontation with the physical torture of a slave generates abolitionist narration" (947), but I would add that this production of narration ultimately happens on the readers' end. As I will discuss in more detail in the third subsection (page 275), the book's paratexts interpellate "incredulous, and [...] curious" readers (iii), and they keep insisting that these readers individually "make the case [their] own" (7), that they generate their own, individual, narrative accounts of the facts they encounter. In demonstrating the reverse process —the process of turning narrative into data—the index and the table of contents help prepare, educate, and train the reader to do just that.

4.3.2 Massification, Literature, and Information Overload

One central quality on which *American Slavery* rests, then, is massification. By reducing a broad variety of textual materials to data, it is able to aggregate masses of such data points, and this massification is hoped to resolve the abolitionist crisis of representing slavery: Most importantly perhaps, it counters the claim that individual cases of cruelty were either inventions or outliers, that they were, in other words, not representative of the entirety of slavery. In doing so, the book ties in to a conventional distinction between literature and data.

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[199] Note how this tactic is the inverse of the slave narrative, a genre in which the presumed lack of credibility of the former slave authoring the book is compensated for by white authors vouching for the story's truth in the paratexts.

American Slavery's introduction is an explicit case in point. It invokes the connection between 'mass' and slavery early on when it makes the sheer number of slaves living in the US the first focal point of its interest: "TWENTY-SEVEN HUNDRED THOUSAND PERSONS in this country, men, women, and children, are in SLAVERY" (7).[200] More importantly, however, the introduction invokes questions of quantity later on, positioning them as central to the debates between slave holders and abolitionists: "[S]laveholders and their apologists," it observes, "seek to evade [...] testimony" of their cruelties by claiming that "such deeds" are "exceedingly rare" (9).[201] Against this tactic, the book positions its own representative project:

> The foregoing declarations touching the inflictions upon slaves, are not hap-hazard assertions, nor the exaggerations of fiction conjured up to carry a point ; nor are they the rhapsodies of enthusiasm, nor crude conclusions, jumped at by hasty and imperfect investigation, nor the aimless outpourings either of sympathy or poetry ; but they are proclamations of deliberate, well-weighed convictions, produced by accumulations of proof, by affirmations and affidavits, by written testimonies and statements of a cloud of witnesses who speak what they know and testify what they have seen, and all these impregnably fortified by proofs innumerable. (10)

The entire, lengthy sentence serves to dispel the allegation that documentation of the cruelties of slavery relied on individual cases alone, and in doing so it builds up a binary between *American Slavery*'s own textual work—of fortification by accumulation, of proof, of deliberation, etc.—and the textual work of literature—of fiction with its exaggerations, rhapsodies with their enthusiasm, poetry, with its aimless outpourings, and so on.

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[200] The introduction repeats the number in the second column, "Two millions seven hundred thousand persons in these States are in this condition" (7). Obviously, the first, unwieldy version of expressing the number makes it appear even larger. Note also how the quote struggles to balance an insistence on the enormity of the number with an emphasis on the specificity and humanity of the people thus evoked as mass.

[201] At the same time, the introduction laments that slaveholders are "flooding the world with testimony that their slaves are kindly treated" (9).

At the same time, of course, the passage does not only describe the value of "proofs innumerable." As the length of the sentence already indicates, it also performs it: Rather than simply naming the distinction between its own project and that of other books, it keeps adding examples to both sides of the binary it aims to construct. As with catalog rhetoric generally,[202] the idea behind this is that no single expression, narrow and specific as it is, can adequately evoke the two types that are referenced by this dichotomy, and so these types have to be exemplified; and since no individual example is enough, more exemplary tokens have to be added so that the readers can interpolate the underlying binary from the masses of examples they are presented with. Of course, the passage above would be just as effective if any individual example had been left out, or replaced with any other, similar one. This accumulation of paradigmatically exchangeable elements thus aligns this passage with data as a symbolic form both in what it says and in how it says it.

4.3.2.1 Data Anxieties

The energy expanded in accumulation here, however, also suggests another, somewhat self-subverting aspect of this rhetoric and the book's anxieties around this moment of self-subversion: while, as the passage seems to suggest, a single instance of the "exaggerations of fiction" might be enough "to carry a point," any "deliberate, well-weighed" representation apparently has to fear falling short, and so more than one instance is required. The text's additive piling-up of examples expresses this anxiety: that the material provided might not be enough. This is particularly palpable in the list of evidence it promises to its readers. The "proclamations" of "convictions" alone do not suffice, they have to be "accumulat[ed]," from "affirmations," "affidavits," "testimonies," and "statements." Again, the passage performs the concern it expresses, with these four words, all near synonyms, suggesting a worry that a single one of them could ultimately fail to properly signify. The same ambivalence determines the number of witnesses it enlists: On the one hand, including a "cloud of witnesses" heightens the reliability of the overall gist of their statements. Now the risk of any one witness being debunked as exaggerating is dispersed, but so is the authority of any single one of them—and so another catalog is required to shore up credibility. As the introduction claims a few lines earlier, its allegations are confirmed

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[202] For an extensive discussion of the mechanics of poetic catalogs, cf. 2.2.

> by the testimony of scores and hundreds of eyewitnesses, by the testimony of *slaveholders* in all parts of the slave states, by slaveholding members of Congress and of state legislatures, by ambassadors to foreign courts, by judges, by doctors of divinity, and clergymen of all denominations, by merchants, mechanics, lawyers and physicians, by presidents and professors in colleges and *professional* seminaries, by planters, overseers and drivers. (9)

The operative logic is the same as above: on the one hand, massification is celebrated, relished in as offering a triumphant sense of reliability; at the same time, it tacitly acknowledges the apparent unreliability of every single one entity named, requiring an endless series of more and more witnesses to be called up, each adding to the previous ones. The "cloud of witnesses" the book thus advertises, indeed, is a metaphor fitting in its ambivalence.[203] This cloud is an amorphous mass with blurry outlines rather than a collection of individuals speaking, and this is why there can be no closure to the argument, why all statements have to be "impregnably fortified" not by a countable, finite number of proofs, but "by proofs innumerable" (9).

This dynamic permeates not just this one, self-reflexive passage but the entire introduction, in which a large number of seemingly endless catalogs of repetitive statements are strung together to both show and tell a sense of mass that comes with two contradictory implications: an exhilarated sense of significatory certainty and conviction (at times mixed with a dose of righteous indignation) and a moment of creeping insecurity regarding each of the individual points. Accordingly, the introduction, for example, outlines the book's overall goal in a list of mistreatments that spans a quarter of the page: *American Slavery*, it claims,

> will prove that the slaves in the United States are treated with barbarous inhumanity ; that they are overworked, underfed, wretchedly clad and lodged, and have insufficient sleep ; that they are often made to wear round their necks iron collars armed with prongs, to drag heavy chains and weights at their feet while working in the field, and to wear yokes, and bells, and iron horns [...] that they are maimed, mutilated and burned to death over slow fires. Reader, we know whereof we affirm, we have weighed it well; *more and worse* WE WILL PROVE. (9)

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[203] *American Slavery* repeatedly uses the phrase (cf. also 62).

Like all of the catalogs, this passage, listing close to forty different forms of abuse, celebrates mass, but it also subjects the reader to an overwhelming and exhausting experience of information overload: After a few lines, the eyes start skipping, running down the paragraph to look either for something that stands out or for an end of the list and the next actual, argumentative, meaningful point. The closing assertion, capping the list, then again condenses the dilemma: on the one hand it hints at the endlessness of the process, an unbounded database of items "more and worse." On the other, it projects a sense of certainty, "we know whereof we affirm," and it promises in all-caps to the reader that this database will not only claim, but "PROVE" the atrocities of slavery. In other words, the ability of this database to prove the atrocities of slavery, to offer argumentative closure, is now, paradoxically, tied to its infinite expandability—the very absence of said closure.

4.3.2.2 Data, Seriality, and (the Lack of) Closure

This then, of course, reflects the *modus operandi* of the entire book: Throughout, the massification of evidence drastically reduces the argumentative or evidentiary work each individual example has to do, and it dramatically reduces the text's reliance on any individual case. This has a number of consequences for the book: The masses of information now have to be presented in such a way that it leaves their overwhelming quality in tact as a quasi-sensory experience for the reader while still being somewhat manageable and usable, a design problem that is both one of aesthetics and of information management. The two indexes—the linear, indexical table of contents and the tree-like index in the end—attempt to achieve this goal. It, secondly, has to find strategies to secure or recapture the readers' attention, and the changes in form between more narrative personal stories, tabular lists of facts, and catalogs of narratoids, especially so in the first half of the body part (B) testify to that, not least in how they are interspersed with one another. Sensationalist claims in the individual sections' introductions, similar to the all-caps "WE WILL PROVE IT" above, serve the same goal, as do the frequent exhortations to the reader to keep up their focus: "We now ask the reader's attention to the testimonies which follow" (82), for example. All these interventions signal at once a strategy to keep the readers engaged and a concern that their attention could slip. Finally, in both the introduction and in the overall book, the logic of massification, of serial concatenations of evidence, suggests a potentially endless project in which ever more evidence can and has to be amassed without ever arriving at closure. As much as the book insists that it has resolved abolitionism's crisis of representation, that it can "PROVE" the slaveholders' treatment of slaves, its inherent desire for ever more evidence keeps undermining such confidence.

'Seriality,' then, constitutes a productive register not only to describe the repetitive structures inside the book where each chapter and sub-chapter basically keeps serving the same argumentative function in slightly different ways and where these individual installments can be read in any order without changing the overall impression.[204] As the prefacial "Note" makes clear, *American Slavery* was moreover originally imagined as the first in a series of similar books to be released by the American Anti-Slavery Association. The Note accordingly asserts the association's "determination to publish, from time to time, as they may have the materials and the funds, TRACTS, containing well authenticated facts, testimony, personal narratives, &c. fully setting forth the *condition* of American slaves" (iv). Notably, the idea here is twofold: to allow for and invite readerly engagement in between and to keep publishing basically the same information again so as to increase its reliability. The Note spells both aspects out,

> invite[ing] all who have had personal knowledge of the condition of slaves in any of the states of this Union, to forward their testimony. [...] Facts and testimony respecting the condition of slaves, in *all respects*, are desired ; their food, (kinds, quality, and quantity,) clothing, lodging, dwellings, hours of labor and rest, kinds of labor, with the mode of exaction, supervision &c.—the number and time of meals each day, treatment when sick, regulations respecting their social intercourse, marriage and domestic ties, the system of torture to which they are subjected, with its various modes; and in detail, their intellectual and moral condition. Great care should be observed in the statement of facts. Well-weighed testimony and well-authenticated facts, with a responsible name, the Committee earnestly desire and call for. [...] Let no one withhold his testimony because others have already testified to similar facts. The value of testimony is by no means to be measured by the

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[204] In fact, *American Slavery* at times does refer to previous material, to the readers' "recalling" (176, cf. also 32, 83, e.g.) a case earlier described, but these references do not point to preconditions, to material that logically precedes the one given, but constitute see-also references, hyperlinks of sorts that invite nonlinear reading more than they enforce a linear one.

> *novelty* of the horrors which it describes. *Corroborative* testimony,—facts, similar to those established by the testimony of others,—is highly valuable. (iv)

These lines then drive home the dataesque understanding of “fact” that *American Slavery* employs. The “facts” it desires are comprehensive, covering “all respects,” and they are, to the largest part, abstract(able), quantifiable and discrete, comparable and storable as individual data points. Explicitly disregarding “novelty” as a criterion and instead asking for “corroborative testimony,” for contributors to provide facts “similar to those established by the testimony of others,” it offers to its readers nothing but the pleasure of “recover[ing], point by point, what they already know, and what they want to know again” (Eco 164).[205] It can do so only because it makes its argument inside a data logic.

American Slavery’s investedness in massified information thus rephrases the abolitionist problem of representation—the question of how to effectively document the reality of slavery—as a problem of how to create, organize, transmit, and read information. In the process, it encounters a core problem of serial textuality: operating within a logic of symbolization that is infinitely expandable, it forfeits narrative closure in favor of an endless database of information. But this forfeiting of closure is not necessarily depoliticizing. It also opens up spaces and venues for readerly activity, for interactive reading and for writing back.

4.3.3 Readerly Engagements

Indeed, *American Slavery* shifts a considerable amount of work over to the readers’ side. Published anonymously, and sacrificing a strong, authoritative narratorial presence in favor of a presumably unmediated presentation of facts, the frequent adjustments of the readers’ positionality through instructions, explanations, promises, and exhortations nevertheless constitute a distinct voice; but it is a voice that is almost entirely concerned with the readers’ treatment of and responses to the material presented. Accordingly, what is most interesting about this voice is the kind of reader it hails, the kind of readerly activity it invites, and the ways in which this (partially) resonates with the affordances of *American Slavery*’s dataesque form.

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[205] Note how *American Slavery* explicitly spells out this aspect when it says: “Reader, we ask you no questions, but merely *tell you what you know*” (123, emphasis mine).

Throughout the entire book, a didactic first-person plural voice keeps adjusting the readers' engagement with the material, contextualizing individual points, explaining how they have to be read or understood, or asking readers to do additional work based on them. For example, after providing tabular and narrative documentation of the slaves' working hours, and meaning to demonstrate that slaves are being overworked, this voice interrupts to add: "The preceding testimony under this head has sole reference to the actual labor of the slaves in the field. In order to determine how many hours are left for sleep, we must take into the account, the time spent in going to and from the field, also the time necessary for pounding, or grinding their corn," followed by a long list of additional chores the readers should keep in mind and add to the hours given above (36-37). Similarly, after offering an already exhaustively long list of roughly twenty examples of slave holders' treating slaves like cattle, the voice adds: "We leave the reader to carry out the parallel which we have only began. Its details would cover many pages" (110). In both cases, as in most others throughout the book, this intervention expresses a sense that the mere listing of facts is doubly insufficient: the working hours documented underestimate the actual working hours, just like the list of examples "only [begins]" to "carry out the parallel"—in other words, the list of facts is forever incomplete, no matter how extensively it is developed; more importantly, these facts, regardless of how many are given, apparently do not in themselves fully speak for themselves, and a particular kind of readerly work—interpolating, interpreting, imagining, and so on—is required to make them meaningful and to, in effect, properly 'read' them.

4.3.3.1 Two Kinds of Reading

As much as these gestures hail a critical, deliberative reader, one who is "incredulous" and "curious," as the "Advertisement to the Reader" puts it (iii), *American Slavery* also frequently makes much more sensationalist appeals organized around two distinct sites. One is the book's own textual work, for example when it, as cited above, promises to "PROVE" facts that others have so far only alleged, or when it promises that its "cross-questioning [...] shall draw [the slaveholders'] condemnation out of their own mouths" (9). In both cases, *American Slavery* promises a particular, spectacular discursive feat based on its formal design, and it invites its readers to appreciate this textual achievement. The other site has to do with the atrocities of slavery and with the resulting outrage it projects its readers to feel. Precisely because it is written under the premise of merely documenting, and because it cites outside sources rather than speaking for itself, *American Slavery* can present a condensed, gory concentrate of the most horrible atrocities.[206] In other words, the book frequently uses its documentary stance as a pretext to present what we today would call torture porn.[207] While examples of this throughout the book are legion, the following quote gives away the dynamic in particularly transparent a fashion, not least because it expends so much textual energy, much of it in catalog form, on teasing the reader:

> To furnish the reader with an illustration of slaveholding civilization and morality, as exhibited in the unbridled fury, rage, malignant hate, jealousy, diabolical revenge, and all those infernal passions that shoot up rank in the hot-bed of arbitrary power, we will insert here a mass of testimony, detailing a large number of affrays, lynchings, assassinations, &,c., &c., which have taken place in various parts of the slave states within a brief period—and to leave no room for cavil on the subject, these extracts will be made exclusively from newspapers published in the slave states, and generally in the immediate vicinity of the tragedies described. (188)

The sensationalist appeals of reading accounts of torture, then, are doubly couched. On the one hand, as in the example above, they are put in the service of a documentary effort. On the other, they are legitimized as sparking welcome political outrage. Whether the book asks its readers to “look at the preceding list” and to “mark the unfeeling barbarity with which their masters and *mistresses* describe the struggles and perils of sundered husbands and wives” (166), or whether it more openly demands: “Reader, what have you to say of such treatment?” (7), the underlying idea is that the encounter with the raw documentation of torture

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206 Cf. also Foley’s remark, in the context of documentary realism’s roots in abolitionist textuality and in autobiographical texts by former slaves: “The presumed historical truth of such documents also was—and is—central to their aesthetic effect: the explicit and concrete detail that produces powerful denunciation in autobiographical discourse would easily seem crude sensationalism in the realm of fiction” (392).

207 Cf. Halttunen, who discusses *American Slavery* as part of a development in which the “modern pornography of pain [takes] shape in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries” (304). Pornography, of course, is another genre frequently maligned for its lack of narrativity.

will trigger abolitionist sentiment in the reader, and the affect economy of outrage and the affective gratifications of indignation and anger are central to this.

Notably, both kinds of readerly activity—the more cognitive, intellectual, "incredulous and [...] curious" interest in the reality of slavery or a sensationalist thirst for the gruesome details of torture and the visceral pleasures of outrage—are afforded by *American Slavery*'s database form. The strong emphasis on fact and documentation, and the grouping together of related cases, does allow for a deliberative understanding, and it, more importantly perhaps, invites a kind of abstraction in which the specifics of individual cases matter less and make room for a more general understanding, arrived at as if by first-hand encounter of, say, the malnourishment of slaves. Simultaneously, the narratively depleted form obviously strips the individual cases of diluting narrative ballast, making the individual horrors stand out even more while the resulting significatory gaps in between individual installments, along with the lack of narrative contextualization, invite particularly strong bursts of emotion. The same holds for the indexes: they obviously invite readers to do 'research,' to identify areas on which they would like to know more and to look them up inside the volume. But it is also hard to look at the index without letting the eye get caught by a particularly gruesome entry and feeling compelled to look it up—an interaction that the detailed list of entries under, e.g., "burning" clearly invites. As much as the book thus foregrounds a critical, pondering reader, and as much as the dataesque form seems to favor a querying, rational engagement, it also emphatically affords an engagement that is much more affective.

4.3.3.2 A Question of Law, Not of Fact?

Both modes of engagement, the cognitive and the affective, come together in the central trope the book employs to frame its readers' activity: that of the court of law. It introduces this trope early on and it keeps returning to it throughout, not least by referring to some of the material it includes as "testimony." Casting its own textual work as akin to a legal proceeding allows *American Slavery* to organize its material, to assert "efficacy," and to situate its own textual work in an established socio-textual context other than literature.

Accordingly, the first lines of the introduction literally hail the reader as inside a courtroom: "Reader, you are empannelled as a juror to try a plain case and bring in an honest verdict. The question at issue is not one of law, but of fact—'What is the actual condition of the slaves in the United States?' [...] We submit the question without argument" (7). While the courtroom is an inherently ready context for abolitionist rhetoric, invoking the law here taps into a particularly fitting symbolic practice. It not only brims with "linguistic agency" in which 'mere' words turn a defendant into a criminal and decide over life and death, but it is deeply invested in the symbolic exchanges between data and narrative generally: legal procedures generate evidentiary facts from narrative and the generate legally impactful narratives from facts. As cognitive psychologist and senior research fellow in law, Jerome Bruner, puts it in a 1998 keynote on "What Is a Narrative Fact?": Legal discourse

> [draws] a razor-sharp procedural distinction between evidentiary matters of fact and doctrinal points of law, the two officially declared to be utterly independent of each other. Matters of fact are decided upon by juries; points of law, by judges. Even so, lawyers (and judges) know full well that, magisterial rules to the contrary, the two cannot be kept neatly separated—metaphysically and also practically. This often creates problems. (18)

The distinction Bruner makes here is the same that *American Slavery* evokes: if the readers are impaneled as jurors, their task is not to evaluate or adjudicate—which would be a "question [...] of law"—but to decide "matters of fact," as juries do. Framing the book in terms of a legal proceeding, in other words, jibes with the fact rhetoric with which abolitionism tapped into the data imaginary: the notion that experience can be split up into the pure facts on one side and their interpretation on the other.[208] However, as Bruner notes, there is a "bumpy two-way street between interpretation and fact" (20). The jury, in a court of law as much as the 'jury' in *American Slavery*, is presented with information, some of it in the form of data; some in the form of narrative, testimony; some of it situated in between, such as the potentially contradictory narratoidal fragments generated in a cross-examination. The jury's purpose, in both settings, is to turn this information into facts, and it does so by categorizing the information and connecting it to a larger story. As Bruner explains: “facts do not become probative [...] until they can be shown to be relevant to some sort of theory or story” (18). In a world awash with facts, it is this relevance that makes facts, otherwise marked by “an exceedingly short half-life” (19), resonate as ‘true.’

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[208] Cf. also the introduction's claim, notably after several paragraphs of evaluative comments, that "we will not anticipate topics, the full discussion of which more naturally follows than precedes the inquiry into the actual condition and treatment of slaves in the United States" (8-9).

The jury’s activity, as *American Slavery* proposes it, is then both deliberative and performative. On the one hand, the introduction insists that “[a] plainer case never went to a jury” and that it is enough to simply “[l]ook at it” (7), thus suggesting, here and throughout the volume, that this is a case of near transparent representation. The readers, this line of thinking suggests, merely have to let the facts speak to them in order to arrive at a true understanding of “the actual condition of the slaves in the United States.” At the same time, however, the introduction keeps insisting that considerable activity is required to process the facts, and that this activity consists in a form of narrativization. Immediately after asserting that the book “[submits] the question without argument,” it urges readers to perform work on their side of the process of literary communication: to adapt the information presented in *American Slavery* into a story about their own friends and family. “You have a wife, or a husband, a child, a father, a mother, a brother or a sister—make the case your own, make it theirs, and bring in your verdict” (7). In imagining the jury’s work, *American Slavery* repeatedly returns to this mechanism of concretization and personalization that the book itself opts out of in order to let its readers perform it. Accordingly, it invites its audience into a role play of sorts:

> We repeat it, every man knows that slavery is a curse. Whoever denies this, his lips libel his heart. Try him ; clank the chains in his ears, and tell him they are for *him*. Give him an hour to prepare his wife and children for a life of slavery. Bid him make haste and get ready their necks for the yoke, and their wrists for the coffle chains, then look at his pale lips and trembling knees, and you have *nature’s* testimony against slavery. (7)

In other words, in interpellating the readers as members of a jury, *American Slavery* asks them to perform a conversion of presumably raw information into narratives akin to personal experience. Having been given the inventory of a storyworld, readers are asked to tell to one another, in more narrative form, how they would feel inside it, and it is this telling that is imagined as making the facts relevant, “probative,” and resonant as being ‘true.’

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A unique textual endeavor, *American Slavery* in its entirety thus turns on the conversion of narratives into facts and vice versa. It tackles the crisis of representation abolitionists perceived by way of two operations. One is to separate from one another the evaluative questions around slavery (which it claims to avoid) and the process of objectively describing it using presumably raw information (which it claims to perform). This rephrases the political question of slavery as a matter of knowledge management and knowledge distribution. To this end, it morselizes and datafies the (more) narrative material it is composed of, reorganizes it according to its informational value, and adds methods of accessing it in a nonlinear fashion. These processes of narrative depletion and datafication then allow for the second operation, the conversion of this data back into meaningful, causally connected, evaluative statements that, as they are imagined here, take on the form of narrative and are imagined to be produced autonomously, individually, by the readers engaging the text.

By capitalizing on abolitionism's investedness in data practices, *American Slavery* thus situates itself not only in the tradition of abolitionist data efforts but also at the intersection of the three fringe dispositions outlined above. Its conversion of the data of slavery into emotional investment is deeply intertwined with sentimental reading practices, in which nonnarrative vignettes trigger affective labor; its interpellation of active readers, and its offer to let them learn again what they already know, resonate with serial textuality, as does its aesthetic of overwhelming repetition; it motivates both operations, lastly, by tapping into the documentary ethics of realism: despite its appeals to the readers' sensationalist desire for gory details, it keeps returning to and legitimizing both its content and its form by insisting on its ability to transparently document the reality of slavery.

In all of these aspects, the book largely sidesteps questions about its own textuality, and about its relationship to literature, by evoking the court of law as its overarching tropical framework. While it at times registers that "fictions" are suspect, and while it thus positions its own documentary realism in opposition to an understanding of literature-as-fiction, it never has to fully engage this debate. Mobilizing the remarkable affordances of its database form via an imagined jury's deliberation, it can avoid questions about its in-between position and about its allegiances to the emerging and increasingly solidifying, textual regimes of literary and data-driven writing, respectively.

4.4 *Uncle Tom's* Databases

While *American Slavery as It Is* can thus avoid debates about the political possibilities and limitations of literature, this chapter's second primary text does not enjoy that luxury: Harriet Beecher Stowe's *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* was written explicitly as a response to the political resonance that her novel had found—a resonance that had propelled the book to unprecedented bestseller status and that had invited attacks as to the novel's truthfulness. Accordingly, in 1853, only one year after publishing the most successful novel of her time, Harriet Beecher Stowe amended *Uncle Tom's Cabin* with this prequel of sorts, which defended the book and, in the process, necessarily had to engage with questions of literariness.

When Stowe published *Key*, the bound version of her novel, originally published in serial form over the course of forty weeks in *The National Era* in 1851, was already in the process of becoming an unprecedented economic and literary success, and it had already begun spawning a sprawling, rapidly proliferating intertextually connected universe of criticism, literary and editorial responses, adaptations, translations, and material commodities. To this expanding textual universe Stowe now added, as it were, a third installment of her book. Responding to allegations that her novel misrepresented the reality of slavery in order to slander the South, this new book professed to offer documentary evidence showing that many of the plot points and characters were "true"; that is, that they were directly mirroring events that had actually occurred—according to reports in abolitionist newspapers or to eyewitness accounts.

In doing so, *Key* not only takes a cue from *American Slavery as It Is*. It continues a trajectory that already begins with the original novel's final chapter, the "Concluding Remarks." Right after George Shelby's exhortation to "[t]hink of your freedom whenever you see *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" closes the penultimate chapter, this epilogue steps out of the narrative frame and directly addresses the question of referentiality. It opens:

> The writer has often been inquired of, by correspondents from different parts of the country, whether this narrative is a true one: and to these inquiries she will give one general answer.
>
> The separate incidents that compose the narrative are, to a very great extent, authentic, occurring many of them either under her own observation, or that of her personal friends. She or her friends have observed characters the counterpart of almost all that are here introduced; and many of the sayings are word for word as heard herself, or reported to her.

These lines already foreshadow two important aspects of *Key*'s overall design. By being added after the end of the story, they form a supplementary addition to the book, a quality that will be central to my reading below. Where George Shelby's comment is already somewhat casually metaleptic, at least teasing the fourth wall by ambiguously referring to both the book and the dwelling as memorial sites of slavery's injustices, the concluding remarks are positioned explicitly and emphatically outside the fictional universe and are thus simply appended to it. They, secondly, establish the fictional narrative's documentary realism by breaking down "the narrative" into "separate incidents," "characters," and "sayings" that all are individually "authentic." This separation of the narrative into discrete, individually verifiable elements projects a logic in which the overall composition can be verified by verifying discrete data points, for example by showing them to be corroborated by other. At the same time, it tacitly invokes the importance of the transformation of these individual data points into a story. Both are aspects I will also come back to below.

The felt need to amend the fictional representation, first by an epilogue, then by a full book, already indicates how much in this case the abolitionist crisis of representation surfaces as a crisis of *literary* representation. This also shows in contemporary debates. As Charles F. Briggs notes in an 1853 review, other writers of fiction had immediately responded to the success of the novel by releasing fictional counter-narratives. To him, it is "one of the most striking" indicators of the novel's "intrinsic merit [...] that it should be thought necessary to neutralize its influence by issuing other romances to prove that *Uncle Tom* is a fiction." In face of "dozens of these anti-Uncle Tom romances," *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* acutely registers abolitionism's crisis of representation as a fundamental problem in how the system of literature can represent slavery—after all, the novel seems unable to claim any epistemic or representational privilege over the “anti-Uncle Tom romances”—and it understands this crisis of literature’s social and political salience as a crisis of the symbolic form of narrative. As I will show in detail below, *Key* responds to this crisis by largely opting out of the symbolic form of narrative and instead offering up to the reader an encyclopedic database of ‘evidence:’ short, fragmented, decontextualized bits of information, advertisements, parts of articles from newspapers, quotes from legal texts and legal opinions, segments from letters sent to the author, and so on. The connective tissue tying these materials together is minimal at best: The entire archive is organized by little more than the fantasy that the individual parts had been the basis of the novel and that they, in their repetitive massification, could prove the truthfulness of the novel’s depiction of slavery.

In the following pages, I will discuss these points in more detail by first focusing on how *A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin* implements a database structure, and on how this structure registers a failure of the narrative form to effectively represent the reality of slavery. I will then discuss three different sites at which the book self-reflexively discusses the relationship between data and literary narration and at which it diagnoses this crisis to varying degrees and in different vocabularies. In a final, third subsection I will then situate *Key* in the larger landscape of cultural responses to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, many of which turn on conversions between different symbolic forms. My point here will be to show that *Key*’s invocation of the database form is not an aberration but that it capitalizes on a particular fluidity of symbolic form in the original novel, and that it does so in unison with other cultural responses and tie-ins. Taken together, these three subsections will then indirectly engage the book that is still remembered as one of the most triumphant demonstrations of the power of narrative, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*—the book that allegedly started the Civil War.[209] By reading its sequel, *Key*, for its dataesque form and for its reflections on literature, and by situating it in the context of the Tomitudes, I will argue that this cultural and political salience stems not least from of how precarious and nimble the original novel's narrativity is.

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[209] As Daniel R. Vollaro points out, the story of Abraham Lincoln crediting “the little woman” Harriet Beecher Stowe and her *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* with “[making] this great war” is “entirely apocryphal” (Vollaro). Its staying power in discussions of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* testifies to the ongoing desire in American culture to imagine literature as able to immediately and directly effect social change, even if this change comes in the form or at the cost of civil war.

4.4.1 The Data-Driven *Key*

A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin is a data project in at least two regards. On the one hand, the book incorporates abstract, tabular information as part of its anti-slavery argument, including in its appendix an extended discussion of whether "figures" can or "cannot lie" (257), that taps into the abolitionist controversy over the census of 1840.[210] But *Key* also is a data project in a more fundamental sense: In ways that clearly follow *American Slavery as It Is*—at times simply incorporating material from "the book of Mr. Weld" (109, e.g.)—*Key* constitutes a vast database of reprinted anti-slavery materials. This database quality shows most clearly in the additive logic with which it amasses fragmented, decontextualized, and thus narratively depleted bits and pieces with mostly minimal connective tissue, at times just putting individual fragments side by side, at times operating a rhizomatic 'apropos' logic in which a keyword mentioned in one fragment gets exploded into a number of other fragments.[211] With the exception, perhaps, of the first sixty-five pages, then, there is no narrative arc, no sense of progression tying the individual parts together. The resulting paratactic, repetitive, at times flat-out exhausting style discourages reading the book from cover to cover. It instead invites readers to browse, parse, and navigate the highly fragmented, heterogeneous information landscape it presents, and to build from this database of fragments their own understanding of what slavery is like.

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[210] On the census of 1840 and its use by pro-slavery advocates, cf. page 238 above. In light of the use of the census returns in arguments *for* slavery, *Key*'s appendix laments that the numbers, "cut and dried, in regular columns" can be found "on both sides of the question, contradict[ing] each other point-blank as two opposite canons." Notably, it blames this adaptability on the numbers' susceptibility to narration and to their "Oriental origin" and the resulting "characteristic turn for romancing" (257). Thus orientalizing the narrative form, the appendix further undermines the pro-slavery position by imagining the debate about the census to take place between "the illustrator" (rather than a statistician), who convinces an older, originally abolitionist lady of the benefits of slavery by "whisking over his papers" and thus confusing her; by casting for this older lady Mrs. Partington, a popular, very 'meme-able' character known for its naivete (cf. *Shillaber*; Girvan); by including the American Statistical Association's refutation of the census returns; and by exhorting readers "not to skip [the] statistical table" (259).

[211] I will return to this rhizomatic apropos structure in the following section on page 295.

In effect, then, there is an encyclopedic vision of a total archive underlaying the project, with the many marginal references to source material suggesting the book's use as an indexical interface between two textual bodies situated outside of it: the novel itself and the sheer mass of writing produced around the question of abolition. For most readers, likely in possession of the bound novel but unable to read the original sources, this second body of material was an imaginary presence, but this does not diminish the way in which *Key* presents itself as an intermediary between those texts and the novel, facilitating a commerce between the two. In this, of course, it follows a template. Other than the bound version, the original, serialized version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had to be read in exactly the kind of textual environment that *Key* tries to recreate in a more systematically organized, remediated fashion: the fragmented landscape of articles, short personal narratives, advertisements, etc., that was the page of *The National Era*.

This original embeddedness in the abolitionist press points to how much *Key*'s traveling between symbolic forms also forms a training ground for its readers. While one might read the book's moments of tedious repetition and its fragmented, incoherent surface as indicating a failure at narrating the reality of slavery, a failure that triggers repeated, unsuccessful attempts and that indicates abolitionism's larger crisis of representation, reading *Key* as a database allows a more positive vision. Seen thus, the book presents to its readers a pre-narrative form in order to educate them in piecing together the facts. This jibes with the book's (somewhat misleading) self-description,[212] and it dovetails with a larger, democratic and educational republican project: by recreating the textual landscape of the abolitionist press, *Key* practices with its readers how to read the news, how to build from varied, fragmented, partial information an understanding of a 'reality' that is necessarily nothing but a 'fiction' the members of society agree on.

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[212] *Key* claims to contain the material from which the novel was written, suggesting that the writing of the novel was the same kind of synthetic process it now wants to practice with its readers. However, *Key* contains a host of material that was collected only after the novel had been written, which led to considerable confusion as scholars tried to reconstruct the composition process based on this misrepresentation (cf. Foley 394).

4.4.1.1 Large-Scale Database Structures

As much as *Key*, most visibly so in its appendix, meshes with the data-driven aspects of the debate over abolitionism, the book's ties to the data imaginary are even more salient in its overall structure and modus operandi. After all, by decontextualizing, collecting, and reproducing morselized pieces of text, and by imagining this collation of materials as the basis for narration, *Key* itself constitutes a database, and this structurally dataesque quality can be found both in its large-scale construction and in the organization of individual chapters.

Overall, the book's approximately 260 pages break down into a preface, four larger parts, each comprising ten to fifteen chapters, and the appendix. Of these four main parts, the first one displays a relatively clear internal structure, with most of the chapters organized around a character in the novel, given in the order in which they appear. Only the first and the last chapter in this part deviate from this logic, the first one offering an introductory discussion of how the book operates, and the last one reprinting letters from Southerners vouching for the accuracy of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*'s representation of slavery, effectively turning these two chapters into bookends that deepen the sense that Part I follows a well-structured design. The remaining three parts are less clearly organized: They have no discernible internal progression, no introductory or concluding chapters, and accordingly they end up forming much looser collections. Part II thus mostly responds to allegations that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had misrepresented the legal aspects of slavery, and to claims that the law protected slaves in the South; Part III is organized around refuting the idea that public opinion protected slaves; and Part IV discusses the role of the church.

This larger structure, and its looseness and lack of hierarchy or logical progression, already give a sense of the logic that underwrites the entire project and its individual parts, a logic best captured by adjectives such as additive, supplementary, corroborative, or serial. This logic is already present in the book's full title. The first part, down to its internal structure, seems like a viable version of the entire book, and the following parts then simply try to add to this in successive, repetitive installments of the same argument. As the subtitle explains, *Key*'s professed purpose is to "[present] the original facts and documents upon which the story is founded. Together with corroborative statements verifying the truth of the work," and while lengthy and descriptive titles were by no means unusual at the time, this additive structure of the title, in which one thing is offered simply "together" with something else, in this case foreshadows the volume's overall design. In the book, individual argumentative projects typically get appended to one another without further comment, one adding to the other not by building on or following from it, but by apparently making the same argument again.[213] Throughout, the book does indeed offer material that presumably was collected before writing the novel right next to material found (or even produced) after. This logic holds within the individual parts, but it also organizes how Part II, III, and IV do (or better: do not) relate to one another: They do not extend or build upon the first part or upon one another and instead simply form recurring installments of the same argument.

This additive logic moreover shows in how material from one part gets effortlessly recycled in another one. To name two particularly glaring examples: Both Part I and Part III contain a chapter on "Select Incidents of Lawful Trade" (in chapters XI and V, respectively), and both Part II and Part III reproduce the same advertisement for a "pack of Hounds, for trailing and catching runaway slaves" (in chapters XII and II, respectively)[214] for their respective arguments. In both cases, there is no progress or development tying these instances together. Instead, the parts relate to one another by their serial logic of supplementary addition.

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[213] Most of its comparatively tightly organized Part I, for example, indeed does present a collection of "facts and documents" that constitute plausible originals to the fictional, 'derivative' plot points and characters, but the final chapter with its collection of letters vouching for Uncle Tom's Cabin, "corroborative statements" indeed, operates differently: this chapter presents material that did not (presumably) precede the writing of the novel but that rather is openly derived from it. Indeed, the final chapter's title, "The Spirit of St. Clare," suggests that perhaps these "testimonials from Southern men" (59) show the type of personality on which the character of Augustine St. Clare was built, which would be in line with the logic of the previous chapters. But these letters, of course, originated *after* the novel had been published. Moreover, material from which the St. Clare character had been (presumably) derived is already presented in the ninth chapter, making the final, fourteenth chapter, a partial reprise, a repetition of a point already made.

[214] The chapter headings in Part II are misprinted, with two chapters XI and all following ones accordingly numbered too low. Inside the book, the chapter is thus mistitled as chapter XI, but the table of contents is correct.

4.4.1.2 Small-Scale Database Structures

The dataesque quality of *Key* is also on display in the additive, associative structure of individual chapters. These chapters tend to serve as containers in which the book can pull together various, more or less loosely connected, bits of material and present them to the readers for their traversal. I will use the following pages to discuss in more detail a particularly instructive example located early on in the book's (comparatively coherently organized) Part I. Following the opening, introductory chapter, this is the first time that the book engages in the kind of argumentative work that is its *raison d'être*. More importantly, this chapter reflects on the book as a whole, and it displays many of the mechanisms that determine the entirety of *Key*, which includes registering a failure of narrative and deploying documentary evidence in its stead.

As part of the overarching effort to prove the entire novel's truthfulness by demonstrating that its constituting parts—characters in this case—are individually realistic, the chapter's overall goal is to show that the character of Haley correctly captures the qualities of slave traders. In explaining this rationale, it invokes a type-token relationship, in which Haley serves as a token of a general type of person, he is "the representative of all the different characters" who engage in slave trade: "the trader, the kidnapper, the negro-catcher, the negro-whipper." These individual people in turn form a "class of beings." This type-token setup is crucial to how the chapter operates, and to how *Uncle Tom's Cabin*'s realism operates more generally, because it invites the readers to generalize from the individual data points it contains and imagines (fictional) narration as one such generalization from real events. To characterize the character of the slave trader the chapter consists of five individual elements: a personal narrative by the author, a letter, two statements, and some correspondence. The resulting structure is as follows:

- *Prefatory Explanation*: "In the very first chapter [...] we encounter the character"
- Personal story of the black woman in the nursery
    - Description of a letter "from a negro trader in Kentucky"
    - Dialog between author and woman
    - Coda: "On further inquiry [...] it appeared"
- *Transition (A)*: "If the public would like a specimen"
- Letter by Ruben B. Carlley (mentioning one Kephart)
- *Transition (B)*: "This letter [...] illustrates"
- Statement by Richard H. Dana, Jr.

  - Transcript of the examination of Caphart (alias Kephart)
- *Transition (C)*: “Hon. John P. Hale, associated with Mr. Dana [...], said of him”
- Statement by John P. Hale (associate of Richard H. Dana)
- *Transition (D)*: “See also the following correspondence”
- Correspondence between two traders (including sales statistics)
- *Concluding statement*: “The writer has drawn [...] only one class of the negro-traders”

This structure already indicates the chapter’s container quality. While there are four transitions sandwiched between the five main elements (the personal story and the four pieces of documentary evidence), these transitions do not establish a trajectory that ties things together. Instead they are mere hinges, short pieces of reader guidance that end up accentuating the boundary between two adjacent pieces of material.

After a brief prefatory explanation of the chapter’s purpose—to provide evidence for the character of the slave trader—and of the relationship between the individual, fictional character of Haley and the ‘real’ “class of beings,” the novel offers “[t]he author’s first personal observation of this class of beings” as an entry point into the discussion:

> Several years ago, while one morning employed in the duties of the nursery, a colored woman was announced. She was ushered into the nursery, and the author thought, on first survey, that a more surly, unpromising face she had never seen. The woman was thoroughly black, thick-set, firmly built, and with strongly-marked African features. Those who have been accustomed to read the expressions of the African face know what a peculiar effect is produced by a lowering, desponding expression upon its dark features. It is like the shadow of a thunder-cloud. Unlike her race generally, the woman did not smile when smiled upon, nor utter any pleasant remark in reply to such as were addressed to her. The youngest pet of the nursery, a boy about three years old, walked up, and laid his little hand on her knee, and seemed astonished not to meet the quick smile which the negro almost always has in reserve for the little child. The writer thought her very cross and disagreeable, and, after a few moments’ silence, asked, with perhaps a little impatience, “Do you want anything of me to-day?”
>
> “Here are some papers,” said the woman, pushing them towards her; “perhaps you would read them.” (5)

This passage powerfully reflects on the overall project of *Key*: It first attempts to make plausible the character of the slave trader by relaying a “personal observation,” thus invoking the authority of the author’s singularly firsthand, eyewitness experience, related in narrative form.[215] In keeping with gender conventions and formulaic tropes of domestic fiction, it situates this experience in the nursery,[216] and with the young boy seeking a mother-child connection, the scene is indeed set up for a moment of sentimental bonding between the author and the black woman—who, it turns out later, has a child the same age.[217] Strikingly, however, this sentimental connection between the two women, which would have opened up an episteme of (gendered) experientiality of its own, does not seem to come to pass. Instead, the author keeps racializing the woman by focusing on her "black, thick-set, firmly built" appearance, her "African face," and her "dark features." In effect, the very kind of connection that *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, read as sentimental fiction, is meant—and has frequently been understood—to turn on, does not materialize. In supplement of her own bodily presence, and, as the narrator here tells it, from a seeming inability to effectively speak for herself, the black woman thus, in a somewhat abrupt, non-sequitur way, offers documentary material, "some papers," and it is these papers that motivate the document-driven remainder of the chapter.

From a conversation that is not given in detail and, perhaps, from the documents the woman offered, "the author" then pieces together her story. But this story is given only in a terse, summarizing 'coda,' an afterthought to their interaction, which terminates after the woman has handed over her papers. In result, the woman's personal history, her comments on them, and the author's explanation remain vague, generic, and strangely irrelevant: a former slave, the woman had been set free, but her deceased master's heirs have attempted to sell her child, which was averted by members of the neighborhood who bought it back from the trader.[218] The story is meant to testify to the moral corruption of slave traders who would sell a mother's child, despite both mother and child being legally free, but it all remains too general and too vague to have a strong emotional, rhetorical effect, thus marking a surprising failure of narrative to do meaningful, politico-textual work both inside the story and in this story's reproduction in the book.

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[215] Considering how much the abolitionist difficulties in representing slavery had to do with the fact that it was happening at a remove, absent and theoretical for most of the members of the audience, it seems worth pointing out that the "personal observation" the passage relays is not the personal experience of meeting a slave trader but merely the personal experience of someone telling about slave trade.

[216] The setting is perhaps also compensating for the 'political' nature of the overall project and its potential violation of the prevalent ideology of separate spheres: the author, this vignette tells the readers, has not gone out searching for politics. Rather, the moral imperatives of slavery have intruded into the private sphere.

[217] Numerous scholars have remarked on how *Uncle Tom's Cabin* uses gendered moments of sentimental bonding to overcome perceived differences of 'race' (cf. e.g. O'Connell 29).

Instead, *Key* turns to additional documentation, now directly citing from correspondence, a letter by one Ruben B. Carlley, but leaving curiously unclear, how exactly this correspondence relates to the story: "If the public would like a specimen of the correspondence which passes between these worthies, who are the principal reliance of the community for supporting and extending the institution of slavery, the following may be interesting as a matter of literary curiosity" (6). The phrasing of the "specimen" and "these worthies" leaves open the connection between the woman, her papers, and these letters, and the following lines suggest that the correspondence was not part of the papers that the woman "push[ed] [...] towards" the author. Rather, the letters are credited to *The National Era*.[219] They are also offered not as evidence that the events in the author's nursery really took place, but merely as "a matter of literary curiosity." Moreover, these letters' status is further undermined by the remainder of the paragraph: They had been "forwarded by Mr. M. J. Thomas, of Philadelphia, to the *National Era*, and stated by him to be 'a copy taken verbatim from the original, found among the papers of the person to whom it was addressed, at the time of his arrest and conviction, for passing a variety of counterfeit bank-notes'" (6).

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[218] It remains unclear how all of this relates to the woman now showing up in the author's nursery, a narrative that clearly lacks a causality and connectivity between its plot points. The reader also never gets to hear what the woman wants from "the author." This non-sequitur quality makes some degree of sense in that the slave's story is something of a false start if the goal is to talk about the slave trader, not the slave. In any case, it is in line with what critical scholars have identified as the novel's overall failure, and what Browne criticizes in sentimentalism generally: instead of speaking for, it speaks about black slaves.

[219] The letter was indeed heavily circulated in abolitionist newspapers in 1851. I was unable to locate it in *The National Era* to which Stowe credits it, but it appeared in the *Albany Evening Journal* on April, 2nd, in the *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel and Gazette* and the *Vermont Watchman and State Journal* on April 10th, and in *The Liberator* on April 11th of that year. All of these reprints reference the *Independent Democrat* as the original source. By reproducing this article in *Key*, Stowe participates in the antebellum "culture of reprinting" (McGill, *American*), and she recreates the original publication context of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in which the serialized novel's installments stood side by side with this kind of articles.

The effect of all this is striking: faced with the failure of narrative to represent the reality of slavery, the text turns to tangible, citable, documentary evidence, to supplement the lacking emotional and political impact of the story of the black woman in the nursery. But the 'reality' this documentary evidence is supposed to signal keeps retreating precisely because the document's source can be traced: what is initially being advertised as a sample of reality, a "specimen," turns out to be a newspaper-cutout, based on a copy of a document, which was found with a forger.[220] If turning to documents was meant to lend credibility to the story, this clearly has misfired—not for a lack but for an abundance of documentary fidelity, which now exposes the multiply mediated and ultimately questionable source of the material. In a data logic, such fleeting referentiality, however, is less of a problem than it would be in other contexts. Here, what an individual data point lacks in reliability can be made up for by amassing more data points neither of which needs to definitively prove anything but the accumulation of which indicates a general direction, a type. By relying on this data logic, *Key* can turn the lack of reliability in an individual element from a potentially crippling problem into a rationale for textual activity: now more, similar data points, adding to the existing ones, are necessary, and more, similar data points is exactly what the chapter ends up offering.

Without further contextualization, Stowe thus reprints the letter to "strikingly [illustrate] the character" of the two men, and she then seizes on the mention, in the letter, of a man named Kephart to motivate another piece of material: "With regard to the Kephart named in this letter the community of Boston may have a special interest to know further particulars [...]. It therefore may be well to introduce somewhat particularly John Kephart, as sketched by Richard H. Dana, Jr.," (6 [transition B]). This is followed by a reprint of the characterization of John Caphart by Dana, which is partly descriptive, partly in itself citing "the examination of John Caphart" in court. The fact that this testimony was provided by Dana is then used to motivate, in another short transition (C), a very brief characterization by one of Dana's associates, which terminates the characterization of Kephart/Caphart. With nothing more but a characteristic "see also," the chapter then transitions (D) to another example of trader correspondence by two entirely unrelated men: "See also the following correspondence between two traders [...] with a word of comment, by Hon. William Jay, of New York" (7). This piece, featuring a tabular list of prices for six slaves, does not contain anything that ties it to Caphart or the black woman in the nursery, or that motivates it regarding a characterization of Haley. Like all the other pieces collected in the chapter, it merely illustrates the fact that slave traders trade human beings as if they were a commodity. The conclusion, finally, also does little to tie things together. By claiming that "[t]he writer has drawn in this work only on one class of the negro traders" (8), it instead claims that it has only delivered a partial representation and develops this into an argument that the qualities outlined before need to be traced to the institution of slavery as such.[221]

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[220] The original article explicitly insinuates that both correspondents, "two patriotic 'friends of the Compromise' were carrying on the occupations of kidnapping and counterfeiting at the same time" ("Precious").

In result, the five larger parts that make up this chapter, the personal narrative and the four pieces of documentary evidence, do not come together in any form of narrative progression or development. Instead, they repeat, with minor variation, the same point: that slave trade is terrible. But this lack of connectivity does not constitute a failure on behalf of the text. Instead, it allows *Key* to signal a loose and (theoretically) unbound archive of facts about slavery from which it draws. The seeming randomness with which elements are selected to be shown, then, has two distinct effects: it adds to the illusion of vastness—the archive on which Stowe presumably draws appears all the more sprawling the more scattered her references are—and it simulates a perfectly arbitrary access by the author: the total availability of all the facts. This latter effect is particularly visible as Stowe turns the casual mention of Kephart into a tangent on Caphart.[222] In the rhizomatic archive the text thus simulates, any keyword can be exploded into a new query delivering new data points,[223] indicating the ‘apropos logic’ that underwrites the entire archive of *Key*.

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[221] The text here, as in other places, relies on a striking logical twist that activates the reader by ventriloquizing a pro-slavery argument: it argues that slave trade, shown to be repugnant throughout the chapter, is "as [innocent] [...] as any other kind of [trade]" if "the institution of slavery [...] is a divinely-appointed and honorable one" (8). The rhetorical goal is, of course, to make the opposite argument: because, as the reader has seen, slave trade is a horrible profession, slavery as such cannot be "divinely-appointed and honorable."

[222] In fact, the original, widely reprinted article from which Stowe took the letter already engages in speculation about the identity of Kephart: "The

Both this apropos logic and the “see also” transitions invite an active, explorative reading practice on the reception side. The chapter—opening to a failure of narrative and, thus, to a failure of the specific, the personal, the concrete, to make the argument against slavery—offers to its readers no narration. Instead it provides a collection of individual narratoids, bits and pieces of decontextualized, denarrativized material from outside sources, which it presents side by side. These materials are offered as data points indicating a particular “class of beings,” the slave trader (5). Parsing them, the reader needs to do the work of piecing things together again, perhaps flipping back and forth (‘Wait, why are we talking about Caphart now?’), and generally trying to narrativize the database into a meaningful, cohesive story of what slavery is.

4.4.2 Conversions and Literariness

Indeed, *Key* is generally deeply invested in the processes of converting data into narrative, and this investment shows, throughout, in discussions of literature, and of fiction and reality. These discussions take place in a variety of locations and formats, and I will use the following

Kephart mentioned here is probably the same man who claimed ‘Shadrach’ in Boston the other day, it being the same with a slight difference of spelling” (“Precious”). While the article leaves it at that, Stowe expands the playing field, offering additional information on Caphart that the readers can now work with. The reference to Shadrach ties this incident to a spectacular case at the time, in which a fugitive slave, recaptured under the new Fugitive Slave Act, had been forcefully freed from a Boston courtroom. While newspaper readers in 1851 were likely sufficiently aware of the context, and had a sufficiently formed picture of Caphart to operationalize the article’s reference, *Key* thus stores a snapshot of the context by offering the additional information on the trader.

[223] For another example of such a keyword explosion, cf. an instance where a section on how “public opinion [is] formed by education” mentions an ad, inside a “newspaper devoted to politics, literature and EDUCATION,” advertising “hounds, for trailing and catching runaway slaves.” The section wants to make the argument that such an ad, presented in the context of education, is harmful to the child, but it instead explodes this mention of hounds into an explanation of how dogs are trained to catch slaves that “came to the writer in a recent letter from the South” (130). The book then segues into the next section on “Negro Dogs” further exploring this topic before returning to the question of education.

pages to explore three exemplary instances. One particularly stark example is the “Illustrative Drama of Tom v. Legree,” which Stowe includes in her chapter on “Protective Acts with Regard to Food and Raiment, Labor, etc.” Situated in Part II, and thus generally focused on the legal situation, this short bit is meant to show that slaves had no recourse in the law to improve their situation regarding food or clothing, but it also showcases how the kinds of information that *Key* offers can be turned into a coherent narrative. The second location, operating very differently, is a letter by Daniel R. Goodloe, reprinted in the first part’s final chapter as a corroborative statement. The letter, written to testify to the novel’s truthfulness, ties its assessment to an extended discussion of the realism and representational work of literature, a discussion that clearly echoes back onto the book it is contained in. Lastly, I will briefly discuss the preface and *Key*’s first chapter, both of which explain to the readers the rationale for the book’s overall design. As I will show, these three examples do not only talk about the relationship of data and literature, but they all register failures of narrative to represent (the) reality (of slavery), a sense of failure that is typically clothed in an understanding of literature as limited in its representational possibilities and, hence, its political efficacy.

4.4.2.1 The Illustrative Drama of Tom v. Legree

Key is a book that was written specifically to explain the relationship between the facts of slavery and the fiction of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. It is necessarily heavily invested in the relationship between abstract information and its literary form. This shows, for example, in signature phrases with which Stowe guides her readers’ attention, manages their processing of the morselized material, and invites them to observe the similarity between the fictional novel and the nonfictional material collected in *Key*. From a simple “see also” (e.g. 7; 74; 76; 98) to the more elaborate “The reader is now desired to compare the following incidents of [Lewis Clark’s] life, part of which he related personally to the author, with the incidents of the life of George Harris” (14), these transitions between individual fragments replace a relatively passive, linear engagement by an investigative, active, curious one, but they also keep pointing to a schism between the two underlying textual forms—precisely by instructing the reader to close it. At times, *Key* also engages the relationship between fact and fiction by explicitly asking its readers to piece together the individual bits of information into a coherent, narrative form, to thus make manifest an otherwise latent narrative that, in this logic, is implied by the material but not spelled out. One particularly explicit such case is the "Illustrative Drama of Tom v. Legree," which is part of chapter VI on "Protective Acts with Regard to Food and Raiment, Labor, etc." in Part II of the book (90).

The chapter opens and closes to quotes from legal texts and judges' opinions. According to advocates of slavery, these are evidence of how the law protects slaves from mistreatment, and the chapter's goal is accordingly to show that these legal guardrails, despite their "solemnity and gravity," do not provide any meaningful protection for the slaves (90). To do so, it promises "a little sketch, to show how much [of a protection] it does amount to." It first quotes from Angelina Grimké's "account of the situation of slaves on plantations" (90) and from William Wirt's *Life of Patrick Henry* (91) to show how plantations, under the control of overseers and with (potentially more humane) masters at a remove, are lawless places. It then seamlessly transitions from this factual discussion into a more imaginative approach:

> Now, suppose while the master is in Charleston, enjoying literary leisure, the slaves on some Bellemont or other plantation, getting tired of being hungry and cold, form themselves into a committee of the whole, to see what is to be done. A broad-shouldered, courageous fellow, whom we will call Tom, declares it is too bad, and he won't stand it any longer ; and, having by some means become acquainted with this benevolent protective act, resolves to make an appeal to the horns of this legislative altar. Tom talks stoutly, having just been bought on to the place, and been used to better quarters elsewhere. The women and children perhaps admire, but the venerable elders of the plantation, — Sambo, Cudge, Pomp and old Aunt Dinah, — tell him he better mind himself, and keep clar o' dat ar. Tom, being young and progressive, does not regard these conservative maxims; he is determined that, if there is such a thing as justice to be got, he will have it. (91)

Tom, the story continues, "finds some white man [...] verdant enough to enter the complaint for him." This leads to a hearing between this man, whom Stowe flatly calls Mr. Shallow, the judge, and the overseer, Legree. As Stowe continues in drama form:

> Let us imagine a scene: — Legree, standing carelessly with his hands in his pockets, rolling a quid of tobacco in his mouth ; Justice Dogberry, seated in all the majesty of law, reinforced by a decanter of whiskey and

> some tumblers, intended to assist in illuminating the intellect in such obscure cases:
>
> *Justice Dogberry*. Come, gentlemen, take a little something, to begin with. Mr. Legree, sit down ; sit down, Mr. — a' what's your name? — Mr. Shallow. [...] Well, Mr. Shallow, the act says you must make proof, you observe.
>
> *Mr. Shallow*. [Stuttering and hesitating.] Good land ! why, don't everybody see that them ar niggers are most starved? Only see how ragged they are!
>
> *Justice*. I can't say as I've observed it particular. Seem to be very well contented.
>
> *Shallow*. [Eagerly.] But just ask Pomp, or Sambo, or Dinah, or Tom!
>
> *Justice Dogberry*. [With dignity.] I'm astonished at you, Mr. Shallow! You think of producing negro testimony? I hope I know the law better than that! We must have direct proof, you know. (91)

The scene continues, with Legree falsely swearing that the slaves are treated well, "and thus the little affair terminates. But it does not terminate thus for Tom or Sambo, Dinah, or any others who have been alluded to for authority. What will happen to them, when Mr. Legree comes home, had better be left to conjecture" (91-92).

Beginning with its direct instructions to "suppose" or "imagine," the passage explicitly spells out what it wants its readers to do: to take the 'dry' information offered by the individual snippets before and to, quite literally, play it out in their minds, thus transforming it into an individual, narrative form that coheres using the literary template of 'drama.' This entails adding invented details, such as the 'guided' metaphor of Tom being a "broad-shouldered" and thus "courageous fellow"; the tobacco chewing of Legree; the open display of alcohol by the judge, a strong marker of moral corruption in the context of the temperance debates at the time; and it is particularly visible in the use of the vernacular in the "venerable elders"' admonition to "keep clar o' dat ar" even before the drama form has fully commenced. These embellishments then obviously have a contradictory effect: they successfully demonstrate the relationship between fictional narration and factual documentation, a relationship that is central to the textual project of *Key*. At the same time, they also supply an amount of color, atmosphere, and detail, that threatens to undermine the idea that the literary form is an adequate reformulation of the documentary material. If Mr. Shallow had not been quite as timid, if the judge's "majesty of the law" was not "reinforced by a decanter of whiskey," would the outcome perhaps have been different? The additional atmospheric detail, and the additional props, brought in by the "illustrative drama" form then unwittingly demonstrate how much crucial detail was missing from the documentary account, detail that the reader's imagination has to supply—which undermines any claim that the documentary material itself already told the full story.

At the same time, the sudden termination of the drama is remarkable. Aborting the telling and insisting that the consequences for the slaves "had better be left to conjecture" not only abandons them in a moment of particular distress. It also reprises the understanding that the horrors of slavery are too terrible to be represented at all, complete with a moment of sensationalist teasing: by explicitly leaving the consequences "to conjecture," it invites the readers to fill in this blank and to imagine the unrepresentable horrors of punishment awaiting the slaves. Thirdly, however, it also marks, yet again, an inability of literary narration to give the full story. As much as the conversion of legal information into an "illustrative drama" speaks of a need to transform data into narrative, this narrative then also cannot fully represent. The literary form, too, remains hampered and incomplete, and it has to embellish the 'facts' if it wants to have any effect at all.

4.4.2.2 Letter By Daniel R. Goodloe

Another, even more explicit discussion of what literature is and what it can or cannot do can be found in a letter by Daniel R. Goodloe that Stowe reprints along with a number of other letters testifying to the truthfulness of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The letter is a response to an inquiry by A. M. Grangewer, who writes to discuss the "world-renowned book, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' by Mrs. Stowe." Since Goodloe lives in the South and accordingly knows slavery from his own experience, Grangewer assumes that he is ideally positioned to determine if "this book is a truthful picture of slavery" or if, as its detractors claim, "its representations are exaggerated, its scenes and incidents unfounded, and, in a word, [...] the whole book [...] a caricature" (64).

Goodloe's response is overall positive: he fully endorses the book. But in doing so, he slightly moves the goalposts in several regards. Part of his assessment stems from his conviction that the novel casts the South and its inhabitants in a favorable light,[224] and that the true villains in the book, the “Vermonter Legree” and the “oily tongued slave-trader Haley, who has the accent of a Northerner,” are not Southern characters at all (64). Similarly, the novel’s hero, Tom, he approvingly explains, is not making a stand against slavery. Rather, his “faithful” “obedience” constitutes a becoming “example for the imitation of man or master” (65). This line of argument, sugarcoating the novel for a Southern audience, notably sidesteps the question of ‘truthfulness’ that is at issue.

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[224] Goodloe writes: "A careful analysis of the book would authorize the [...] inference, — that she has studied to shield the Southern people from op-

More fundamentally modulating the original inquiry, Goodloe responds to whether the book paints a “truthful picture of slavery” by affirming that it is a “fair picture of society,” and by weighing such fairness in relation to the limitations that literariness, understood here as art with its own rules and necessities, puts on representation:

> A book of fiction, to be worth reading, must necessarily be filled with rare and striking incidents, and the leading characters must be remarkable, some for great virtues, others, perhaps, for great vices or follies. A narrative of the ordinary events in the lives of commonplace people would be insufferably dull and insipid ; and a book made up of such materials would be, to the elegant and graphic pictures of life and manners which we have in the writings of Sir Walter Scott and Dickens, what a surveyor’s plot of a ten-acre field is to a painted landscape, in which the eye is charmed by a thousand varieties of hill and dale, of green shrubbery and transparent water, of light and shade, at a glance. In order to determine whether a novel is a fair picture of society, it is not necessary to ask if its chief personages are to be met with every day; but whether they are characteristic of the times and country,—whether they embody the prevalent sentiments, virtues, vices, follies, and peculiarities, —and whether the events, tragic or otherwise, are such as may and do occasionally occur. (64)

Goodloe here offers, in a few quick strokes, a brief theory of literariness; and while this theory in itself is not particularly innovative or unusual—its acknowledgment that we cannot expect to meet with fictional characters in real life echoes the Aristotelian discussion of the possible and probable—this argumentative aside touches on a number of aspects worth discussing in detail.

The central tension the passage registers is between the ordinary, average, quality it associates with reality and the extraordinary, “rare and striking” quality that makes a literary story worth telling and reading.

probrium, and even to convey an elevated idea of Southern society, at the moment of exposing the evils of the system of slavery” (64).

This tension is crucial for arguing for the ‘truthfulness’ of the fictional novel because it sanctions a certain degree of dramatic license and, perhaps, even exaggeration: As a piece of literary writing, the novel now necessarily needs to go beyond the dull but faithful description of things as they are and must find ways of making them more “striking.” The passage notably develops this distinction between mere representation of reality and the conversion of reality into literary form by way of a double analogy. It positions the “elegant” writing of established authors, “Sir Walter Scott and Dickens,” and “charm[ing]” painted landscapes as categorically similar on the one side, and it situates “dull and insipid” writing along with the data practice of land surveying on the other. At the same time, the terms in which it describes this second group, the notion of “ordinary events in the lives of commonplace people,” sound exactly like a foreshadowing of the realist literary project, at least to our contemporary ears.

Finally, the preferred way Goodloe imagines for making reality more striking without violating principles of truthful representation is a form of condensation that turns on a type-token logic. As he explains a few sentences later: “I may never have seen such depravity in one man as that exhibited in the character of Legree, though I have ten thousand times witnessed the various shades of it in different individuals” (64). This way of putting it, inside a book that offers “ten thousand times” documentary evidence of “various shades” of the injustices of slavery, indeed projects a bifurcated representational regime, two different modi operandi: In one, reality is represented by offering it up, “ten thousand times” in partially repetitive, redundant, overlapping data points, in the other, the information is, in Stowe’s words, “crystallized”: condensed into a rare and striking form, a ‘concentrated’ reality that could not be found in real life. Whether *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is best described as either or, or whether it neatly aligns with a single such logic is another question. For Goodloe, making this distinction allows him to call a fictional text a “fair” picture of slavery; and for Stowe, reprinting the letter inside her *Key*, it simultaneously offers a model for how this second, nonfictional book works. The novel contains a condensed, crystallized version of reality, and *Key* features reality in its individual bits and pieces, tokens repeated “ten thousand times.”

4.4.2.3 Preface and Part I, Chapter I

Beginning with the Preface, *Key* filters the description of its own representational processes through a discussion of the relationship between fiction and reality that taps into early realist logics and ethics. This helps bolster the representational credibility of the nonfiction book, but it ends up complicating the situation for *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* itself, a book that may be realist in ethos but hardly so in form.

The preface thus opens to the assertion that *Key* had been written “with much pain,” and this insistence already does different kinds of work: It taps into the sentimentalist fascination—going back to eighteenth-century aesthetics—with the ability of representations of suffering to cause empathetic pain in the spectator, but it also sets up the preface’s core binary between the pleasure of fiction and the pain of documentation. In building this dichotomy, the preface aligns “fictitious writing” and “art” with “pleasure,” with a “refuge from the hard and the terrible,” with the “picturesque and beautiful,” and it opposes these to the “truth” of a “work of fact,” the writing of which has caused “much pain” and that has rendered a description of a “truth that must needs be very dreadful.”[225] It ties these assessments to the subject of slavery. While other subjects, such as the “the tenants of an English estate” might be more pleasurable to read about, “[t]here is nothing picturesque or beautiful” in the quality of slavery.[226] In effect, the subject matter itself, along with the political necessity not to dilute its horrors, thus ends up projecting a proto-realist logic in which the marked absence of beauty becomes a conventionalized formal marker of reality.[227]

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[225] It cannot go unmentioned how Stowe’s emphasis on her own pain in writing *Key* uncomfortably displaces the pain of the African Americans, enslaved or free, that she writes about; a dynamic resonating with Browne’s criticism of sentimentalism cited above (page 225). On the other hand, note also how the data-driven decontextualization of traumatizing material tends to obfuscate the damage that reviewing such material can do. Recent, contemporary reporting on the PTSD suffered by social media content moderators has highlighted this (cf. e.g. Newton; *Cleaners*).

[226] On how the passage aligns Britishness with literary beauty and contrasts this with the absence of such beauty in an American subject matter, cf. my chapter on national literature (starting on page 55).

[227] Discussions of realism as governed by narrative conventions oftentimes reference Roland Barthes’s notion of the “reality effect.” Notably, his original coinage of the term invokes a moment of information overflow: the phenomenon he is trying to explain why a given narrative ends up offering

This configuration is then tied to a second marker of reality: mass. As the preface insists, *Key* is not a result of artistic creation but of reality pressing onto the page in ways that test authorial control; the book has "overrun its limits," it has "grown much beyond the author's original design," and it could only be completed by "omit[ting] a whole department." And while the author thanks "those, at the North and at the South, who have kindly furnished materials for her use," she also notes that "many more [pieces of documentation] have been supplied than could possibly be used. The book is actually selected out of a mountain of materials" (iii). In this logic, mass doubly signals reality: If the allegation leveled against *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was that Stowe had made things up, evoking the masses of materials counteracts this. Her composition process, she tells the readers, did not consist of inventing new material, simply because there was more than enough available in the first place. Instead, she reduced and directed the flood of reality into a publishable form. 'Mass' secondly evokes the data imaginary's notion of corroboration, in which individual faults in a data point get averaged out by amassing more of them.[228] In this logic, the information presented here is credible (enough), because there is much more that is almost the same. Counterintuitively, then, the novel is defended not by way of its novelty, but by way of its massified commonality.

Still, Stowe's insistence that *Key*'s truthfulness was testified to by its lack of pleasures, both for the author and for the readers, complicates any claim that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was similarly true to reality. These complications surface in Stowe's attempt to offer a more nuanced model for how the two books relate. In the first, introductory chapter of Part I, and with overtones of *American Slavery*'s "as it is," she notes the "doubt" that has been raised over whether the novel is "a fair representation of slavery as it at present exists." Against this doubt, she claims that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has been

> more, perhaps, than any other work of fiction [...] a collection and arrangement of real incidents,—of actions really performed, of words and expressions really uttered,—grouped together with reference to a

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"many 'futile' details and thereby increasing the cost of narrative information" (230).

[228] The preface directly addresses the possibility of errors: "It would be vain for [the author] to indulge the hope of being wholly free from error. In the wide field which she has been called to go over, there is a possibility for many mistakes" (iv).

> general result, in the same manner that the mosaic artist groups his fragments of various stones into one general picture. His is a mosaic of gems,—this is a mosaic of facts.
>
> Artistically considered, it might not be best to point out in which quarry and from which region each fragment of the mosaic picture had its origin; and it is equally unartistic to disentangle the glittering web of fiction, and show out of what real warp and woof it is woven, and with what real coloring dyed. But the book had a purpose entirely transcending the artistic one, and accordingly encounters, at the hands of the public, demands not usually made on fictitious works. It is *treated* as a reality,—sifted, tried and tested, as a reality ; and therefore as a reality it may be proper that it should be defended.
>
> The writer acknowledges that the book is a very inadequate representation of slavery ; and it is so, necessarily, for this reason,—that slavery, in some of its workings, is too dreadful for the purposes of art. A work which should represent it strictly as it is would be a work which could not be read. And all works which ever mean to give pleasure, must draw a veil somewhere, or they cannot succeed. (5)

The passage is built around a morphing metaphor for narrative fiction that stresses the compositional process: The novel is first characterized as “a collection,” then as “a mosaic,” and finally as a “glittering web of fiction,” each successive mutation putting greater emphasis on the beauty of the resulting surface, but each also hosting an understanding of how individual materials are being turned into a book. In all three installments of this sequence, “real incidents,” “facts,” or a “real warp and woof” and “real coloring” are emphasized as the building blocks, and the process of writing is a notably artisan one, manual work—collecting, inlaying, weaving—from which ‘imagination’ or ‘inspiration’ are markedly absent.

In this framework of artisan production-by-collection, the “artistic” quality of a text emerges as a notably performative, praxeological and constructed one. When Stowe thus weighs what might “be best” “[a]rtistically considered” or whether a certain behavior is “unartistic,” the passage expresses a notable concern with appearance, with creating and upholding the impression of artfulness, which thus does not naturally reside in the text but must be maintained by performances of literariness. The “glittering web of fiction” then fittingly returns, transformed again, in the final paragraph in the form of the “veil” that “art,” which is “mean[t] to give pleasure,” “must draw” to hide rather than represent reality. The development over these few lines is stunning and it speaks to the conceptual difficulties Stowe is working through here. Setting out to assert the truthfulness of the novel it ends up claiming that art cannot represent slavery, and that an attempt to truly document it "would be a work which could not be read." The figure of the "glittering web" that becomes a "veil" thus pulls together a discussion of the purposes and limitations of art with a discussion of the possibilities of representing reality. In this, the final paragraph is perhaps the most radical one of the three: having come a long way, it categorically denies the ability of fiction to produce a representation that is not "inadequate." In face of such inadequacy, *Key* turns to a mere "collection and arrangement of real incidents," and to the readers' metafictional interest in how this collection relates to a fictional text, an interest in understanding from "which quarry and from which region each fragment of the mosaic" is taken from, and "what real warp and woof" the text is woven from.

In all these instances, *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* is clearly aware of the difficulties it encounters. By presenting a database of materials from which the book (allegedly) was written, and by proceeding to teach its readers how to turn such a mass of morselized information into coherent narratives, it suggests a model of literary production as an artisanal rather than an inspired process. While this democratizes writing, it also comes into conflict with a more stratified vision of the literary field and with the ongoing institutionalization of 'literature' as a distinct social and cultural enterprise.

4.4.3 A Universe of Tomitudes

As striking as the idea of presenting a "key" to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* may appear, the book was part of an enormous and dazzlingly diverse outpouring of responses to the original novel, a burst of cultural activity, textual production and circulation that rivals the multimedia franchises of contemporary "convergence culture" (Jenkins). Among the tie-in products in the immediate aftermath of the novel's publication are the anti-Uncle Tom novels mentioned above, an avalanche of Uncle Tom poems, as well as songs and drama adaptations. Less narrowly textual responses include Uncle Tom busts, Tom-themed wallpapers, or the St. Claire fashion items, at least three different dioramas, static yet detail-rich displays of scenes from the book, that were offered to Americans in the 1850s, as well as at least three Uncle Tom games.

In how they draw on the novel, all of these products tend to take considerable liberty with the material, and it is tempting to regard them as nothing but a commercial fad, an attempt to cash in on the Uncle Tom phenomenon at a time when brand protection was far less rigorous than it is today. This is especially true for products that seem to merely invoke the name of Uncle Tom, indeed using it as a brand, without any tangible connection to the novel itself. But such a view overlooks these products' cultural work, and recent scholarship has in turn worked to read these commodities for their meanings and impact. As I will show in the following pages, this cultural work has typically been facilitated by conversions in symbolic form, by their denarrativizing the novel's plot into individual impressions and vignettes, with the readers replenishing them, resupplying the narrativity drained from the object. This, of course, is not to say that all Tomitudes are dataesque, but it is to underscore how much narrative depletion and dataesqueness form gradable continua; it is to emphasize that the appeals to data that *Key* performs happen in a larger textual context; and it is to focalize the way in which the original novel affords such narrative depletion.

4.4.3.1 Tomitudes and the Exchanges of Symbolic Form

Attempts to understand the cultural response manifesting in this universe of Tomitudes have typically taken either of two roads: A critical view is exemplified by Richard Yarborough's assertion that the Tomitudes corresponded to the novel's pointless sentimentalism (41). Bringing together Henry C. Wright's early criticism of the novel, James David Hart's discussion of *Uncle Tom*, sentimentalism, and sensibility, and Stephen A. Hirsch's survey of the Tomitudes, he suggests that these tie-ins, like the novel, "allowed [consumers] to feel deeply about any situation without having compunctions that anything must be done to rectify it" (Hart 60), thus turning Uncle Tom into "the most frequently sold slave in American history" (Hirsch 311). On the other hand, scholars working in the wake of a revisionist reevaluation of sentimentalism have focused more on the cultural work of the Tomitudes, and on their role in heightening the novel's cultural and political impact.

Interested in Harriet Beecher Stowe's "sentimental realism," Lori Merish, for example, discusses these "'secondary' commodities" as an important indicator for and crucial facet of how the novel practiced the "transform[ation] [of] insensible 'objects' into sensible, hybridized 'animated objects'" (163). Merish writes:

> Stowe's sentimental realism was reinforced by numerous additional commodities produced for domestic consumption: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* inspired dolls, songs, poems, plays, and toys—including a parlor game, "Uncle Tom and Little Eva," introduced in 1852, with pawns that represented, according to the manufacturer, "the continual separation and reunion of families." [...] These "secondary" commodities would be textualized—invested with narrative content—even while they substantiated the novel's realism and the phenomenal reality of its events and characters, loaning their empirical weight to Stowe's fictional representations. (165)

Merish here identifies a system of exchanges, an economy, operating between "Stowe's fictional representations" and the readers' "empirical" reality. This economy presupposes the two to be understood as categorically different, but it turns on mediating between them: What she calls 'textualization,' the "invest[ing] with narrative content," is a two-way transfer in which the novel's meanings, and the emotional charges that go along with them, travel in one direction—and "empirical weight" in the other. These exchanges, notably, almost always coincide with transformations in symbolic form. Readers paying to see an Uncle Tom diorama do so to discover in its static images fragments of the narrative they are familiar with (or that they imagine the novel to be about). In watching the diorama being unrolled, typically accompanied with piano music, they reconstruct from the images, or project onto them, a narrative sequence with a before and after. It is not least this realization of potential narrativity that Merish refers to as 'textualization.'

This is even more clearly the case with the Tom-themed games: they offer a number of material pieces that are representative of characters in the book, along with rules, which govern the possible sequences of events in the game. Based on these, the players instantiate new narratives—meaningful sequences of events related by causality—each time they play. These narratives are situated on two planes at once, and they end up bringing these two planes into dialog: by separating and reuniting fictional families, they are situated in the game's version of the novel's storyworld; and by being part of the players' interaction with one another, the events caused not only by the rules of the game but also by these players' actions and reactions, they exist in the very parlor in which the game is being played as an interpersonal experience. Playing the game thus reactivates the novel's content, in whatever abstract a form (considering how feeble the connection between novel and game are), and it does so by literally playing out versions of potential narratives that the game's rules, elements, and emotional investments harbor. In doing so, it embraces, practices, and celebrates the underlying transformation from one symbolic form into another.[229]

Seen thus, the textual economy underlying Merish's "sentimental realism" relies on this very operation: the conversion from an only latently narrative form into ever new versions of similar narratives. Indeed, the majority of 'Uncle Tomitudes' employs such transformations of symbolic form, and while this might seem like a matter simply of 'medium' in the above cases, it is also true for more narrowly textual tie-ins.

4.4.3.2 *Uncle Tom's Almanac* and the *Pictures and Stories*

One particularly striking example of an emphatically nonnarrative, narrowly textual Tomitude is the *Uncle Tom Almanac*, a British Tom-themed product published in 1853, which brings together a dizzying range of different materials: standard Almanac contents (such as calendars and tables of moon phases), narrative vignettes of slavery (to "teach the misery the Fugitive Slave Law produced," e.g.), informative articles on "Slavery in the United States," various illustrative engravings (of Frederick Douglass, e.g.), abridged versions of Frederick Douglass's *Narrative* and others, a replication of those lines of hymns that Southern churches had eliminated, a list of free slave settlements in Canada, the lyrics and score of the song "Poor Uncle Tom," and some additional information specifically for the British context, such as a list of the members of parliament. The plurality and diversity of materials, and the magazine-like layout with insertions of images, often with explanatory text, within longer articles, encourages a nonlinear, explorative reading, a repetitive, interruptible, active process in which readers are invited to browse and explore, rather than to read cover to cover, and to assemble their own reading trajectory from the fragmented material offered.

While such multimedial and multimodal assemblages are typical of the almanac form, the book's opening "Address" ties this form explicitly to the question of slavery via two observations: As the editors explain, the book is written as a response to the waning affect in Britain regarding slavery: “[I]t must be confessed that, latterly, the Anti-Slavery feeling in this country has somewhat declined—the story of the slave had become old, and familiar, and common-place; men had grown weary of it. The sense of injustice was still the same, but the indignant utterances against it were few and far between.” (4). This decline, the editors explain, had been arrested by Stowe’s book, and the goal of the almanac is to now “strengthen this impression—to lead it to some practical result—to give life and action to a feeling we would not willingly let die.” In the editors’ vision, both Stowe’s sentimentalism and the morselization and fragmentation of the material in the almanac’s database form are meant to disrupt cultural as much as affective routines. This disruption is then, secondly, tied to a particular form of ‘realism’ stemming from how the editors imagine the book to integrate into their readers’ daily life by way of being a reference work: “But why, we may be asked, seek to [advocate for the abolition of slavery in the US] in an Almanack? For this simple reason—that an Almanack is an inseparable companion. Men and women refer to it every day. Our aim is to give a daily lesson, and to bear a daily witness. Consequently, we could not well have taken any other form” (4). While their book contains little information that would require its owners to actually consult it daily, or even every other day, what the editors invoke here, of course, is a conventional understanding of a conventionalized textual form: almanacs in general project a daily ‘use’ because they contain such a wide range of practical information, much of it emphatically in data form. In result, the *Uncle Tom Almanac* accordingly has precious little to do with the novel’s plot, or with the narrative arcs of its subplots, and purposely so; it instead denarrativizes the book into a collection of narratoids, images, pieces of factual information, and journalistic writing, imagining that this fragmentation will allow it to better mesh with its readers’ everyday lives, and that this meshing will in turn lend a crucial, politically potent form of ‘real-ism’ to the text, and revitalizing the abolitionist cause.

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[229] On the properties of play as a symbolic form, cf. Schubert ("Narrative and Play" 116); on play as facilitating conversions from data to narrative, cf. Herrmann ("Unnecessary" 90).

A similar investment in modulating narrativity can be found in another book that sought to cash in on *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*’s success, a children’s version of the novel published under the title *Pictures and Stories from Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by Stowe’s publisher John P. Jewett in 1853. As Stephen A. Hirsch puts it, it was advertised “under the frightening banner ‘Indoctrinate the Children!’” and “oversimplified” the novel “to the point where it just barely gives the outlines of Mrs. Stowe’s story, [...]

filled with so many vague references that it must have confused more incipient abolitionists than it converted" (318).[230] Reading the book does indeed produce a strange sensation: It condenses the novel to approximately thirty pages made up of three types of material: images, that show scenes from the novel; simple poems in large print, that often correspond to the images; and narrative text in a smaller font size, that connects the individual scenes with a basic narrative thread explaining how they relate to one another.[231] The book's opening lines spell out the imagined uses of this mix: "The verses have [...] been written [...] for the capacity of the youngest readers, and have been printed in a large bold type. The prose parts of the book [...] are printed in a smaller type, and it is presumed that in these our younger friends will claim the assistance of their older brothers or sisters, or appeal to the ready aid of their mamma" (*Pictures* 2). This book, too, is not imagined to be read in solitude from cover to cover. Rather, it is imagined as part of a didactic, ritualized, domestic activity in which children of different ages, or children and parents, participate.

In terms of content, the adapted children's version is strikingly "different [from and] more didactic" than the original novel, telling its young readers "that they must listen to their parents, be respectful and disciplined and earn their parents' love" (Kantorovich), but the effect of its formal modification is at least as striking. Already visually, narrative here is emphatically relegated to the fine print, serving as mere scaffolding, while emphasis is placed on the individual, strangely static vignettes. The combination of picture and text invites readers to linger on these individual moments, to explore details in the image and to relate these details to the corresponding poem, perhaps even to learn the poem by heart. Again, the reading experience the book thus projects is a more halting, but also a more active one, in which the narrative's forward progression is relinquished in favor of the mere collection of individual, emotionally rich yet narratively static textual moments.

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[230] There was also a British children's version published under the title *A Peep into Uncle Tom's Cabin*, written by "Aunt Mary" but seemingly approved by Stowe (cf. Yarborough 41). "Except for the new beginning [...], it adds no words to Stowe's text, but instead simply excises words, phrases, paragraphs, episodes and even chapters. [...] Presumably the agenda behind such changes is to make the novel more appropriate for children" (*Peep*).

[231] In addition to these three elements, pictures, poems, and prose, the book closes with the lyrics and score of the "Little Eva Song," credited to John G. Whittier and Manuel Emilio (32).

4.4.3.3 *Uncle Tom's Cabin*'s Seriality as Latent Database

It is no coincidence that these two examples, like many of the other Uncle Tomitudes, so emphatically turn on what seems like a breaking-up and denarrativizing of the original novel's form. In doing so, these commercial tie-ins identify in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* a latent database structure: In the book that its contemporaries lauded for its suspense—a quality one would instinctively associate with a narrative's teleological drive—these commodities discover and exploit a very different organizational principle: they see Stowe's novel as a collection of emotionally charged, sentimental moments that they can capitalize on with little regard for how these moments are held together by the plot. They may be strung together by a narrative thread, but this thread, they suggest, plays a surprisingly minor role and can simply be eliminated, leaving behind a narratively depleted, dataesque collection of sentimental moments. To a certain extent, of course, this is true for all adaptations and for any kind of 'franchising' of a successful work: the process always relies on breaking down the narratively coherent, stable form into individual parts and reusing and re-composing these. What is striking in the case of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, however, is how emphatically the derivatives embrace the resulting denarrativized, or at least narratively depleted, state. Only rarely do the resulting artifacts reassemble the parts they take from the novel into new, coherent narratives; more frequently they opt to hand over to their readers a barrage of individual fragments, asking their audience to piece these fragments together at will, and making this need for the fragments to be pieced together an integral part of their own appeal.

In so emphatically embracing a condition of fragmentation, the Uncle Tomitudes thus realize a quality that the novel itself already has, thanks in no small part to its originally serial production. As Susan Belasco Smith explains in the passage quoted above, seriality trades a "linear story line" for "scenes, tableaus, and parallel organizations of plot" (72). Drawing on studies on Dickens, Thackeray, and Eliot, she thus identifies a set of "constraints" that serialization puts on a writer: "set or uniform lengths for installments, rigid deadlines, the pressure to make each installment dramatic or compelling, an emphasis on vividly drawn characters and sensational plots to aid the audience's memory, interruptions from illness or quarrels with the publisher, censorship, and a variety of editorial interventions." Stowe, Smith concludes, "was certainly restricted by many if not all of these constraints and conventions" (73), and this resulted in a novel marked by "a number of repetitions and parallels in scenes and plots as well as in detailed descriptions of settings" (74).

Seen thus, the fragmentation that the Tomitudes discover, exploit, and foreground in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is indicative of a more general quality of serialized narratives. Simply because of how they are written, they tend to develop structures that resonate with database principles of organization: A potential longer narrative arc tying things together notwithstanding, they necessarily tend to grow into collections of narratoids that individually do and say similar things; that are to a certain extent paradigmatically interchangeable; and that mutually 'corroborate' each other. For example, the novel's many cases of family separation, threatened or performed, are at the heart of its sentimental investment. Their repetition heightens their impact, but it also simply makes sure that even casual readers come across them at least once: if one misses the separation of Uncle Tom and Aunt Chloe, or of Eliza and George, or the threatened one of Eliza and Harry, one might at least read the one of Lucy and her child during Tom's journey into the South (Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* 110), and so on. At the same time, once a reader trains the eye on this one, endlessly repeated plot point, the entire novel becomes a largely paratactic database of family separations: Each one is a little different, each one might be more or less emotionally compelling, but their massification results in the undeniability of the underlying fact: the separation of families, frequently denied by advocates for slavery, emerges as an "incontrovertible" fact of "slavery as it is."

In fact, several other qualities that Smith attributes to the novel's serialized production also resonate with the symbolic form of data and are similarly accentuated by the Tomitudes. For example, Smith notes a moment of interactivity in how the gaps in the writing and publication process allowed readers to write back, imagining and perhaps at times even having an impact on the text's development. To her, "[t]hese [...] letters suggest the intimacy of serialized publication; as in no other literary form, literature became a part of the day-to-day lives of readers" (71). As different as this form of interaction may seem from that of piecing together a text from a collection of fragments, it is impossible to deny how similar Smith's description of the serialized novel's textual effects sounds to how the almanac's editors imagine their more openly dataesque structure to integrate into their readers' daily lives and to "bear a daily witness" (*Uncle Tom's Cabin Almanack* 4).

Even more importantly, perhaps, Smith points out that the serialized publication of the novel in the *National Era* made it interface with the surrounding text in ways that profoundly shaped the reading experience:

> To read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* column by column in issue after issue is a very different experience from reading the novel in book form [...]. On a mechanical level, one is simply struck by the number of other texts that compete for attention on the pages of the newspaper. And in the case of the *National Era*, a newspaper specifically designed to include imaginative literature, aesthetic and political materials inhabit the same space. (78-79)

As Smith explains, the intertextual connections between the novel and the surrounding articles run wide and deep,[232] and readers could hardly avoid making connections between the evolving narratives around Eliza, George, and Tom, and this textual periphery. In result, the fictional characters resonated with the surrounding letters by readers protesting the Fugitive Slave Law, the factual and fictional accounts of slavery, and the many other texts about slavery in the US that populated the *National Era*'s pages. The fragmented form of the serialized novel, the way in which it left plot lines unresolved for at least a week (if not longer), adds to this effect: Wondering if Eliza and Harry will make it to Canada, one instinctively begins to parse the surrounding material for clues. The aesthetic effect Smith describes here may stem from the novel's serialized production and publication, but it also strongly resonates with the data form. Both entail an attenuation of narrativity that opens up the resulting text to rich, querying readerly interaction.

Much like *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the *Uncle Tom Almanac* and *Pictures and Stories from Uncle Tom's Cabin*, are examples of 'Tomitudes' that thrive on a form of denarrativization that resonates with the original novel. In the process, the *Key* and the *Almanac* create textual environments that are structurally similar to that of the novel's original, serialized publication: They (re)situate the novel's fictional events in a landscape of markedly factual information and invite the readers to travel back and forth between these different texts, to invest the factual information with the novel's meaning and to transfer a sense of social

[232] She notes that later developments in the novel seem to be directly inspired by fictional and factual texts that were published in the June 5th, 1851 issue of the *National Era* alongside the novel's first installment, suggesting a dialog between these textual surroundings and Stowe's writing process (79).

and political relevance from the factual information to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The underlying dynamics, however, go beyond these artifacts' recreation of the *National Era*'s page. As Lori Merish points out, and as the *Pictures and Stories*'s narrative depletion also exemplifies, the Tomitudes more generally invited consumers to "textualize" them, to "[invest] with narrative content" these denarrativized Uncle Tom tie-ins. In so doing, they certainly sought to simply cash in on the novel's economic success, or to participate in its political project, but they also realized (in both meanings of the word) how much the novel itself, despite its ability to create a strong sense of suspense, was already a narratively depleted product.

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A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin, then, constitutes a particularly decisive incarnation of some of the textual dynamics most Tomitudes share. This book, too, engages in narrative depletion, but its fully dataesque form does so with particular vigor. Presenting itself as a source book, it simulates an unbounded, endless database of facts that mutually corroborate each other, and it aligns the novel's author's authority with her ability to command this archive at will: to present evidence for any element of the story that might be in doubt, and to further explode any keyword into more troves of ever more evidence.

In how it envisions the total availability and reliability of factual knowledge, in its morselization of narrative, and in its presentation of knowledge in short, discontinuous segments, *Key* evokes the textual logic of an encyclopedia, but its connection to the novel complicates any straightforward encyclopedic appeals. Claiming to prove not the realities of slavery, as for example *American Slavery* does, but the realness of slavery's representation in a novel endows *Key* with a distinct metafictional twist. The book that operates mainly by providing dataesque evidence of how slavery really is ends up pondering, in repeated iterations, whether and how literature can represent these realities. In doing so, it evokes 'literature' at a time when the exact contours of this social institution were still more fuzzy and more in flux than they are today, and its decision to bring in dataesque forms to defend the truth of narrative fiction thus testifies to the productivity of the border between literary and data practices at the time.

■□□ ■□■

As different as they are in their respective projects, their motivations, and their form, *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *American Slavery as It Is* then share in at least one important facet of their cultural work: Both texts are marked by a broader cultural desire for "literary efficacy" (Gilmore 59), the ability of texts to describe the world impactfully, and both identify in the social tensions around slavery a deep and troubling failure of textual representation. As much as the young nation was still a "republic of letters" (Warner ix), the failure of textuality to reconcile the differing world views in North and South, to forge a consensus both on what slavery is and on what should be done about it was perceived as a deeply troubling sign of the limits of textual representation generally. Perhaps this moment of insecurity, this disillusionment with representation ran deeper, having to do not just with this one political question but more generally with how the increasing integration of the public sphere cast into relief the fault lines between different "interpretive communities." The integration of the public sphere, I have suggested, was thus paradoxically felt as a form of fracturing of the still-young republic. The question of abolition gave a concrete, urgent, and tangible form to this sense of crisis.

In response to this, both *American Slavery* and *Key* turn to data. Rather than attempting to provide grand narratives to stitch together the fracturing public sphere, they aim to separate the question of what slavery is from the question of what should be done about it, a rhetorical trick, of course, that trusts that once the reality of slavery has been established, the political consequences are impossible to disagree on; a rhetorical trick that nevertheless has far-reaching implications. Attempting to force a consensus at least on the facts, both books choose to turn experience into data, to break down narrative accounts into smaller and smaller bits, narratoids, that ideally testify to only one discrete quality of slavery. Massifying them, showing them to be paradigmatically replaceable and thus mutually corroborative, they hope to fix the reality of slavery, one data point at a time.

More importantly, however, they do not leave it at turning (narrative accounts of) experience into data. Rather than simply putting their trust in one symbolic form, they focus their investment on the liminal border between narrative and data and on the conversions from one symbolic form into another that happen there. They instruct their readers on how to turn the dataesque information they provide (back) into more meaningful, more narrative accounts of reality. In doing so, they imagine ‘reading’ as a practice in which texts do not fashion their audiences with coherent, ready-made accounts of the world but provide the raw material of experience, which readers then need to use to construct from them each their own, individual yet sufficiently compatible views of reality—a deeply democratic, republican vision of the social role of text. With much of the material in these two books taken from newspapers, this reading practice clearly meshes with how another socio-textual institution, daily newspapers, has helped imagine vast communities as nations. However, in how these two books invoke the symbolic form of data while simultaneously engaging in a debate about the limitations of literature, they pursue a more general and more fundamental interest in the (symbolic) forms underwriting a modern, democratic republic.

5 Data, Literature, and the Academy: A Coda

Thou shalt not do as the dean pleases,
Thou shalt not write thy doctor's thesis
On education,
Thou shalt not worship projects nor
Shalt thou or thine bow down before
Administration.

Thou shalt not answer questionnaires
Or quizzes upon World-Affairs,
Nor with compliance
Take any test. Thou shalt not sit
With statisticians nor commit
A social science.

— W. H. Auden

5.1 Exploding the Frame

This final chapter steps outside of the chronology of this study to broaden the view in two important ways. One has to do with the time frame discussed. The bulk of this study focuses on the middle of the nineteenth century as a crucial phase both in the formation of what I call the 'US data imaginary' and in the self-reflexive self textualization of the young nation. It investigates this phase as one in which data practices and literature were seen as two competing modes of capturing the nation; in which their presumed opposition helped mutually define both of these social enterprises, one serving as a foil to the other; and in which the ambivalences resulting from this social construction of a binary of symbolic forms can be traced across various primary texts and sociopolitical concerns with particular, poignant clarity. This chapter, in turn, visits three later historical moments—the end of the nineteenth century, the middle of the twentieth, and the beginning of the twenty-first—to spotlight how the data-literature binary continues to inform discussions of literature, not least in regard to its socio-political valency.

In addition to so temporally broadening the view, this chapter, focuses on the academy and on how the data-literature binary reverberates in academic discussions of scholarship, of disciplinarity, and of method. It does so by engaging three controversies about the contours of literary studies in the US: One is a particularly early attempt to introduce quantitative reading into the English literature curriculum in the 1890s; the second is a discussion of whether American studies can develop a method—a discussion in which, I will argue, data makes a hitherto overlooked cameo appearance whenever sociology and 'content analysis' are evoked; and the third is the (ongoing) debate around the role of the 'digital humanities' in light of the crisis the humanities faced—and continue to face—at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

In so doing and in covering such large an expanse of time, this chapter must necessarily be more impressionistic than the previous ones. After all, it engages three very different sites, each spaced at least two generations apart from the others, and it acknowledges that these three sites are very different indeed in terms of the debates they host. The coda, *excursus* quality of this chapter thus shows not only in how it steps outside of the temporal frame of the overall study but also in the relative looseness with which its individual parts relate. Accordingly, adding this chapter as a Coda allows me to more freely point to resonances between these three otherwise only loosely connected moments. The meta-reflexive quality of this chapter, which, among other things, features an Americanist reflect on how Americanists reflect on method, at times also makes for a slightly looser register, especially so in the last section, the temporal vicinity of which makes it hard to abstain entirely from a somewhat editorializing tone. Still, engaging these three later moments forms an integral part of this study's discussion of the data imaginary.

The three historical moments this chapter accordingly revisits are key moments of a dynamization of the academy, moments in which social and institutional transformations require the university to rethink and re-situate itself, its function, and its inner makeup. They are also moments in which the university, the humanities, and (English) literary studies in particular feel compelled to reevaluate and reinterpret their relationship to society, moments in which the humanities thus have to newly justify their role in and value for a democratic society, moments in which literary studies gets asked about its practical value. They are, in other words, all moments of a crisis of sorts.

In these three waves of democratization, the data-literature divide repeatedly gets invoked as a key conceptual touchstone. More often than not, renegotiating the social roles and functions of the humanities here accordingly means revisiting and renegotiating the relationship between literature and data. The ensuing debates thus activate a discursive nexus that I have identified throughout this study as intimately tied to the US data imaginary as it emerges in the nineteenth century: they associate the symbolic form of data with a particular modern, liberatory, democratic promise that is, conversely, seen as lacking in the realm of the literary proper.

Seen from within the disciplinary confines of literary or American studies, the debates I engage are all debates of method. Like all discussions of method, they are boundary practices: acts that determine who is inside and who is outside of the discipline. They are also acts, struggles even, that determine who gets to say so. In this, they are performances of distinction in every meaning of the word. It is no surprise that Rita Felski, in a slightly different context, refers to these debates as “the method wars” (“Introduction” v). Perhaps because this is so, these debates, seen from a greater distance, are also often discussions of class—or they at least appeal to matters of class. Invested in questions of power, hierarchy, and stratification as they are, they ask how to service the masses of less-educated students flowing into the land grant universities at the turn of the century; about whether traditional literary studies methods are even able to pick up on the negotiations of class in, for example, Mark Twain; and they frame the stratification of academia as a classed system of sorts. In all these debates, data gets invoked as a powerful chiffre to express an ‘other’ to literature itself, and to cast this distinction between literature and its dataesque other as one that is of deep and acute social import.

5.2 Lucius A. Sherman’s *Analytics of Literature* and Willa Cather’s “Information Vampires”

Wondering, in a 2014 article on slate.com, about the recent popularity of the word “analytics,” Mark Liberman turns to the *OED* to learn more about the term. The dictionary distinguishes different meanings and usages, and it dates the contemporarily en-vogue one, the one Liberman is interested in, to 1966.

> b. The collation and analysis of data or statistics, esp. by computer, typically for financial or commercial purposes; the data that results from this; (also) software used for this purpose.
> 1966 Econ. & Polit. Weekly 15 Oct. 377/1 A correct conclusion from the analytics of comparative statics. ("analytics, n.")

The timeline makes sense at first glance, considering that the *OED* ties this notion of analytics as based on the "collation and analysis of data" to the availability of computers. Digging deeper, Liberman however makes a surprising discovery: There is an earlier case of this usage, apparently overlooked by the *OED*'s editors but very much in line with the contemporary computer- and data-oriented meaning of the word: Lucius Adelno Sherman's 1893 book titled *Analytics of Literature: A Manual for the Objective Study of English Prose and Poetry*. Following this track further, he finds out that Sherman, a professor of English at the University of Nebraska, was Willa Cather's teacher, and that she apparently despised his methods, as documented in Bernice Slote's *The Kingdom of Art*. Sherman, Liberman's article sums up, was "a digital humanist *avant la lettre*," and "Willa Cather was skeptical of analytics before you were" (Liberman).

Unwittingly perhaps, Liberman's article is fully in line with scholarship on Sherman, who today by and large remains somewhat obscure, at least from a literary studies perspective: Even though he was a prolific writer, with several books on Shakespeare and Tennyson, and other edited volumes on literature, Sherman is nowadays mostly mentioned in genealogies of the digital humanities, at least in those that try to "get beyond the Busa story" (Underwood)[233]; he is more regularly invoked in linguistics in the histories of stylometry and of readability studies (e.g. DuBay 1); and he makes an even more frequent appearance in discussions of Willa Cather's work, typically cast as the dubious teacher who, to Cather, represented everything that is reprehensible about literary studies scholars and other "information vampires," who don't adore but assign, interpret, and teach texts (Cather, *Willa* 111).[234] In fact, so deep ran Cather's rejection of Sherman's that she not only made him the target of a mock poem anonymously published in the university's *Hesperian*.[235] Her review of *Lohengrin* and *Die Walküre*, published eight years after her taking her first class with him, alludes to him when it abruptly dismisses "the people who count the poetic words in Tennyson" (*World* 622), and her disdain for her former teacher's methods still filtered into her writing a full thirty years later (cf. Funda 310). The fact that Sherman's academic work is now to be found, if at all, not in the disciplinary history of English but in the fuzzy no man's land between disciplines—between English, the digital humanities, and (corpus) linguistics—certainly speaks to the more fluid, "less defined" quality of disciplinary boundaries "of earlier eras." It also speaks, more eloquently even, to the vigor with which quantitative methods were expelled from the study of English literature in the decades after (Lee, *Overwhelmed* 123). And so today Sherman is remembered less for his *Analytics*, his data-driven attempt to reform the study of English and American literature, and more for his more famous student's scorn.

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[233] The "Busa story" here refers to Roberto Busa, an Italian Jesuit and DH pioneer of sorts. His 1946 *Index Thomisticus* is frequently considered the first DH project in the modern sense.

[234] In an interview she explained: "I hope the readers of that story have enjoyed reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it. I like my stories to be read because people like them. I didn't want to be 'assigned reading' for university classes, a duty, a target for information vampires. Why should

In the following pages, I will discuss Sherman's work in the context of the transformation of US academia in the 1890s. Rather than focus on the presumed oddity (or the presumed prescience) of his *avant-la-lettre* quantitative humanities approach, I will hone in on the pedagogical goals and hopes he expresses as he explains his method. As much as his work might have been expressive of a "scientific mania" or a "scientific virus" raging at the time, as Evelyn I. Funda and Robert E. Knoll characterize it in remarkably pathologizing terms (Funda 289; Knoll 32), Sherman's method of turning literature into data and then reading the data rather than the original text, I will argue, was a direct response to the influx of masses of students who did not come from educated families, whose class background, in other words, made it difficult for them to appreciate literature as literature right away. The mechanistic, straightforward interpretation of literature via data, Sherman hoped,

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anyone try to teach contemporary literature, anyway? Stories are to be read" (*Willa* 111).

[235] Her "He Took Analytics" appeared on December 1, 1893. It alluded to "Antony and Cleopatra" by William Haines Lytle, "[making] mock-heroic the suffering of students forced to take Analytics" with Sherman (cf. Jewell and Zillig 170). Cather's *The Song of the Lark* has a reference on "diagramming" that is likely about Sherman (92). On Cather's and Sherman's animosity, cf. also Woodress (80-81, 87).

would offer them a gateway into a more literary mindset and would thus overcome the social stratification between the ‘lower’ and the ‘literary’ classes.

5.2.1 “The Data Now in Hand”: Sherman’s Distant Readings

Published in 1892, Sherman’s “On Certain Facts and Principles in the Development of Form in Literature” is an earlier, shorter version of the argument he would then later unfold at length in his *Analytics of Literature*, and the essay itself is written more as a process description of his discoveries and less as a thesis-driven, argumentative paper.[236] It begins by detailing his observation of “differences of form between the sentences” of individual writers, differences primarily in terms of these sentences’ lengths. From this observation, Sherman sets out to count the average number of words between periods for a large quantity of texts, efforts he documents in nine pages of tables of sentence lengths. Looking at these numbers, having “[t]he data now in hand” (“On Certain” 252), he makes a number of observations, reading no longer the texts themselves but only their thus abstracted, datafied form:

> Now that the number of words in consecutive sentences was definitely exhibited, strange facts and features of style were indicated or suggested. The length of one sentence, it was shown, might be echoed unconsciously into the next, as notably in Macaulay’s groups of seventeens. Noteworthy was Macaulay’s failing for odd, and De Quincey’s for prime, numbers, as also Macaulay’s partiality to seven and nine for final digits. But the really remarkable thing was the apparently constant sentence average in the respective authors. Could it be possible that stylists as eminent and practised as these are subject to a rigid rhythmic law, from which even by the widest range and variety of sentence lengths and forms they may not escape? (348)

As strange and Kabbalah-like as his observations on the lack of prime numbers in De Quincy may sound, the general observation of regularities in sentence length opens up two lines of inquiry for him: one is into the stylistic peculiarity of individual authors—the assumption that authors have preferred sentence lengths and that they compensate for longer sentences by adding shorter ones so that an author’s text may be identified by its characteristic average sentence length. The other is into the *longue-durée* historical development of written English—the “principal lines along which the English sentence had approached its modern simplicity and strength” (13).[237] Based on these observations, Sherman then develops more complex metrics, such as “sentential complexity and weight” as well as numbers on “predications, [...] simple sentences, and [...] predications avoided through use of present participles, past participles, and appositives” (357, cf. Fig. 20). These allow him to design visualizations, simple charts that detail a given text’s stylistic ‘fingerprint’

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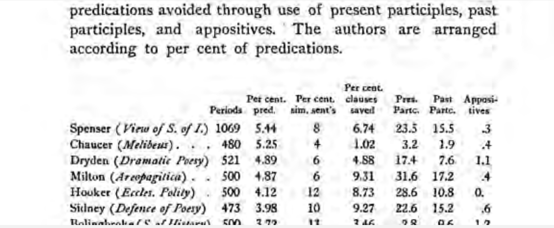
[236] Along with his *How To Describe and Narrate Visually* and his *Elements of Literature and Composition: A Manual for Schools*, these texts form the canon of Sherman’s explication of his method.



predications avoided through use of present participles, past participles, and appositives. The authors are arranged according to per cent of predications.

	Periods	Per cent. pred.	Per cent. sim. sent's	Per cent. clauses saved	Pres. Partc.	Past Partc.	Appositives
Spenser (*View of S. of I.*)	1069	5.44	8	6.74	23.5	15.5	.3
Chaucer (*Melibeus*) . . .	480	5.25	4	1.02	3.2	1.9	.4
Dryden (*Dramatic Poesy*)	521	4.89	6	4.88	17.4	7.6	1.1
Milton (*Areopagitica*) . .	500	4.87	6	9.31	31.6	17.2	.4
Hooker (*Eccles. Polity*) .	500	4.12	12	8.73	28.6	10.8	0.
Sidney (*Defence of Poesy*)	473	3.98	10	9.27	22.6	15.2	.6

*Fig. 20: Literature as Data (*On Certain *375)*

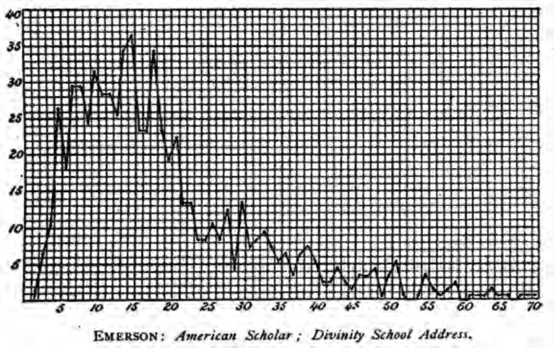


*Fig. 21: A Data Fingerprint of Emerson (*On Certain *360)*

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237 Picking on “classical learning,” which stood in for upper-class elite education in the discourses on the Land Grant university, Sherman’s *longue-durée* perspective laments that the “influence of classical learning had the effect of fastening a heavy unoral diction upon the English literary world. From that the race has been slowly but effectually liberating itself; so that we are to-day almost emancipated from mediaevalism in literature as in all things else” (365). On his stylometry, cf. DuBay.

(Fig. 21), and to argue points such as the “unequivocally established [...] fact of a systematic decrease of sentential complexity and weight, towards the oral norm.”

In all of these aspects, Sherman’s project is decidedly data-driven, and it projects a strong dataesque aesthetic of its own. It turns the text into a set of discrete numbers, data, and it proceeds by reading this data, rather than the original text, for its meaning. This data-driven quality accordingly shows in the long tables of vast numerical information and in the graphs he charts, but it also shows, throughout, in his stance toward masses of information. Early on in his essay he admits that the material he is working with is inherently flawed:

> In this attempt I realized at once, what I had failed to comprehend before, that the punctuation in early writers is often signally false to both form and sense, therefore could not fail to misrepresent the authors and period in hand. But all such considerations, until some sort of foothold might be reached, were disregarded ; a period as found was taken as a period, no matter if beginning with a *which* or *when*, and ending without principal verb. (337-38)

The logic this passage exhibits is a decidedly big-data one, the idea being that the sheer mass of raw data processed will make it both impossible and unnecessary to assume or rely on particularly ‘clean’ data. The same logic returns later on when Sherman assumes for each author “the operation of some kind of sentence-sense, some conception or ideal of form which, if it could have its will, would reduce all sentences to procrustean regularity.” Evoking the law of large numbers,[238] he explains: “A single act may or may not signify with respect to character, but the sum of a man’s deeds for a day or a week will exhibit his ideals and principles and other springs of action.” It is the ability to average out all outliers that, in Sherman’s view, constitutes the superiority of his method and makes it “objective,” even though the result can read a bit jarring: “Here, then, in this 23.43 was the resultant of the forces which had made Macaulay’s literary character” (353).

As “muddleheaded” (Hayes 265) as such a conclusion, “23.43,” may sound, the general thrust of Sherman’s analysis, and particularly his interest in identifying characteristic numbers for individual authors, was not his alone. A few years earlier, in 1887, Thomas Corwin Mendenhall had already published a paper on the “Characteristic Curves of Composition" in *Science*, and this paper in turn makes reference to an even earlier suggestion by Augustus DeMorgan, that "some time somebody will institute a comparison among writers in regard to the average length of words used in composition, and that it may be found possible to identify the author of a book, a poem, or a play, in this way" (qtd. in Mendenhall 237). As Mendenhall concludes, it should be possible to determine characteristic curves for each author and to use these in "cases of disputed authorship. If striking differences are found between the curves of known and suspected compositions of any writer, the evidence against identity of authorship would be quite conclusive" (246). Mendenhall's paper is not only at times regarded "one of the earliest examples of quantitative stylistics" as well as "one of the first text visualizations" (Rockwell and Sinclair 9). It also "led to a commission to use his technique to show that Bacon was really the author of Shakespeare's plays (Mendenhall 1901); A wealthy Bostonian, Augustus Hemingway, paid for the tedious work of two women who counted word lengths only to show that no, Bacon's prose didn't have the curve characteristic of Shakespeare's drama" (9).[239] More importantly, perhaps, Mendenhall's paper, its precursor work, and the actions in spawned illustrate how much Sherman's work was indeed embedded in a broader academic and social interest in quantitative investigations of literary style.

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[238] On the law of large numbers, cf. Hacking (*Taming*) and page 33 above.

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[239] As Edward Dowden summarizes in particularly concise a fashion, Shakespeare's authorship had seen even earlier stylometric investigations: He lists James Spedding's "Who Wrote Henry VIII?" published in the August 1850 edition of *Gentleman's Magazine*, which "first applied quantitative criticism of verse peculiarities to the study of Shakespeare's writings"; as well as work by Charles Bathurst, (1857), J. K. Ingram's *Afternoon Lectures* (1863), George L. Craik's "English of Shakespeare" (1872). Rev. F. G. Fleay and Wilhelm Hertzberg are credited with "'quantitative criticism' of the characteristics of verse" (Dowden, *Shakspere* 6). Attempts to identify the authorship of Shakespeare's plays continues today and uses updated stylometric procedures, including machine learning algorithms. Petr Plecháč's 2019 paper on the "Relative Contributions of Shakespeare and Fletcher in Henry VIII: An Analysis Based on Most Frequent Words and Most Frequent Rhythmic Patterns" is an example of this. On the gender aspect of having this "tedious work [done by] two women," cf. page 268, n. 198, as well as Garvey (*Writing* 239-40).

5.2.2 The English Classroom as Laboratory

What makes Sherman's work particularly pertinent in the context of this study, however, is not simply that he uses data to engage texts. Rather, it is the rhetoric he turns to in order to explain and justify his project. After all, he never positions his work as being primarily about identifying authorship or tracing the historical development of the English language. Instead he emphatically situates his interest inside "English," however broad or narrow this disciplinary designation was understood at the time. This is true for his "Facts and Principles," but it is even clearer in his *Analytics*, where the teaching of English literature moves front and center. In his shorter essay, the method's main appeal is still simply that of its presumed objectivity: As Sherman explains, using tables of sentence lengths allows him "to study the literature objectively, scalpel and microscope in hand" (349). His book-length *Analytics of Literature* in turn then foregrounds a different rationale. The quantitative study of style now gets positioned first and foremost as a method for teaching literature. In the process, the original notion of 'objectivity' comes to be tied to a sense of a decidedly US-inflected project of democratic, egalitarian education.

Sherman's *Analytics* accordingly brands itself as a "manual" (vi), a kind of textbook not meant primarily to disseminate his academic findings to an audience of scholars but to facilitate a particular way of teaching literature.[240] As its author explains in the Preface, "[t]his is not a volume [...] to be merely read. Each topic and point must be diligently and thoroughly worked out to a personal solution" (x).[241] To this end, and to "aid teachers not acquainted with laboratory methods, hints and suggestions how to set the students at work [...] are appended to many chapters" (x-xi). This focus on teaching is important not least because Sherman is very much aware of the reservations his data-driven, quantitative approach to reading and interpreting literature will encounter. He acknowledges that "[t]here is a very natural antipathy to treating aesthetics by scientific methods" (*Analytics* xii), and tying his method to the more narrow goal of educating students is accordingly meant to help dispel these reservations.[242] After all, it now ties quantitative reading to a particular purpose and to a particular, narrowly defined audience, and it positions as one of the main benefits of this method the way in which it allows for practical, hands-on experiments.

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[240] Fittingly, he also published a book for schools, his *Elements of Literature and Composition: A Manual for Schools*.

[241] Note how this call for "work[ing] out to a personal solution" the different exercises jibes with the "new kind of hermeneutic" through "haptic engagement" that Stephen Ramsay praises in the digital humanities ("On" 244). For more on this, cf. page 387 below.

This focus on teaching, and in particular the notion of a 'laboratory,' then injects an egalitarian, democratic thrust into Sherman's argument.[243] It situates his innovation—and the way in which it facilitates classroom 'experiments' in reading—in the context of the earlier transformation in the teaching of the sciences, which he describes as newly participatory, too. "Twenty years ago the college study of Physics and Chemistry consisted of recitations in assigned pages from a text-book," with some few experiments performed by the professor and with the students looking on. This has changed: "Physics and Chemistry and Botany, but also Zoölogy and Geology, and, following their lead, History and Economics and Psychology, have gone over from theoretical and dogmatic to experimental modes of teaching." Notably, these new ways of teaching are preferable to Sherman because they enhance equality in the classroom. Learning "is no longer a question of gifts or genius [...]. Science has, in its method of substituting experiments and experiences for second-hand knowledge, found a means of bridging the chasm between exceptionally endowed and mediocre minds" (vi).

In Sherman's view, the English classroom had seen similar attempts at reform, but with only limited successes so far: Teaching had already moved away from simply "requiring students to memorize observations from text-books about literature, or biographies of authors, or circumstances under which masterpieces have been composed" and toward confronting them with "literature itself," to force them to "get their acquaintance with books and authors and circumstances as nearly as possible first hand." To achieve this, students are now "sent into the library to find out things for themselves." However, this has deepened rather than bridged the divide between students of varying talent:

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[242] Even in this realm of pedagogy, he acknowledges a possible objection: the concern that analyzing poetry will make the students "too conscious of 'associational words,' or 'tropes,' or 'effects,' or other elements" so that they lose the ability for an "enjoyment of poetry as a whole" (xii). But he quickly adds that he could not witness a single case in which the intellectual understanding had lessened the aesthetic impact.

[243] On this notion of the laboratory, cf. H. C. Peterson's review of Sherman's *Analytics* (qtd. in Funda 304-05).

> [A]mong students set thus to study literature in its pure forms, only those quick to perceive principles and merits intuitively have thus far consciously or unconsciously gotten much from the subject. The slower of perception are not helped to find the implied processes. Especially has this been true of poetry. There has been little success in teaching this except to such as have already felt its power" (vii)

Again and again throughout the Preface, Sherman returns to this point: The main advantage of his objective approach, in his eyes, is its presumed ability to allow even mediocre students to develop a sense of literature: Everybody can count words, the rationale goes, and if interpretation is a matter of transforming these word counts into meaning by following set rules, interpretation becomes something anybody can do. The main selling point of a more 'scientific,' numbers-driven approach to literature, then, is the sense that a 'laboratory of literature' is an inherently dehierarchizing, interactive, and therefore ultimately more democratic space: Here the students are "called in to get their own experiences of each degree and quality in some way for themselves." After all, as Sherman spells out his maxim: "No other man's impressions may take the place of ours. We may weigh, compare, and accept or reject, but must first have impressions or judgments of our own." In his eyes, "[t]he paramount business in the teaching of literature is to enable the student to have first impressions, to develop in him the power of independent observation and judgment ; to show him how to discern and interpret every manner of excellence and beauty for himself" (ix).[244] Finally, the very skills that the hands-on laboratory work on literature is supposed to hone, "independent observation and judgment," happen to be ones that are also expected of the citizens in a democratic republic.[245]

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[244] Note how Sherman's goal teaching his students "independent observation and judgment" resonates with the goals the New Critics later spelled out: I. A. Richards "understood his task in teaching Cambridge undergraduates as the training of their literary judgment, which he hoped to put on a surer, scientific footing. The faculty of judgment is what he meant by the term 'literary criticism' in the *Principles of Literary Criticism*" (Guillory 12).

[245] As I will explore in more detail below, it is no coincidence that Sherman highlights these qualities. In the widening canon of subject areas students could study, and in a climate that gave preference to practical, technical disciplines, English faculty surely felt a certain pressure to defend their discipline. This dynamic in which an appeal to data is made in order to justify or legitimate the social relevance of literary studies, somewhat latent in this case, moves to the center of attention in the two following two sections.

In the Preface to his *Analytics*, the source of the original inequality between students, between those "quick to perceive principles and merits intuitively" and those "slower of perception," is not explicitly spelled out.[246] At times it reads merely like a matter of individual talent, but there are hints that Sherman regards this also as a more structural problem, a matter of social stratification. Note, for example, how he frames "taste" as something that every human being has, even if it needs to be developed, awakened through education and practice: His "method," he writes, "will discover to those who suppose they have no taste for the best literature that they have such taste; and it will make those who have never found anything in poetry both feel and know something of its power" (xii). The taste for literature in this view is inherent in all, dormant perhaps in many, but certainly present as a potential. For some, childhood experiences and early instruction have already awakened it, for others this is what Sherman's method claims to do.

This aspect becomes even more apparent in a letter Sherman wrote to E. C. Stedman at Harvard in 1893.[247] In it Sherman describes teaching "Gen'l Eng. Lit" to two different cohorts, "a class of scientific students" and a "literary division." As he describes it, the science students "had never read poetry at all; Without exception they had taken no delight in it." Performing the exercises prescribed by his *Analytics*, however, they quickly learned to enjoy Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Keats, and Shelley—at times even being "excited" by their reading while "the literary division merely agreed that it was 'good.'" In the letter, as in the Preface, Sherman thus advertises his data-driven method primarily for its ability to even out the differences between these two groups of students. However, this time he is even more explicit as to where their differences stem from: "The literary division included students that had read Homer and other Classics, some of them Victor Hugo and Goethe, and were generally from families of literary traditions and culture." It is here that the egalitarian politics of Sherman's *Analytics* become most readily apparent. At least as he justifies his data-driven efforts, their main value lies in how they can help those students not “from families of [...] culture” understand, interpret, feel, and talk about literature. In making this argument, he evokes the conventional connection between data, egalitarianism, and democracy that is a set element in the US data imaginary. He also situates his project, and roots this data-democracy connection, in the middle of debates around the transformations of higher education raging at the time.

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[246] In Sherman's view, this is a concern specifically with regard to undergrads: "of all young men in the world of equal privileges and knowledge the academic undergraduate, except for causes outside of the curriculum, is most elementary in his emotional culture" (viii).

[247] The letter, inserted into title pages of a copy of Sherman's *Analytics* in Harvard's University Library, was found by Maurice Lee during his archival work for *Overwhelmed* (Lee, *Overwhelmed* 247). Lee quotes individual passages from it in his book (122), and he generously provided a copy of the full letter for the purpose of this chapter.

5.2.3 “Dude Factories” vs. Mass Teaching for Democracy

Indeed, the emphasis Sherman puts on teaching “scientific students” and those who do not have a family background of literary education speaks of both the situation at his home institution, the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, and of the larger transformations of US higher education after the end of the Civil War. Sherman’s university, like the US university system generally, had to absorb an unprecedented, explosive rise in enrollment numbers in the 1880s, a massive diversification of the student body, and a fundamental change in the social function of this institution —changes that can all be summed up under the heading of a democratization of university education and university access. This constellation forms another facet in the association, evoked by Sherman, of democracy, numeracy, science, and ‘practical’ learning on the one side vis-a-vis the perpetuation of ‘aristocratic’ elites and lofty, fine arts on the other.

As Evelyn I. Funda suggests in a redeeming account of his work, Sherman found himself in “a transitional period in literary pedagogy and critical methodology” (295).[248] At this juncture, she claims, he addresses “salient questions about literary pedagogy at a particular moment when the academy was at a key evolutionary point in terms of university mission, pedagogy, and research methodology” (295). In doing so, and in turning to data to answer these questions, Sherman positions himself inside three overlapping debates that dominated discussions of the university, of teaching, and of English Literature at the time. One is a debate about how universities should balance teaching and research; the other is about the tension between the ‘philological’ (i.e. linguistic) and the ‘aesthetic’ approach to literature (cf. Funda 308-11); and the third is about the conflict between the agricultural, practical, vocational training of a diverse student body and the aesthetic education of a smaller cultural elite. These debates shape the overall educational landscape at the time, but they also become starkly visible in Sherman’s home institution, the university of Nebraska.

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[248] As she insists, Sherman was not just Cather’s obscure teacher but a “Yale-educated professor [who] was becoming well known [...] as a sought-after educator and literary critic [and] who, during his more than fifty-year career, wrote seven books on the study of literature and education and edited several others” (289).

Founded in 1869, two years after Nebraska had joined the Union, the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, was still a relatively young institution during his tenure. It had been funded through the 1862 Morril Land Grant Act, which required it to have a certain vocational profile. It stayed small for twenty years, a “tiny institution—a university only in aspiration” (Luebke 172), with fights “between factions within the Board of Regents over the character of the institution [...], as reformers battled traditionalists in their efforts to introduce electives into the curriculum and professionalize the faculty” (172). In the 1890s, around the time that Sherman published his *Analytics*, enrollment numbers sharply rose, and by 1897 “the University of Nebraska had become one of the leading state universities in the country. It ranked fifteenth in the nation in terms of enrollment; it exceeded the universities of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Iowa, as well as Princeton, Stanford, and Brown” (173). Even if the rise of enrollment numbers, from 384 in 1890 to about 1500 in 1895, might seem moderate in absolute terms (“University”), their quintupling in just five years constituted a massive, disruptive change that Sherman’s university had to absorb.

These rising numbers were in line with general changes in the role the university played in US society at the time. As Frederick Rudolph points out, “[t]he emergence, after the Civil War, of land-grant colleges and institutes of technology; the rapidly accumulating knowledge of a technical nature which required some orderly synthesis; the requirements of now complex, industrial society with its need for experts of the most specialized sort” were all elements in a larger social transformation (338). This transformation fostered a “spirit of vocationalism” (339), the sense that a university education was no longer needed only for entry into the highest echelons of society but instead qualified students for a much broader set of occupational and civic roles. Accordingly, colleges were now increasingly “required to welcome and to serve potential merchants, journalists, manufacturers, chemists, teachers inventors, artists, musicians, dieticians, pharmacists, scientific farmers, and engineers on an equal basis with students of law, theology, and medicine" (341). This broadening of access went hand in hand with an "unleashing of new impulses to social and economic mobility," an "emergence of a more democratic psychology which stressed individual differences and needs," and "a more democratic philosophy which recognized the right to learning and character-training of women, farmers, mechanics, and the great aspiring middle class" (245). Put differently, where traditional universities with their course of "classical studies" placed their "emphasis [...] on preparing *certain* citizens to become one of the professional elite by entering law, medicine, or the ministry" (Funda 296, my emphasis), the Morril Act's "emphasis on the practical and scientific" and on a vocational profile (297) aided a much more fundamental transformation of the university, which quickly became a more broadly accessible, more egalitarian, more democratic institution aiming to qualify a less homogeneous student body, many citizens, for all kinds of mid-level functions and roles.

These transformations obviously came with their own conflicts, inside the institutions and outside. Whereas traditionalists resisted changes such as the introduction of electives that allowed students to tailor their course of study to their needs, education reformers "recognized that a new society needed new agencies of instruction, cohesion, and control" (Rudolph 245). In their eyes, earlier "collegiate reformers had failed in their efforts to bring the colleges into any vital connection with the economic life of the nation. Now, the tendencies of an equalitarian and expanding industrial society made no distinction between what might be learned on the job or in the university" (340). This resulted in conflicts between the "classicists, who would find room for the new subjects" in or on the margins of existing curricula, and "the 'popularists' who would provide only practical technical education" at the cost of the traditional course of study (255). Attempts to broaden access and to make the curriculum more 'practical' were met with resistance, as were attempts to raise the academic profile of technical or vocational institutions. In the eyes of a public appreciating the practical qualities of the vocational or technical universities, the country did not need more "dude factories," institutions that produce upper-class dandies rather than practical men.[249]

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[249] When, e.g., the Illinois Industrial University was renamed University of Illinois, the "measure met with fierce opposition. Many of the University's best friends opposed the change, and the farm papers were unanimously

All of these developments then resonate not only in Sherman's *Analytics* but also, and more explicitly so, in his report on "English at the University of Nebraska." The report is part of William Morton Payne's 1895 *English in American Universities*, a survey detailing the state of the field across the US. In it, Sherman first gives an overview over the program and institutional structure at the University of Nebraska and then strikes a careful balance between advertising the almost mechanical, reliable qualities of his data-driven brand of literary studies on the one side—qualities that make it particularly apt for the diversifying student body of the rapidly growing, practical, vocationally oriented university—and this approach's suitability to not merely train certain practical skills but to instill in the students the kind of enthusiasm for literature that is typically considered impossible to teach: "It is steadfastly believed that the study of literature as literature is impossible to minds insensible to the inner differences between prose and poetry, and blank to aesthetic challenge or suggestion," Sherman writes ("English" 126). But his method, he claims, is capable of doing exactly that: to teach to presumably untalented, "insensible" students "literature as literature." Moreover, it is able to do so without requiring teachers to be particularly gifted either: As Sherman explains, his method's successes are not "in any way due to expert teaching, for the tutor in charge is but new to the work, not yet experienced in handling college subjects" (127). So strong are the appeals of egalitarian rhetoric to Sherman, not even the teachers need to be members of an elite anymore.

In the report, as in his *Analytics*, the blindness of his approach to a student's background is an important point in Sherman's pitch: The "hundred and fifty members of a given class" are made up of students of English, of students in "the classical and the philosophical courses," and of "men from the industrial sections, from the scientific, the agricultural,

against it, crying that the industrial classes were being betrayed." Resistance came from the so-called agriculturalists: "The *Iowa Homestead* remarked that the sensibilities of the dude students were now cushioned and that it only remained to substitute for the motto of 'Learning and Labor' the words 'Lavender and Lily White.' The *Western Rural* declared: 'If the University [...] is to become a shadow of the Greek and Latin mills, there is no need of its existence at all. We have better mills of that kind than it is or ever will be, and we have enough of them to satisfy the demand. If it wishes to convert itself into a dude factory, let it be informed that there is no place for it in this great agricultural State" (Nevins 120-21; cf. also Rudolph 257).

and the electrical engineering groups of study." Of these, "more than two-thirds are without literary traditions or taste or training, or interest in pure literature of any sort" (126). Again, the analytical, experiment- and numbers-driven approach to English is able to make up for the more privileged position of the students coming from "literary traditions": With his method, the students "from the so-called classical or literary groups do not prove superior, either in aptness or preparation, after the opening and quickening of the sensibilities, to those from the technical courses of study" (126). And again, the success of his method shows not simply in how the students are now able to mechanically perform analytical operations. As Sherman insists, going through his basic training they take up the state of mind and habitus of the "literary groups": It is the students "from the scientific rather than the literary side of the class" who, he reports, founded a "University Browning Club" (126), and who are now "enthusiastic readers of best literature." Having learned to "read literature as literature, with true aesthetic discernment" moreover makes them enthusiastic enough to "go forward of [their] own momentum." Now, "teaching becomes merely guidance, suggestion, is no longer dogmatic exposition or authority. Each student will then do his own thinking and form [...] his own literary judgments" (127). In other words, Sherman's method, as he advertises it, is perfectly suited to this first shift toward a mass university because its democratic egalitarianism scales: his method, he envisions, can instruct a large, diverse student body, and it can do so without relying on "expert teaching" to get students to the point from which they pursue their own studies with "[mere] guidance."

It remains questionable whether Sherman's method really was so successful. There certainly were many incentives for him to paint a particularly rosy picture here, among them simply the genre requirements of such a report that put the English programs of twenty universities in direct competition with one another. But the question, of course, misses the point. What matters, rather, is the rhetoric he deploys in characterizing the successes of his method. As Sherman describes it, his *Analytics* are able to demystify the study of English, to turn the love for literature, and the ability to properly reproduce the behavioral markers of a 'literary' upbringing, into a skill even students who seem "blank to aesthetic challenge or suggestion" can master. If one task of the humanities is to cultivate a particular habitus in students, a point I will return to below (cf. page 372), Sherman praises his method for reliably, mechanically doing just this regardless of the students' upbringing. In making this case, his argument acknowledges a tacit assumption that binds literariness to social stratification, and it reinforces an association of data, practical work, egalitarianism, and democracy.

5.2.4 The Kingdom of Art in the Republic of Letters

All of this perspectivizes and significantly complicates Willa Cather's resistance to and mockery of her English teacher's approach. A remarkably gifted student by all accounts, she did not stand to profit from Sherman's egalitarian thrust, his desire to show that students like her did "not prove superior, either in aptness or preparation" ("English 126"). Originally striving to become an English literature professor herself and certainly alert to the structural hurdles she would have to overcome as a woman in the academy, she was, in a sense, on a very different, individual mission for 'inclusion' and 'diversification' in the university. As things stood, the "spirit of vocationalism" (Rudolph 339) of the democratizing university was clearly organized around male-connoted vocations (cf. 341), and Sherman's list of students, "*men* from the industrial sections, from the scientific, the agricultural, and the electrical engineering groups of study" (English 126, my emphasis), shows a similar gender bias. Attempts to advance these students invariably increased the pool of mediocre men with whom a talented woman such as Cather now had to compete.

Strikingly, there was another model of teaching English at Lincoln, and it was more hospitable to Cather's own aspirations. As M. Catherine Downs points out, Herbert Bates and L. A. Sherman represented "war[ring]" visions of English at Lincoln (48) at the time, one 'technical' and the other 'romantic.' And Cather not only despised Sherman but "admired" Bates, whose "teachings told [her] that her feelings were the best judge; [...]. Bates ennobled the figure of the author as being the bearer of a supreme imagination." Arguably, such notions of supremacy, which cut out a space in which Cather thrived, ran counter to Sherman's egalitarian ideals:

> Bates was a belletrist [...]. The belletrists [...] came from the upper classes in colonial America. As members of the upper class, they sought the fame of publishing, but not remuneration—gaining money by such work would remove them from the class of gentlemen. [...] To suit their needs of self-expression, they formed literary clubs, like the Bread and Cheese Club in New York City, to which James Fenimore Cooper

> belonged. [...] Such small groups of writers with common tastes and goals engaged in coterie publishing, creating writing only for their group. (47)

In the 1890s "the coterie as arbiter of taste and the center of publishing had long dissolved," but, as Downs explains, the values Cather appreciated in Bates stem from this form of elite publishing: "the ideal that art has no market value—and also that it is the plaything of the wealthy, not work—comes from the old coteries and is clear in Bates's comments" (48). These quasi-aristocratic, heavily classed overtones of the coterie are, of course, problematic in post-Jacksonian American culture, but in the case of Cather, who was working to claw her way into academia, they certainly held a particular promise.

A similar tension between Cather's own development and group empowerment informs another conflict she was engaged in: "In her senior year," Janis P. Stout reconstructs, "Cather became involved in another *contretemps* when she chose to attack ladies' literary clubs. On October 28, 1894, in her column in the *Journal*, she poked fun at clubwomen's self-conscious efforts at 'self-improvement' by way of weighty studies that did not "mix well with tea and muffins" (39). Stout uses this episode to offer a brief but nuanced account of Cather's complex and conflicted positioning: She observes a "brashness (of which [Cather] had plenty in those years)," but also a "tendency to disparage women generally—an eagerness to separate herself from women who struck her as conventional." But, as Stout adds, Cather's "anti-woman rhetoric" is directly linked to her ambitions—eager to thrive, she was wary of "any association with women whose endeavors might stigmatize her as being frivolous or unable to compete in a men's world" (39). Stout goes on to explain: "Cather seems to have overlooked the importance such clubs had for a great many women," and she refers to Karen J. Blair's discussion of how these clubs "served as a first step for feminists determined to improve their status" (K. J. Blair 58). Nevertheless, as Stout continues, these clubs

> "apparently failed to meet the needs of single professional women" ([Blair] 65). As an incipient member of that group, Cather was impatient with the clubwomen's amateur status. Perhaps, too, as an aspiring "Bohemian" (to use her own half-facetious term for herself in those years) she wanted them to be bolder and to direct their attention toward artistic movements more nearly avant-garde than the nineteenth-century cultural status quo. Or perhaps she wanted them to leave her "Kingdom

> of Art" (a phrase she seems to have picked up from [...] Sherman [...]) to herself and the like-minded exceptional few. (40)

Cather's ambition, this account suggests, left her feminist quest for self-empowerment in an uneasy position in which her success, as a "New Woman" (39) at times was predicated on her disparagement of other women and on a rejection of an egalitarianism regarding class,[250] such as Sherman's.

Exploring Cather's rejection of Sherman's methods from this vantage point then quickly becomes an endeavor fraught with ambivalences. Most accounts of Cather's and Sherman's mutual disdain assume that readers will agree with Cather's ridicule of her teacher, and that they will share her assessment of Sherman's attempts to understand (and teach) literature numerically as 'obviously' misdirected. Accordingly, only few accounts are willing to characterize "Cather's rejection of Sherman's methods [as] narrow-minded," or to acknowledge, as she herself admitted, "that she 'probably distorted the method'" (Jewell). Even fewer see how her "distort[ing] the method" might have nevertheless served an important, if problematic, goal—after all, this is where the ambivalences of Cather's and Sherman's tense relationship reside. Accordingly, when apologists of Sherman's, coming from a digital humanities angle, speak of Cather as "Sherman's precocious student" or insist that his method might have value, "no matter what the teenage Cather thought," one gets an immediate sense of the kind of dismissal this "teenage" and "precocious" (Jewell and Zillig) young woman must have faced and fought to overcome. When Bates resigned in 1896, Cather applied for the position, but the department, chaired by Sherman, rejected her application (Woodress 105). It was then that she turned her back to academia and became a journalist and writer (Slote 28). Cather was, perhaps, right to sense that an aristocratic "Kingdom of Art," which Bates stood for, would have been more welcoming to her, an ambitious, striving woman, than a democratic 'Republic of Letters' was, which Sherman represented. In this case, conflicting structures of exclusion, one organized around class and one around gender, each resonating with equally conflicting conceptualizations of English literature, and both brought to the fore by the conflict between Cather and Sherman, seem impossible to resolve.

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[250] Stout's reference to Cather as "an aspiring 'Bohemian'" seems richly suggestive here, considering the complex and contradictory class performances of such a form of Bohemianism.

In any event, the conflict between Cather and Sherman illuminates the underlying ideological configurations on which Sherman's defense of his *Analytics* rests—as the attacks on his data-driven project also do. These configurations associate the traditional project of the university, the reproduction of social elites, with an "aesthetic school" of criticism, in which a sense of (literary) beauty is inherent in some, certain people, while others are "blank to aesthetic challenge or suggestion." They, conversely, align a modern, technical or practical vision of the university with the egalitarian goal of a flattening of social hierarchies and distinctions. Sherman's data-driven form of literary studies and of literary studies instruction emphatically invokes the latter.

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Looking at the post-Civil War landscape of academia, Frederick Rudolph notes the "popular distrust of the old colleges," the traditional institutions serving the purpose of reproducing a small social elite. This distrust ran so deep that attempts even to add merely a classical humanities component to a technical curriculum "was often interpreted as a capitulation to aristocratic influences" (280). In this climate, a leftover "Jacksonian emphasis on numbers and on the practical" manifested itself in "the special commitment of the land-grant colleges" (281), which offered practical and, in this line of thinking, 'non-aristocratic' education rather than a perceived elitism of the liberal arts. It thus comes as no surprise that Sherman chaired English at one such land-grant college. His project, indeed, resonated powerfully with a "Jacksonian emphasis on numbers" and with a distrust against "aristocratic influences" and the dandifying qualities of elite education that were imagined as hiding in the aesthetic school of criticism.

Sherman's attempt to make literary studies more "objective" thus comes at a time of a massive transformation of the role of academia in society—one of the first of several waves of reform and reinvention that broadened access, massified higher education, democratized both teaching and the institution, but also 'flattened' it in several important regards. After all, these transformations gave access to previously excluded groups of students, they frequently lessened internal hierarchies, but they also entailed an inflation of sorts for the kinds of cultural capital the academy more often than not runs on. In this context, Sherman's turn toward data, his attempt to introduce simple, quantitative, data-driven methods speaks volumes. It points toward the powerful discursive nexus, the data imaginary, in which practical concerns, egalitarianism, and democracy get associated with data and data practices, thus contrasting them against a perceived association of elite education, 'aesthetic' literary studies proper, and the reproduction of social stratification.

5.3 Data and the Question of "Method" in American Studies

The second moment of dynamization of the relationship between university and society this chapter explores lies in the middle of the twentieth century. During what Christopher Newfield calls the "rise of the public university" enrollment numbers in higher education again sharply ticked upwards (*Unmaking* 2). New constituencies entered the (public) universities, testifying to a changing, much broader role the university now played in public life as the US transformed into a 'knowledge society.' In this context, the teaching of literature in US universities also underwent important, transformative changes, as the 1930s to '60s saw a remarkable "range and vigor of the modes of literary scholarship and criticism" (Abrams 110). The institutional success and consolidation of the New Criticism must be seen in this light, not least because this school's formalism helped cope with an, again, rapidly growing student body marked by, again, vastly varying degrees of previous exposure to literature, history, or philosophy. New Criticist instruction strove to overcome such differences by focusing on the text alone, thus lessening the role that a student's educational and family background would play. However, while the New Criticism may have "dominated the pedagogy of courses designed to introduce undergraduates to the reading of poems, plays, and novels," the transformation of the university also gave rise to a "great variety" of other impulses (109, cf. 111). Among these one running counter to the New Criticist exclusive focus on the text itself: a reconceptualization of literary studies as a field of social relevance and public usefulness, which went hand in hand with an increasing focus on American literature as a dedicated area of interest and study in its own right.

In this sense, the gradual emergence of American studies—first as a loose, interdisciplinary teaching cooperation between history and literature departments; then as a ‘movement’; then as a ‘field’; and finally as a paradoxically ‘interdisciplinary discipline’ with its own set of methods —constitutes one important, richly meaningful manifestation of this changing role of the university in US society and of literary instruction within US universities’ curricula. Consequently, while the disciplinary history of American studies is frequently told by focusing on the efforts of spearheading individuals and (often private, Ivy League) institutions, it must also be seen in the context of these larger, enabling transformations of the (public) university.

Unsurprisingly, and in ways that I will detail in the first of the following subsections below, this rise and institutionalization of American studies, one attempt to bring into dialog matters of aesthetic, social, and political inquiry, was an inherently fraught, contradictory project. Among other things, it meant opening up the study of literature to a discussion of society, to read literary works with regard to their social and historical context, and it meant doing so at a time when much of the prevailing wisdom defined literature, and aesthetics generally, by its autonomy from, if not its opposition to, the social. In this sense, wanting to read literary texts as both a product and an indicator of social developments while simultaneously insisting on it being categorically different from nonliterary texts and as thus endowed with a distinct value, was a conflicted, impossible desire.

This tension is clearly visible in some of the early Americanists’ self-consciously cautious discussions of how American studies relates to existing disciplines, but it is particularly dominant a concern in the emerging field’s discussion of method. For several decades, a self-conscious concern for method marked American studies as particularly self-reflexive, and it expressed the challenges of the kind of interdisciplinarity it longed for: holding on to a conceptualization of literature as characterized by extraordinary qualities while trying to connect literature to the ordinary—a true *contradictio in adiecto* that was impossible to resolve. Indeed, so persistent are the questions for and the concerns about method throughout American studies’ disciplinary history, so elemental are they to the identity of the field, it stands to reason that the emergence and institutionalization of the discipline was not being hindered but, somewhat paradoxically, facilitated by a perpetual deferral of an answer to them.[251]

Notably, the data-literature divide constitutes one of the central, albeit under-acknowledged, paradigms within which Americanists have dwelled on their concern for method. Specifically when they conceptualize American studies' interdisciplinarity as being suspended not between literature and history but between literature and sociology, the latter discipline is frequently eyed—with an ambivalent mix of fascination and rejection—for its obvious and effortless integration of questions of society and politics using methods driven by data and data analysis. In these debates, sociology accordingly gets cast as literary studies' other, the two forming the poles in between which American studies aims to make its methodological home. Arguably, when Americanists invoke the 'interdisciplinary' quality of their field they more often than not mean the bridging of the divide between literature and social science, not simply the bringing-together of two or more arbitrary disciplines. Invoking sociology and literary studies as a binary worth bridging then in turn relies on (and reaffirms) the customary discursive constellation in which data and sociology's data-driven methods get associated with understanding and textualizing society, especially so for large, egalitarian, democratic societies—one of the core conceptual associations in the data imaginary. This association makes it even harder to then conceptualize literary studies, understood as sociology's other, as speaking to social and political contexts; hence the complex love-hate-relationship between sociology and literary studies in many of the foundational texts on method in American studies. As a true other, sociology is similar enough to embody some of the qualities Americanists in these texts long for, but it is different enough to mark these qualities as always out of reach and always somewhat suspect.

In the following, I will thus read two discussions of 'method' in American studies for how they invoke the data literature divide in the context of the mid-twentieth century expansion and democratization of the (public) university and the conceptual tensions this expansion entailed for literary studies. To do so, I will use a first subsection to flesh out the social and institutional transformations that marked the time, focusing on two interrelated aspects: On the one hand these transformations brought about a new sense of social embeddedness, a “public ethos,” for the university (Newfield, “New Roles” 23). On the other, literary studies responded to its newfound ‘public’ role by opening up to unprecedented numbers of students and to a new, more democratic, and more socially embedded understanding of its own subject matter. This is the context through which I then read two prominent discussions of ‘method’ in American studies, devoting one subsection to each: Henry Nash Smith’s “Can ‘American Studies’ Develop a Method?” and Leo Marx’s “American Studies—A Defense of an Unscientific Method.” Both these texts register a tension in the Americanist project between the egalitarian, ‘democratic’ discussion of American social totality and a more hierarchical logic of discussing the “most fully realized, complex and powerful” works (Marx 80). Most importantly in the context of this study, both these articulations turn to sociology’s data-driven distant reading practice of ‘content analysis’ to work through this tension.

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[251] It is impossible to overlook the similarity of this move with that of the discourses around national literature in the nineteenth century, which also operated a logic of deferral in which the possibility of a democratic national literature was asserted by deferring its presence. Cf. my "Songs and Inventories" for a more extended discussion of this dynamic, as well as page 88 above on how Margaret Fuller drew on it.

5.3.1 American Studies, and the “Public Ethos” of the Postwar University

Echoing some of the dynamics around the expansion of the university that the Morril Land Grant Act had facilitated in the nineteenth, the middle of the twentieth century saw another massive expansion of the university—both in its sheer size and reach and in its mission. As Christopher Newfield points out, the public university was both the motor of these developments and its ground zero. It was here that these changes manifested most visibly—more visibly, in any case, than in the private colleges and universities. Following World War II, the public university was tasked with a remarkable array of new and expanded responsibilities that went beyond mere education, among them “to incorporate returning war veterans back into society, to defuse the social movements of the 1930s, particularly the labor movement, and to expand research relevant to both economic and military competition with the communist world during the Cold War.” In Newfield’s telling, this integration of sorts of the university into society went hand in hand with a new ethos, which in turn signaled a more fundamental, underlying social transformation taking place at the time: American society was becoming a knowledge society. Quoting Clark Kerr, then-president of the University of California, Newfield explains: “The knowledge society had one indispensable institution: the university. ‘Originally,’ Kerr wrote, ‘it served the elites of society, then the middle class as well, and now it includes the children of all, regardless of social and economic background’” (Newfield, “New Roles” 24). As Kerr describes it, the previous expansion of the university around the turn of the century had changed its mission from elite education to a broad array of vocational training—a shift discussed in the previous section on Sherman’s work at the University of Nebraska. Now, in its second transformative expansion, the university’s social function came to transcend even this already-broadened educational goal. In the emerging knowledge society of the twentieth century, the university, envisioned as a “city of intellect,” thus served an even broader goal of social cohesion and advancement and of thus facilitating a “middle-class democracy” (Kerr 123; 94).[252]

As Newfield explains, the university’s rise to newfound and unprecedented social relevance rested on three pillars. One was “military and corporate techno-science”—after all, “World War II and then the Cold War flooded American universities with money,” and this money facilitated the expansion, but it also added a new sense of relevance. In other words, the US consolidation of its role as an international superpower required scientific and technical innovation, both to project power abroad and to safeguard economic prosperity and social cohesion at home, and the university emerged as the key site from which this innovation was expected to come. This emphasized the importance of science and engineering. But the “city of intellect” was now also tasked with a new, more broadly civic function, which relied on the social sciences and the humanities as a second pillar in the university’s rising social relevance.[253] Quoting again from Kerr, Newfield elaborates that the social sciences and the humanities could now "'find their particular roles in helping to define the good as well as the true and to add wisdom to truth' (93). Kerr put special emphasis on the university's role in formulating ethical and social coherence," thus spelling out a new dimension of relevance vis-a-vis society (Newfield, "New Roles" 24-25). Lastly, public universities were able to "convince the general public that its aspirations required strong universities," in part by pitching their "popular, though generally implicit, public mission" against the elite private universities. Together, these three pillars redefined what the public expected of the university, and they gave the university a new, more broadly civic role transcending the earlier, roughly ante-bellum focus on elite education and the turn-of-the-century focus on practical and vocational training.

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[252] As Newfield points out, this vision of “middle-class democracy” and of a “mature” stage of capitalism resting not on “exploitation, slavery, imperialism and the like” but on “creat[ing] value through invention” was “an idealization of post-war capitalism, of course, but it was an idealization with world-building powers” (28). The ambivalence here is palpable: the public university ran on an ideal of inclusivity, and this ideal had real, manifest consequences. But, even if “[a]ssimilation to WASP norms became decreasingly the university’s operative assumption,” campuses continued and, oftentimes continue, to fail these ideas. In consequence, the goal of true inclusivity and equality “persisted as a double bind: the university could not fulfill an egalitarian vision, yet it could not settle for not fulfilling it” (26-27).

It is easy to see how this vision of a new form of civic responsibility and social relevance of academia, specifically as it was based in a shared mission of social sciences and humanities, resonates with the kind of interdisciplinary thrust that underwrote the American studies movement from the beginning on. Even though this movement's programmatic framing was originally spearheaded by a progressive, experimental group of scholars in Ivy League universities,[254] its spread and success was undoubtedly spurred on by how much it resonated with this discursive moment. It is similarly easy to see how this constellation, from the beginning on, entangled American studies in *realpolitik*, triggering discussions of the field's own relationship to political (hard) power, nationalism, empire, and democracy. Seeing "its first real growth in a climate of nationalism and patriotism during World War II and the immediate post-war era," and at times benefiting from public diplomacy efforts during the Cold War (Davis 354-55), American studies has been and continues to be both implicated in and poignantly and often self-critically aware of the ties between politics and research and curricular development.[255] As Michael Bérubé puts it: By now, "one wing of American studies has practically devoted itself to exposing the complicity of an earlier generation of American studies scholars—who might have appeared to their contemporaries as liberals, progressives, and socialists—with the ideological machinery of the Cold War" ("Loyalties" 226). If nothing else, these entanglements underscore just much the emergence of American studies is interwoven with the politics of the "public ethos" of the university that Newfield outlines.[256]

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[253] The phrasing in the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965 illustrates this conception of the humanities and their social role when it declares that "the humanities belong to all the people of the United States" (qtd. in T. Miller 5).

[254] Cf. Udo Hebel's assertion that literary studies scholars and historians at the time were discontent with the limitations of their respective disciplines and developed new, interdisciplinary studies out of an experimental reform impetus. Hebel here points to Stanley Williams and Ralph H. Gabriel's course on "American Thought and Civilization" at Yale in 1931, as well as to Perry Miller and F. O. Matthiessen's similar course at Harvard in 1933. These courses prepared a broader adaptation of the interdisciplinary methodology at Harvard, the University of Pennsylvania, and Amherst (390).

In fact, reading the emergence of American studies not, as is frequently done, from the few, clearly identifiable and crucial figures at elite institutions but from the fermenting of an interdisciplinary spirit in less privileged English departments across the US further illuminates the profound relationship between American studies and the rise of the public university. Elizabeth Renker, investigating the "origins of American literary studies" by focusing on one single such institution, Ohio State University, paints a picture very similar to Newfield's, albeit one that puts more emphasis on the institutional pressures under which the university, and literary instruction in particular, entered into these transformations. As she describes it, during World War II,

> [t]he university struggled to proclaim its utility in the war effort, a topic that dominates its institutional publications at this time. For example, the 1942 Annual Report on the College of Arts and Sciences focused on the College's contributions to the war. It enumerated specific war activities in the sciences, including Bacteriology, Chemistry, and Physics and Astronomy. Its silence on the Arts was palpable. Lurking in the margins of such a report was the old question dogging English and the other liberal arts at Ohio State. What are they good for? Are they useful like the applied sciences? What practical work can they accomplish? (120)

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[255] On how especially European American studies profited from soft power and public diplomacy money, cf. Davis (355) and Wagnleitner (4).

[256] It seems particularly fitting in this context that Henry Nash Smith, whose "Can 'American Studies' Develop a Method" I read below, was the first graduate of Harvard's "American Civilization" program but went on to teach at a number of public universities (at Minnesota, Texas, and California) and actually wrote his "Can 'American Studies'" at the University of California, Berkeley, at the time when Clark Kerr, right before becoming president of the entire UC, was chancellor there.

Under pressure to demonstrate its "useful" and "practical" value, the English department increasingly moved away from characterizing literary studies as serving the "cultivation of interests and appreciations which bear upon the individual's leisure rather than upon his work in the world"—an earlier characterization that had always been deeply problematic in the ideological framework of the "land-grant ethos" but that now became entirely untenable in a country that felt the urgency of war (122). In consequence, the English department increasingly highlighted as its core contribution "civic and political education" as well as the ability to help with a "better understanding of the causes of the war and the possibilities for preventing a recurrence" (120). As part of that, it increasingly turned to American rather than British literature, thus recognizing the fact that, "within the world of curricular English, American literature best embodied this form of value" (120).[257] In this sense, the increasing focus on American literature allowed the English department to claim a new role, new relevance—and new investments. By 1945, the department's reports self-consciously touted the hiring of William Charvat as a dedicated American studies scholar and an increase of the university library's "collection of Americana," and it generally now highlighted the patriotic and utilitarian dimension of studying American literature—a dimension closely linked to the values of more broadly civic education and of fostering democracy.

This reimagination of the public role of the university, and especially the transformations this entailed for English studies, were thus born during World War II, but they fully blossomed later during the postwar years. As Ohio State University worked to map out its vision for the time after the war, it accordingly put front and center public education's "'consequences for the future development of democratic values' and recommended focusing on 'education as a social instrumentality which has distinctive responsibilities in a democratic culture'" (123). Within the emerging ethos of the public university, even a land grant university with its even stronger focus on practical training, was now able to justify the study of literature. It was able to do so by highlighting American (rather than English) literature's ability to foster democracy, and by confidently claiming a new public role for the university as a "social instrumentality" rather than merely as a place of learning or vocational training. In other words: it broadened the definition of 'practical,' but it also fundamentally shifted the educational work English was expected to do so as to fit this new, broader sense of 'the practical' as 'civic education.'

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[257] Renker notes that there were in fact two argumentative strategies for favoring American literature. One invoked the civic mission (and nationalism) fostered by World War II, the other claimed that American literature was valuable because it was 'modern': "Although the civic model eventually became hegemonic as a result of the world wars, the modern model is an important addition to our understanding of American literature's historical configuration as a subject: an active discourse of the time that only later circumstance closed down" (112).

In this newly imagined social institution of the public university, and in the cultural climate of the postwar years, American literature's traditionally tense relationship with the more elite values of English literature accordingly became an asset. Renker writes:

> [American literature's] image [...] was initially antithetical to the very idea of a higher curriculum. This conception held that American literature lacked seriousness; its materials were too chronologically close to current life to warrant scholarly treatment; it had no academic pedigree; people enjoyed reading it, so it didn't require attention in school; grade-school kids could understand it, so it didn't merit college status; and college students, when you let them have it, consumed it enthusiastically. Surely no subject with those qualities belonged in higher education. (126)

By accentuating the potential of (American) literature to serve as an agent of democracy, a source of civic values, and a motor of social integration, early Americanists were able to turn this seeming liability, American literature's status as being "antithetical" to elite education, into an asset. This shift of emphasis was salutary, of course, but it was not easy nor did it come without considerable tensions and internal conflicts. After all, in embracing such a "useful" and "practical" role of literature, literary studies scholars had to give up the venerable role as serving the individual's "cultivation," and they had to sacrifice cornerstones of individual and disciplinary identity.

Most importantly, making this shift meant giving up on the "academic pedigree," the cultural capital, that came with a conception of literature, or of art generally, as standing outside of—and perhaps even above—society. It fundamentally meant relinquishing a core tenet of literary studies and literary criticism at the time, a conception that had not just been a source of disciplinary identity and self-worth but that had also defined literary studies' very object of investigation: "Literature," in this view—which predated but was certainly amplified during—the New Criticism, was a form of textual signification that stood apart from the social. Giving up this definition meant allowing other kinds of text, but, eventually, also other kinds of symbolic objects and practices, enter the field of vision, and this inflation of possible materials of study thus diluted the category of the 'literary.' If Ohio State's English department thus advertised its purchase for the university library of "Americana," rather than of volumes of 'American literature,' this choice of words signals also a readiness to gradually blur the category of 'literature' in terms of medium and form. It signals the transformation of English literary studies into what would later become today's dominant, cultural studies-inflected brand of American studies.

These changes moreover entailed a blurring of disciplinary boundaries or, to put it more positively, a certain degree of interdisciplinary openness. Better "understanding the causes of the war," the ideological makeup of society, or its democratic values not only was a new task for literary studies scholars endowing them with new-found relevance. In the makeup of US academia at the time, it also was decidedly the purview of other, existing disciplines: history and sociology, to name the two most important ones, but also anthropology and others. Rethinking literary studies via its national and social relevance, reimagining it, in other words, as 'American studies,' accordingly involved an intricate interdisciplinary dance, a complex back-and-forth between disciplinary openness—acknowledging the value or even embracing the goals of existing, already more socially 'useful' disciplines—and self-affirming boundary drawing: making clear that literary studies, despite being in flux, was still a distinct discipline and could not simply be subsumed by the other, existing ones. This complex, doubly-bound dance around interdisciplinarity moves front and center in the context of the institutionalization of American studies, and it manifests itself most visibly in discussions of method. Transforming from a loose collaboration to a movement to a field to a discipline, Americanist inquiry had to take on a degree of disciplinary coherence and boundedness, complete with its own method(s), while staying existentially invested in the interdisciplinary exchange between literary studies and the social sciences—and while retaining vestiges of its original identity as English literary studies that lent crucial cachet to the new movement / field / discipline.

One result of these double-bind constellations was a highly productive inability in American studies to settle the question of method. Counter-intuitively, this inability came to fulfill the same unifying function as a single, disciplinary method would have. For a considerable time, a self-conscious concern for method thus was an essential part of the grammar of the young field, a token of disciplinary identity for its practitioners, and a genre marker for many of its most influential publications. In its unsettled quality, this concern for method speaks of the transformations and upheavals of the public university at the time and of the different, conflicting demands that were brought to bear on the institution. In this second wave of a democratization of the university, a second wave of a dynamization of the relationship between society and academia, the data literature divide again became a crucial site at which to negotiate and articulate these conceptual tensions.

5.3.2 Henry Nash Smith, Data-Driven Reading, and the Americanist "Method"

Henry Nash Smith's 1957 "Can 'American Studies' Develop a Method?" is a foundational text for American studies because it moves the question of method—and with it: the question of discipline—front and center. American studies, the underlying thinking goes, can evolve from a movement to a discipline if it can develop a distinct method of its own. Unsurprisingly, generations of Americanists have thus gone back to this essay to revisit and renegotiate the question of method. Lawrence Buell, for example, returns to Smith's text in 1999, over forty years after its original publication to focus on the fact that the title of Smith's essay asks a question that the body then refuses to fully answer:

> Smith's cautiousness may seem exceedingly peculiar given that his era is today generally presumed to have been the one epoch in the history of the American studies movement that *did* manage to generate something like a method: the so-called "myth-symbol" approach of isolating a putatively defining image of American culture and exploring it by recourse to an interweave of literary and cultural analysis. (Buell, "Commentary" 13)

In Buell's eyes, the question form may have been triggered by American studies' precarious institutional position in the 1950s—a field, after all, that was still in its infancy and that had to be cautiously wrapped in charmingly self-deprecating, protective quotation marks in the essay's title. As Buell explains, however, the question form continues to resonate through the end of the twentieth century, albeit in slightly altered a fashion. Thanks to the proliferation of “institutional epicenters” and “semi-competing/semi-overlapping scholarly discourses” that today characterize the field, American studies continues to be an “increasingly complex, politicized, and centrifugal array of revisionisms” (15, 14), which cannot be unified by a single method. Thus shifting emphasis in Smith’s title, from the noun ‘method’ to the article ‘a,’ Buell concludes that American studies indeed cannot develop “*a* method,” and for good reasons. This shift of emphasis makes sense, of course, but it also softens considerably the provocative, aporetic blow of Smith’s original assertion that for American studies “no ready-made method [...] is in sight” (207)—and that the question for method thus has to stay open.

In the following pages, I too will probe into Smith’s “peculiar” cautiousness, engaging it, however, via a different aspect that has received comparatively little attention so far: the curious presence of a data-driven, ‘distant’ modality of ‘reading’ in his argument. Several pages of Smith’s argument are devoted to a discussion of ‘content analysis,’ which he characterizes as a sociological method of reading imaginative texts by converting them into abstract, quantified, discrete data and then working with this data rather than with the texts themselves. As I will show, content analysis is crucial to Smith’s articulation of American studies because it provides a possible template for connecting literature to society. In doing so, it operates a well-established association between (descriptions of) the social body and the symbolic form of data, an association that is a cornerstone of the data imaginary; and it jibes with an underlying sense in the essay that ‘literary excellence’ poses a problem for envisioning American studies as a more socially inflected and, in consequence, more democratic incarnation of literary studies. As appealing as content analysis thus is, the method simultaneously poses a threat: Precisely because it is a form of reading and thus sufficiently similar to literary studies it threatens to invalidate aspirations to make American studies into a discipline in its own right and instead threatens to demote it to a mere subfield of sociology, thus cutting it off from the cachet of literary studies proper. In result, the essay eyes content analysis with a palpable sense of ambivalence, an ambiguous mix of attraction and rejection. Content analysis, in this sense, is truly uncanny: it is too similar to be dismissed yet too different to be fully embraced. As I will show, the essay attempts to resolve this tension by splitting literature in two, suggesting that content analysis works well for popular culture but not for "serious art," but this attempt remains unconvincing—not least because the stated goal of American studies is to analyze American culture "as a whole," and because Smith opens his discussion by insisting on a very broad definition of culture, which runs counter to his "serious art" vs. popular culture distinction. The discussion of the data-driven reading method of content analysis thus forms the ground zero for several of the fault lines the essay tries to contain. Unable to resolve the resulting tensions, it does not answer the question for method but merely defers it; hence the open form of the question, and hence the conclusion that "no ready method can be found."

From the beginning on, Smith's essay makes clear that it strives to broaden narrow definitions of literature and culture in order to connect the literary to the social. It opens by defining as American studies' goal "the study of American culture as a whole" and by defining culture broadly as "the way in which subjective experience is organized." It is, moreover, built around a case study of Mark Twain that is meant to demonstrate that literary works "[need] to be placed in a social setting before [they] can be fully understood" (197). In making these points, the essay positions itself consciously and programmatically in opposition to more narrow understandings of literature and literary studies. Specifically, it notes—with a dig against the elitism of modernist 'high culture'—the "serious shortcomings" of "[c]urrent literary criticism," which "assumes [...] that value lies outside society, in works of art which exist on a plane remote from the Waste Land of our actual experience" (206). This trend, a trend of disciplinary entrenchment in which the humanities move "away from rather than toward the social sciences," is epitomized by the New Criticism, a movement that may be laudable for its purification of literary studies, and for having brought a "new penetration and intensity," but that has made it "extraordinarily difficult to relate literature to the culture within which it occurs" (202). In fact, in Smith's view, the New Criticism idealizes the "alienated artist," who stands above and not inside a culture "habitually viewed as irredeemably Philistine and depraved." Its "cult of pure literature" has thus "establish[ed] an apparently impassable chasm between the facts of our existence in contemporary society and the values of art" (202-3). In tone and content, Smith takes issue not just with the intellectual limitations such a position entails but also with its ethos, the elitism and social stratification it entails.

Notably, there is a certain affinity to the symbolic form of data in how Smith talks about the social reality that American studies, in opposition to the New Criticism's version of literary studies, is supposed to engage. His phrasing that it is the "*facts* of our existence" that constitute the social notably does not speak of substance, essence, story, or the like. It is instead much closer to raw data. This contrast is particularly pronounced when he sees these "facts of our existence" in opposition to "the values of art." In other instances, his phrasing is much less stark—for example when he speaks of an individual's "subjective experience." Here, however, the "facts of our existence," raw, merely to be collected rather than to be organized and refined, are much closer to the symbolic form of data than they are to literature.

Notably, the connection Smith imagines American studies to (re)create between "contemporary society" and "art" is heavily invested in questions of stratification, class. It is thus rife with overtones of the kind of "middle-class democracy" that marks the ethos of the public university outlined above (Newfield, "New Roles" 28), and it is at its core an attempt to envision a form of literary studies that is more in tune with egalitarian democracy than the New Criticism's version is. This shows, for example, in Smith's discussion of Mark Twain, who, he explains, must be "placed in a social setting" in order to be "fully understood" (197). As he thus portrays him, Twain is a transitional figure caught up in an ambiguous place between two possible roles society offered to an author. One was that of the Man of Letters, a role that had been established by the revered New England authors, that was fading during Twain's lifetime, and that was resurrected later in modernist notions of the 'alienated artist'—with both versions of this role being marked by their distance to society. The other was that of the pop-cultural "darling of the mass audience" (201), a role that presumably trades artistic excellence for a closer integration into the social body. Twain's works, Smith concludes, are marked by his shifting and ambiguous positioning between this upper-strata, distinguished role of author and the more socially integrated role of a producer of 'mass culture.' Moreover, Smith identifies a similar mobility around class in the "three distinct prose styles" Twain used: a vernacular style "based on the everyday speech of men with little formal education"; one "patterned on the ornate, elevated rhetoric of the pulpit and of political oratory"; and a "direct, unpretentious style" that is "apparently felt as being neutral, as being somehow outside the hierarchy of classes" (199-200). Meaningfully reading

Twain, Smith concludes, "requires a careful discrimination between attitudes toward social status that he has taken over unconsciously from the culture, and attitudes that spring from his conscious recognition of social stratification and of his place within the status system" (200). In this attention to questions of class, but also in the assumption that middle-classness can be felt as being "outside the hierarchy of classes," Smith's readings here, written to demonstrate how a "largely hypothetical" form of American studies would operate (202),[258] clearly draw some of their appeal from how they project an egalitarian, middle-class vision of democratic culture. They also appeal to the reader in how they imagine American studies itself as more socially embedded and, hence, more democratic than the established versions of literary studies.

This desire for egalitarianism, this critical attention to if not outright rejection of socially elevated roles for literary authors and literary works, however, threatens the category from which the (non-sociological) study of culture draws its legitimacy, its *raison d'être*, and its cachet: the serious, high culture 'work.' Paradoxically, this threat is most visible in how Smith fails to acknowledge it by addressing Twain's literary merit only in passing. His introduction of the author exemplifies this move particularly well: "No other American writer of comparable importance," Smith asserts on the essay's first page, "is so unmistakably of the people" (197). The phrasing relegates the question of Twain's "importance" to a mere epithet while throwing all thetical weight behind his being "of the people." It thus reveals which aspect of Twain's authorship is up for debate—his being of the people—and which one is not: his being of importance. At the same time, the sentence effectively encapsulates a core tension that informs the entire essay: the concern that an author, or a cultural artifact, cannot be at once "of importance" and "of the people"—two qualities that it imagines to be in contradiction; two qualities American studies is accordingly expected to straddle; yet two qualities only one of which it is willing to debate.[259] Twain's being "of the people" is discussed for several pages, often by highlighting the author's ambiguous positionality (his, one might say, ambiguously only half-being of the people). His being of importance, however, is simply asserted but never really addressed. At the same time, the essay is lastingly and emphatically (albeit tacitly) invested in the question of Twain's literary merits, and it registers this question in its discussion of his ambiguity. After all, Twain's flirting with the role of the "darling of the mass audience" matters because it raises the specter that Twain might, in fact, be as much (or more so) associated with "mass culture" than with being "of importance."

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[258] It seems worth noting that Smith's discussion of Twain here seems viable enough to make his assertion of their "hypothetical" nature stand out. The assertion is a first indicator that his project is conflicted for reasons other than its mere analytic viability: The inquiry remains "hypothetical" not because it cannot be done but because the framework in which it would operate is in itself as impossible as an answer to the question for American studies' method must be.

[259] The fact that Smith imagines these two qualities as being in contradiction also shows in the previous sentence, and in its conjunction "but." Smith

Within this set of questions and interests, Smith registers that sociology might be considered a more fitting disciplinary frame to relate literature to culture, and he confronts this question head on: Having noted that literary studies, as practiced at the time, is ill-equipped to relate art to society, Smith declares that "[w]e are no better off if we turn to the social sciences for help in seeing the culture as a whole. [...] [These] find their reality in observed fact, and like all other scholars they have defined facts as the data which their methods of inquiry enable them to discover and record" (203-4). It is here that Smith introduces "content analysis," a kind of quantitative, data-driven reading, as a stand in for all of sociological inquiry:

> The sociological studies of literature which I have encountered characteristically involve a 'content analysis' of large numbers of works of popular fiction or drama. The assumption on which they are based is, in the words on one such study, that popular literature "can be regarded as a case of 'social fantasy'—that the psychological constellations" in such material "indicate sensitive areas in the personalities of those for whom the work has appeal; their needs, assumptions and values are expressed ('projected')" in the play or novel or short story. (204)

The study Smith refers to here aims to determine the correlation between cultural traits and a nation's susceptibility to fascism.[260] To this end, it turns a large number of German and American plays into data by having human readers classify a range of aspects in them—e.g. "according to

writes: "He was a writer and his work belongs to the traditional field of American literature. But I can think of no other man whose work so clearly needs to be placed in a social setting before it can be fully understood" (197).

[260] Smith does not give a reference, but the quotes strongly suggest that he has Donald V. McGranahan and Ivor Wayne's study on *German and American Traits as Reflected in Popular Drama* in mind.

whether the ending is (1) happy, (2) unhappy (tragic), or (3) ambiguous (mixed)" (McGranahan and Wayne 432). It then uses statistical methods to mine this normalized, discrete data for typical traits in American and German plays, thus indeed giving its readers the raw numbers of "society without art." As odd as this project might seem from a contemporary cultural studies perspective, its overall thrust of reading texts for the cultural values they ingrain, and the goal to use literature to understand the reasons for war, is obviously aligned with attempts to repackage English and literary studies as socially relevant at the time. What is even more troubling, perhaps: its method, and its appeal to data to understand society, are well aligned with this goal.

Perhaps recognizing this problematic moment of competition between two 'reading' professions, Smith spends several pages detailing the shortcomings of sociological methods. Among these are the kinds of abstractions they entail, including the abstraction by which the "statisticians and appraisers [...] conceal [their] own consciousness behind statistical tables" and thus pretend to be "outside the field of [their] observations" (205). As strong as this argument is—it effectively points out a hard epistemic limitation in the sociological method—Smith is even more concerned with the kind of object these methods are (un)able to engage. Content analysis, in Smith's view, is "entirely justified" as long as it limits itself to objects that are already flat and easily generalizable:

> Popular art is certainly notable for its lack of originality; it is meant to be a homogeneous product identified by brand labels that the customer can count on. Its characters and situations are indeed, as another sociological study maintains, "ubiquitous mass symbols," extremely limited in range at any given moment. The relative homogeneity of popular art lends itself to the quantitative methods of content analysis. (204)

Thus defining popular culture by how it can, presumably, be datafied without any major losses of meaning, Smith in turn defines "serious art" by its inherent, categorical resistance to being translated into data:

> I suppose that when we speak of a serious novel, for example, we have in mind a work whose meaning is not exhausted by the identification of stereotyped ideas and attitudes in it. It is serious precisely because it differs in some respects from the mass of popular literature with which it is contemporary and with which, to be sure, it probably has something in

> common. The serious work has its period flavor but it also has other qualities, and some of these other qualities may be quite unique. (204)

As conventional as this association of "serious art" with being "unique" may be, it becomes immediately clear that this association poses a problem for Smith's essay. It is crucial for rejecting sociological content analysis, and it is highly effective in doing so: it introduces a category that is by definition unreadable to sociology. However, it simultaneously introduces a split in culture—which American studies, as the essay repeatedly insists, should analyze "as a whole."[261] This is a problem the essay neither addresses nor fully resolves.

Just how much the essay's conflicted desire for both egalitarianism and literary value, for reading Twain as both an author of the people and an author of importance, constitutes a problem shows in a notable outburst of emotion when Smith exclaims that "[t]here is more to us than that!" (205). The assertion comes in response to the "truncated" and frightening "image of society" that a sociological study of mass culture would render of American culture, but it obviously speaks to much broader concerns and status anxieties. The 'we' in this sentence refers to Americans, whose culture must not be reduced to dime novels, movies, and other forms of popular culture studied by sociology: It asserts national self-worth and identity by insisting on the existence of a national culture of serious, fine literature. The 'we,' however, at least implicitly also refers to scholars of American studies, to whom "there is more" than what sociology can accomplish. It, in other words, asserts disciplinary self-worth and identity by insisting on the existence of subtle meanings beyond those that sociological methods can identify and turn into data. In its intertwining of national and disciplinary value, and in the affect it expresses, the line indicates a central element in the essay's work: fending off the threat to disciplinary self-worth that sociological inquiry poses.

In result, the essay's internal conceptual conflicts become particularly palpable here. In invoking the sociological method of content analysis and in recognizing it as a form of distant, quantitative reading, Smith's text reaffirms preexisting cultural associations between data, society, and democratic egalitarianism on the one side and literature, individualism and social distinction on the other. It recognizes these associations as problematic, as deepening the disciplinary divide, and as debilitating for American studies' ambitions, but it simultaneously uses them to assert the value of non-sociological, interpretive, hermeneutic inquiry. In evoking the data-literature split, Smith accordingly expresses an unresolvable conflict of values, and this conflict allows him to ask but never to conclusively answer the question for American studies' method.

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[261] Smith's argument appears even more troubled here once one takes into account that his *Virgin Land* does read "mass culture," noting that the Beadle dime novels had a particular "close fidelity [...] to the dream life of a vast inarticulate public that renders them valuable to the social historian and the historian of ideas" (91-92).

In the end, of course, this inability to forge closure might counter-intuitively constitute the essay's foremost achievement for the young field: rather than solving the problem of method, or declaring it solved, Smith's discussion of sociology's data-driven reading and literary studies' hermeneutic one turns the tension between these methods into an academic program that is viable precisely because it knows no easy closure. Accordingly, Smith's assertion that there is "no ready-made method for American Studies [...] in sight" is as much an admission of an impasse as it is a call to action: a call to "develop [a method] for ourselves." And even here, closure is deferred as Smith warns that progress will be slow and "at present we shall have to be content with a very modest program" (207). Encapsulating the ambivalence the essay registers regarding disciplinary boundaries, Americanists are thus called upon to "widen the boundaries imposed by conventional methods of inquiry," but not break or transgress them. After all, as Smith explains early on, the unresolved, contradictory, "ambiguous relation between works of art and the culture in which they occur" is not something that must be solved with an easy fix. Rather, it may well be "distinctive" of American studies (199). Seen thus through its appeal to the data-driven reading practice of content analysis, the particular achievement of Smith's essay is not that it answers the question for method in particularly convincing a way. It obviously does not. Rather, Smith's articulation of American studies turns American studies' difficulties with developing a method into a field-enabling program. By suspending this field between data and literature, Smith, in other words, articulates American studies not as a discipline but as an inherently conflicted, inherently ambiguous, inherently incomplete, ever-emerging discipline-to-come.

5.3.3 Leo Marx and the “Most Fully Realized, Complex and Powerful” Works

The role of data for articulations of American studies, for moderating a social inflection of literary studies, and for negotiating the disciplinary positioning of American studies vis-a-vis English and sociology also shows in the staying power of this frame of reference in the years after Smith’s essay and, in fact, during the entire first phase of American studies’ institutionalization. Leo Marx’s “American Studies—A Defense of an Unscientific Method” is a case in point. Written in 1967, some thirteen years after Smith’s, and thus coming at a later point in the institutionalization of the field, this text is far less willing to tolerate the “ambiguous relation” of art and culture, or of disciplines, and it is far less willing to suspend closure on questions of disciplinary identity and method in the way that Smith’s unanswered question for the method of American studies does. In consequence, Marx’s “key essay of disciplinary self-definition” (Fluck 13) represses most of the ambiguities that Smith’s sustains, and it casts a much starker and in effect somewhat unflattering light on the limitations of the myth and symbol approach as it shaped the early phases of American studies’ institutionalization.

Like Smith, Marx turns to the data-driven reading practice of content analysis to situate American studies in relation to literature and society, to literary studies and sociology, and to the humanities and the sciences. In doing so, he is far less invested in pushing back against the New Criticism’s vision of art as autonomous from society—a shift in focus that is no doubt at least in part due to the time of his writing, and he is less invested in exploring the possibility for a more socially invested, more democratic form of literary studies. As I will show, he instead uses his discussion of content analysis to identify two different models of representation. One is aligned with sociology and the sciences, and the representational logic that underwrites it neatly corresponds to the representational desires of data within the data imaginary. This model accordingly strives for totality and would ideally capture all of culture in a normalized, egalitarian database. In lieu of being able to do that, it reverts to statistical sampling to create a representation of culture that is free of selection bias. The other model, that Marx aligns with the literary and with the “unscientific” method of the humanities, is that of the canon. Here, the best works are selected to stand in for the totality of culture, and they are selected in ways that openly embrace the ‘bias’ of the "collective wisdom" of experts. It is strikingly obvious how these two models of representing culture evoke two possible models of political representation, a democratic and an aristocratic one. The essay's silence on or blindness to this is in fact somewhat surprising, an effect perhaps of an increasing disciplinary entrenchment at the time.

Marx's essay is based on a talk he gave at a symposium on "Public Opinion, Foreign Policy and the Historian," and this would seem like a natural setting to tout American studies' interdisciplinarity and methodological flexibility. Indeed, Marx, at first glance, seems to replicate Smith's gestures of disciplinary openness and to even double down on the latter's refusal of methodological closure when he asserts that "it is neither possible nor desirable for American Studies to develop a method" (76). This statement, however, comes with an important qualification that practically inverts its meaning: Marx applies a somewhat narrow definition of method as anything that "is borrowed, by whatever circuitous route, from the physical sciences," and these are the kinds of methods he rejects. This allows him to relabel American studies' presumed methodlessness as having a "humanistic" method, a terminology that couples the social sciences with the natural sciences in one camp, with both now standing in opposition to the other camp: that of the humanities. This boundary drawing is important to him precisely because he does recognize the seeming difficulty of distinguishing between sociological and humanistic modes of inquiry. Both, he observes, pursue similar objectives in that they are "engaged in an essentially historical enterprise: the effort to describe and understand the state of mind of a group (or groups) of people at some moment in the past." The differences between them are accordingly "in many ways [not] obvious" and rather "difficult to clarify" (76), which raises the specter of a disciplinary blurring similar to the one Smith had to fend off. If both sociological and humanistic inquiry are "essentially historical" enterprises, both might be subsumed under the rubric of "history."

Working to thus draw a boundary between the sociological and interpretive disciplines, Marx, too, associates "the empirical historian (or sociologist)" with the practice of content analysis, which he, even more so than Smith, emphatically characterizes as a form of data science made up of counting and tabulating information. Quoting from Laswell, Lerner, and Fool's *Comparative Study of Symbols* and from Richard L. Merritt's "Emergence of American Nationalism," he writes:

> [C]ontent analysis is “a technique which aims at optimum objectivity, precision, and generality in the analysis of symbolic behavior; its value is to be appraised according to the success with which it achieves these aims in specific researches.” In practice, and judging by the current work of such content analysts as Richard L. Merritt, this means that the method is limited to problems susceptible to “the systematic tabulation of the frequency with which certain predetermined symbols or other variables appear in a given body of data.” (77)

Indeed, Merritt’s study is a well-chosen target when it comes to distinguishing a “humanist” approach in American studies from a sociological one. Published in the *American Quarterly* and referencing existing American studies scholarship on nationalism, it is solidly embedded in the field, albeit in its more empirical schools. Merritt accordingly begins by observing the troublingly incoherent and impressionistic nature of research on the emergence of American nationalism. The existing publications, he notes, locate these beginnings at very different points in time, and their

> variety of views leaves the student of American nationalism somewhat bewildered. When *did* the transition to Americanism take place? When did the colonists stop referring to themselves as “His Majesty’s subjects” or as “British colonists” [...] Did this shift occur in all the colonies at approximately the same time? [...] Above all, what was the timing of the transition? Did American nationalism blossom in the space of a few weeks or months [...] [o]r did the colonists “learn” to become Americans over a much longer period of time? (Merritt 321)

In other words, Merritt turns to content analysis in search of empirical, precise answers, dates, after other, more qualitative investigations have failed to produce a coherent picture of the emergence of American national identity. In its desire for empirical precision and objectivity as well as in its modus operandi his project thus resembles one branch of contemporary quantitative digital humanities projects. Merrit indeed turns to the “meager data that have come down to us from the colonial era.” Distancing, in his turn, quantitative methods from those of literary studies, he asserts that he is not interested in the “deliberate use of language,” as one would be when looking at the writings by a novelist, but in the “subtle *unconscious* patterning of speech (322).[262] To identify this patterning, the content analyst must engage large bodies of materials, "newspapers, letters, books, speeches or any other form of recorded communication" (321) and must submit these materials to a hypothesis-driven analysis within an objective framework that attempts to control for the potential of unconscious bias (325). These hypotheses are then confirmed or falsified—basically by counting words.

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[262] Highlighting the power of such a quantitative reading, Merritt references stylometric studies such as Mosteller and Wallace’s *Inference and Disputed Authorship: The Federalist*, which attempts to identify authorship in

Marx invokes Merritt to contrast such a quantitative, 'scientific' method from his vision of American studies' "unscientific" one, a contrast that works because both methods are forms of reading—the comparison's *tertium comparationis*. However, in juxtaposing the two, Marx is not particularly interested in the epistemic constraints either method comes with. Rather, Marx is interested in the kinds of objects these methods are compatible with, and in the value that these objects have—a move that mirrors Smith's recourse to a split between "mass culture" and "serious art," albeit in much starker terms. As Marx explains in fairly blunt a fashion, "the significant point" in "distinguishing the two methods" of sociological and humanistic American studies is in "the indispensability to the humanist, and in spite of its ambiguous sociological status, of the category of 'high' culture. Any set of criteria which did not enable him to select major works [...] would be wholly unacceptable" (80-81). With concerns over (in)dispensability thus apparently high on his mind, the legitimacy of Marx's brand of American studies, as he sees it, thus rests on an ahistorical, apolitical understanding of the canon that certainly may have been commonsensical in the 1960s but that seems deeply problematic, if not outright naive, from a contemporary perspective and that has been harshly criticized by later, revisionary movements inside American studies. More importantly, Marx himself does recognize the contested quality of the category of high culture and the evaluative baggage it comes with. He accordingly notes the "judgment implicit in the concept of 'high' culture" and the "value judgment in the selection of data" this entails, but he pushes these concerns aside by pointing out that all knowledge always is partial (80).

What is at stake in Marx's distinction, then, are two different models of representation. As he points out, even "the empirical scholar who selects a problem susceptible to content analysis either must study all the relevant data or make a selection." Since the former seems impossible, it

the Federalist Papers. Seeing stylometric adjudications of authorship as a major selling point for quantitative readings has a longer tradition, cf. page 320 above.

must necessarily be the latter. The difference between the humanistic and the scientific method, then, is in how they perform this selection of representative materials. One is based on the canon, the other is done “in accordance with the principles of scientific sampling” (78). As Marx explains, a sociologically speaking ‘representative’ selection from American culture, one in which ‘high’ and ‘low’ forms would equally find consideration, however “would make it difficult, if not impossible, to give any special attention to major works.” Not being able to treat ‘high culture’ differently thus is immediately and obviously disqualifying to him. Such an “arbitrary or random sampling procedure,” Marx continues to warn with alarm, “is almost certain” to “not include either Thoreau’s *Walden* or Melville’s *Moby-Dick*” (78). In his vision of representation, it is not the random, unbiased sample but the few, select, best works that should get to represent the totality of culture.

Defining the canon, from which Marx’s vision of American studies here accordingly draws its legitimacy, as a “a selection [...] based on the collective wisdom” of scholars and as thus “presumably includ[ing] the most fully realized, complex and powerful (hence enduring) work of American writers” of course seems more than just a bit problematic from a contemporary vantage point. It is, after all, exactly this way of defining canonicity that came under attack in the canon revisions of the 1970s and after. Of course, Marx’s text was written before the ‘Canon Wars,’ but his phrasing here nevertheless is telling. Clearly sensing a problem, he admits that a canon based on the taste of a small cultural elite is “inherently, inescapably normative.” He then sidesteps this problem by mythologizing the selection as an “intricate, never-ending, and imperfectly understood process” (80). The “imperfectly understood” quality here is key: after all, understanding the process better would spotlight all the different ways in which canonization is a questionable process, a function of social inclusion and exclusion, of cultural capital, of power, and of chance. In order to unsee this, and in order for canonization to “[bring] the subject matter of the humanities into existence,” it has to be imperfectly understood. In this sense, the empirical data scientist’s method of sampling arbitrarily, of being transparent about procedures, and the underlying desire to control for unconscious bias runs counter to the project Marx envisions for American studies. In both the “unscientific method” and the “imperfectly understood process,” the still-young discipline is defined by contrasting it to a data-driven one and turning its shortcomings into presumed strengths.

Accordingly underwriting Marx' two models of representation and his ahistorical view on the canon is a powerful, culturally ingrained association central to the data imaginary as this study understands it. In this association, data gets linked to a sense of positivism, objectivity, but also social totality, the indiscriminate quality of which resonates with visions of democratic egalitarianism as much as of popular culture. Its mode of representation is that of random sampling in which each part is given equal preference in an infinitely expandable database of homogeneous information. This presumed egalitarianism, however, runs counter to the kinds of cultural distinction Marx's version of American studies is invested in and relies on to justify its value vis-a-vis the social sciences. In this view, 'America' cannot be represented by its "culture as a whole," or by randomly chosen members of its collective, but by an elite canon of "complex and powerful" works.

In the end, the full-out rejection of the data-driven readings of content analysis leaves Marx with a version of American studies that is hardly different from how any other national philology would operate. As much as his essay acknowledges, on paper, the need to investigate American culture "as a whole," and as much as it considers "[t]he phrase 'as a whole' [as] the key to many of the distinctive features of this interdisciplinary approach" (77), he concludes that American studies, which should discuss the major works of American authors, should not attempt to "represent the common life" which would mean putting down "the masterpieces we continue to read and enjoy" or even "put[ting] literature aside altogether." He continues:

> In any event, and this is the crux of the method being defended here, I would submit that the argument for the usefulness of *Moby-Dick* in the kind of [Americanist] inquiry I have described is identical with the argument for the intrinsic merit of *Moby-Dick* as a work of literature. It is useful for its satisfying power, its capacity to provide a coherent organization of thought and feeling, or in a word, for its compelling truth value. (89)

In this version of American studies, there is indeed no identifiable difference between a text's value as an object of critical study of culture and its value as a *belles lettres* literary object of aesthetic appreciation. It's value is not, as Smith would have it, in its relation to culture but, as the New Critics would, in its "intrinsic" qualities.

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Writing in 1994 and in the context of one of the many revisionary impulses American studies has seen since the days of Smith and Marx, Donald Pease applauds the then-current movement of the 'New Americanists' for how "[t]he political unconscious of the primal scene of their New Historicist readings embodies *both* the *repressed relationship between* the literary and the political and the *disenfranchised groups previously unrepresentable in this relationship*" (Pease 31). While he stresses the inclusion of previously unrepresented groups, an expansion of the canon, as the New Americanists' major innovation, his notion of the "repressed relationship between the literary and the political" as the core of the field's original "primal scene" is richly suggestive in the context of this chapter.

After all, in slightly different terms, and in very different intensities, both Marx and Smith enter into and reproduce a tradition of, as it were, unseeing the intimate interrelatedness of "the literary and the political." In this view, their articulations of American studies engage a longstanding cultural split between the literary and the social, a split that is tied to and frequently projected onto the data-literature divide. This split was intensified by the New Criticism, but it preexisted and outlasted this particular scholarly movement. It is a split the cultural salience of which rests on the repression of all the ways in which the literary and the political are actually and always already intertwined. In a fashion that is indeed prototypical of American studies' "field imaginary" (Pease 9), Marx's and Smith's essays perceive this 'union,' this relationship between the literary and the political, as at once the source of their disciplinary existence as Americanists and as a threat to their disciplinary identity and selfhood. Like the work of generations of Americanists following them has continued to do, their essays revisit this repressed primal scene as they are unsuccessfully trying to come to terms with it.

For both essays, Smith's "Can 'American Studies'" and Marx's "Defense of an Unscientific Method," the data-literature divide provides the conceptual framework for working through this encounter with the field's repressed "primal scene." In both texts, data enters the field of vision via sociology, and via the sociological method of content analysis in particular. Cast as a form of data-driven, distant reading, the method is a highly ambivalent object of self-definition. It is uncannily similar enough to literary studies, and it corresponds closely enough to American studies' representational desires, to be longed for, and to be compared to literary studies in the first place. At the same time, its reliance on data and its process of 'reducing' literature to data marks it as irreconcilably other. For Marx, the encounter with this object results in a reassertion of the presumed irreconcilability of literature and data—a reassertion of the disciplinary self by way of a renewed repression; for Smith it results in an unresolved, open-ended question, a tension the resolution of which is forever deferred; hence his vision of a disciplinary program that feeds on this deferral.

In how both essays articulate their vision of American studies in relation to democracy, they both testify to the dynamization of the relationship between society and academy that stemmed from the rise of the public university. They do so in very different ways and in different circumstances. Smith's essay is not only written at the time that Newfield identifies as the peak of the public university's expansion, it was also written at the University of California, Berkeley, under the chancellorship of Clark Kerr, one of the major advocates of the public ethos of the university. Marx's text, in turn, is written thirteen years later at a time when, in Newfield's telling, a conservative backlash against the public university had already set in.

> Kerr's presidency was the beginning of the end of this knowledge society and its public-good mega-university. A local Cold Warrior named Ronald Reagan ran against a popular governor in 1966 by redefining Berkeley's City of Intellect as the City of Subversion. Reagan won, and fired Clark Kerr early in 1967. The American political right has waged culture wars and budget wars on universities ever since. [...] After a half-century of steady effort, [it has] succeeded at [its] core goal, which was to sever the university from its popular base as the servant of everybody's personal and vocational aspiration. (28-29)

Written in the dusk of public university, it seems fitting that Marx's text is much less optimistic both about democracy and about the possibility for cooperation between the humanities and the (social) sciences than Smith's was.

In any case, the rise of the public university and the massive expansion it entailed—in terms of the sheer size of the institution, in terms of its public role, and in terms of the responsibilities and functions it was tasked with—constituted a remarkable dynamization of the relationship between the academy and society. One of the ways in which literary studies responded to this dynamization was by envisioning new and different incarnations of the discipline and its modes and methods of inquiry, incarnations that were more socially embedded, more invested in democracy, and more willing to consider objects beyond a narrow understanding of the literary. One such incarnation is American studies, a discipline often characterized by way of its paradoxically interdisciplinary quality. More often than not, ‘interdisciplinary’ here means that it supposedly straddles literary studies and sociology, that it, in other words, bridges the data-literature divide. Its emergence thus marks another instance in which a dynamization of the relationship between the academy and society triggered a return to and a reconsideration of the data-literature divide.

5.4 DH and the Crises of the Humanities

The third moment this chapter investigates is a nearly contemporary one: the debates around the growing institutional presence of digital humanities in academia that surged in the first two decades of the twenty-first century.[263] As in the two previous sections, I will argue that these debates negotiate the relationship between the university and society; that they mark a dynamization of this relationship; and that this dynamization, as with the two previous historical moments, surfaces as a controversy over the respective value of ‘literary’ versus data-driven modes of reading. After all, both proponents and critics of digital humanities methodologies tend to characterize these methodologies’ engagement with literary texts, be it by treating literature *as* or by engaging it *via* data, as a marked break from established, disciplinarily meaningful (close) reading practices. Both thus draw on and reaffirm the sense of a fundamental, categorical conceptual split between data and literature that this study investigates. In the ensuing debates, both these modes of reading, each seen as expressive of a different ethos and a different affective disposition, a ‘mood,’ get recruited in performances of group conflict inside the academy—performances that map larger social and political questions onto the sociotope of academia. In these performances, followers of the digital humanities often invoke the association of data with democracy to cast the advent of DH as the arrival of a more egalitarian form of humanities work. Critics, on the other hand, tend to see in the flattening of distinctions the digital humanities presumably entail a form of neoliberal homogenization. In this sense, the intra-institutional struggles around the digital humanities build on the socio-political valencies of the data imaginary.

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[263] Of course, writing about the near-contemporary moment comes with its own set of challenges: these begin with tense—in keeping with the previous section, the following pages will mostly engage discursive developments in the past tense, as if from hindsight, even though it is unclear whether they are actually in the past. They likely also impact the following pages’ voice: writing about the contemporary moment involuntarily leads to a more editorializing tone.

As histories of the digital humanities movement insist, and as this chapter's two previous sections have also demonstrated, quantitative modes of engaging literature are by no means a recent invention, but the first decades of the twenty-first century saw a massive expansion of their disciplinary presence, both practically and discursively. Digital humanities practitioners became much more visible at conferences and in publications and they asserted their presence in academia with growing confidence. At the same time, a rich, reflexive meta-discourse—a flurry of ad-hoc histories of the nascent movement and of papers, presentations, and articles defining and explaining, as well as attacking it—accompanied this rapid institutionalization around the 2010s. Greeted variously as "the *Next Big Thing* at a time when the humanities seem to be in *big* trouble" (Pannapacker) or, only half-ironically, as a "rough beast [that] has slouched into the neighborhood threatening to upset everyone's applecart" (Fish, "Old"), the digital humanities and their institutionalization thus hosted rich, vigorous discussions over the outlines and the future of the humanities project generally.

Its timing situates the digital humanities' coming-of-age at the confluence of several crisis discourses that all register a disturbance in the relationship between the humanities and society. It is these crisis discourses that turned 'DH' into a projection screen, a surface on which scholars were able to cast "so many of [their] hopes and anxieties" (Bérubé, "Humanities"), and it is these crisis discourses that makes the debates around DH meaningful in the context of this chapter. One such discourse is a more general, public, and longer running sense of a 'crisis of the humanities,' which gained particular poignancy with falling enrollment numbers in English and other liberal arts disciplines in the 2010s. This discourse worries over the diminished social standing of the humanities, and over the cultural impact of a decreasing humanities presence in higher education—and in society generally. Another one is a related yet more narrow discourse on a ‘crisis of (close) reading.’ This crisis is variously linked to the rise of new media and the concomitant change in regimes of attention that make it hard for people to read deeply—a concern that also resonated with the general public; or it is linked to the sense that politically inflected modes of reading—for race, class, gender, or sexuality—have changed and dilated the practice of literary (close) reading to the point that it has lost its value both as an analytic tool and as a token of disciplinary identity—a concern mostly circulated within academic publications. This discourse then partially overlaps with another more narrowly academic debate about the value of “symptomatic reading” vis-a-vis other modes of engaging with a text, such as “surface reading” (Best and Marcus), “postcritical reading” (Felski, *Limits* 12), or “reparative reading” (Sedgwick 123), to name just three. Sometimes referred to as the “method wars” (Felski, “Introduction” v), these debates register that closely reading a text for traces of a hidden ideological depth structure has lost some of its appeal. Lastly, the more general discourses of a decline of the humanities and of a decline of reading—often coming with a substantial dose of well-practiced cultural pessimism—were infused with additional social and political urgency by way of another crisis weighing heavy on the (public’s) mind at the time: the financial meltdown of 2008 spawned crisis discourses that recognized the perils and catastrophic social effects of unchecked deregulation and neoliberalism. It is the convergence of these different crisis discourses that turns the otherwise innocuous debate over a new set of methods, DH, in literary studies into a highly contentious site of political negotiation.

Indeed, one of the more remarkable features of these debates is how they fold onto one another the social relevance of the humanities, the disciplinary function of reading, and the intra-disciplinary politics of the digital humanities. Andrew Kopec observes as much in an essay in which he “examine[s] the socioinstitutional contexts that give rise” to two of these interrelated debates: one over the role of ‘reading’ for a declining humanities project, primarily expressed, in his view, in a desire to have “close reading back” and one about the advent of DH. Even though these debates hardly seem to take note of each other, Kopec argues, the complementary “calls to revitalize close reading and to bypass reading entirely constitute a dialectic: they are contradictory but inextricably related solutions to the same problem. The problem is the perceived erosion of the academic humanities” (324-25). Kopec’s focus on the “socioinstitutional contexts” will be key to my discussion below as it investigates the tensions inside the academy around the rise of DH.

In all of these discussions, both ‘DH’ and ‘reading’ constitute surprisingly mobile, fluid signifiers. Charged with broad arrays of associations and meanings, they often become highly abstract yet deeply familiar set pieces in somewhat scripted performances of conflict. Matthew Kirschenbaum points this out with regard to the digital humanities. He notes that “the advent” of the digital humanities has brought about “a *construct* of a ‘digital humanities’” and that debates about DH thus take place in a kind of virtual sparring arena for disciplinary conflict (“What Is ‘Digital Humanities,’ And Why” 47). Thus, ‘DH’ here comes to stand not simply for a new set of methods but for a much larger set of disciplinary, institutional, and, ultimately, social transformations. The same holds for close reading. As Peter Middleton remarks, the term is far from narrowly describing a single methodology. Rather it is “our contemporary term for a heterogeneous and largely unorganized set of practices and assumptions” (5). The fluidity and openness to projection of these terms accordingly constitute one of the enabling conditions that allow these debates to negotiate underlying senses of crisis and opportunity, of threatened professional identity, and of promised disciplinary innovation. They allow these debates to negotiate both the larger social and the more narrow intra-institutional politics of doing humanities work, as these two realms here come to be folded onto one another. Put differently, the extent to which debates around the advent of DH ‘misrepresent’ both (close) reading and the digital humanities does not constitute a misrepresentation at all. It rather is foundational to the negotiations of meaning they perform.

In the following I will thus proceed in three steps. I will first outline the larger humanities-in-crisis discourse as it regularly gets activated in debates of the digital humanities. While this discourse registers material changes in the academic humanities in the 2000s, I will argue that it also has different, longer-running functions for humanities practitioners’ identity formation. Among these is the projection of a pathos of critique that then comes into sharp conflict with the can-do ethos of many DH practitioners. In a second subsection, I will address a more narrow version of this crisis discourse: the sense that ‘reading’ is in decline, both as a widespread social activity and as ‘close reading,’ the latter being a master token of disciplinary identity for scholars of literary studies. As I will show in more detail below, both of these crisis discourses activate two powerful, archetypal scripts: that of generational conflict and that of *kulturkritik*. Both of these scripts are crucial, then, in the debates over the advent of DH in the academy, as the third subsection will show. They provide the frames and metaphors that allow digital humanities critics to cast the movement as complicit with neoliberal ideologies and that allow digital humanities proponents to claim for themselves the mantle of a revolution from below.

5.4.1 Crisis as Habitus? The Decline of the Humanities and the Pathos of Critique

It is impossible to meaningfully engage the discussions surrounding the advent of the digital humanities without acknowledging both the material strains on academic humanities institutions in the first decades of the twenty-first century and the proliferating crisis-of-the-humanities discourses, which have a much longer history but which also surged at the time; and it is as important to acknowledge both without allowing either one to take away from the other. This subsection thus very briefly dialogues the material pressures on humanities institutions with these longer-running crisis narratives. It does so not in order to present a comprehensive discussion of either one, each of which would fill monographs in their own right, but in order to prepare and scaffold the following subsections.

As of the 1970s the humanities had been subject to a sustained political backlash directed more broadly against the "public ethos" of the university (28-29, cf. also page 365 above)—a backlash which entailed a strategy of systematic defunding. This defunding took place under the auspices of the widespread neoliberal ideology of "New Public Management," as Chris Lorenz calls the particular "combination of free market rhetoric and intensive managerial control practices" that has increasingly determined the inner working of academia since the 1980s "fiscal crisis of the welfare state" (600; 599). Within this ideological and managerial framework, the university is seen no longer as a public good, a site of spending that delivers varied, diffuse, but important social returns, but as a service sector that is expected to be "efficient and profitable" in immediate, quantifiable terms (602). The resulting financial shortages did not only impact day-to-day operations. They also hampered the internal operations of disciplines and the economies of academic reputation, most visibly so in how the resulting 'crisis in publishing' came to disrupt the tenure process.[264] These financial shortages also coincided with a decline in enrollment numbers in the humanities, which was variously interpreted as either an effect of these sustained attacks or as an aggravating factor.[265] Simultaneously, the neoliberal assaults on the humanities' standing and on the vision of the university as part of the welfare state opened a fault line of conflicting ideologies inside the institution: The profit- and efficiency-driven maxims of New Public Management here openly conflicted with the very modes of thinking, of attention and of inquiry that are typically seen to characterize the humanities. The result was a wave of symbolic resistance and critical analysis brought to bear on this increasing presence of managerial regimes inside the university, most prominently in the form of "Critical University Studies" (cf. Williams). This critique unmistakably constitutes an engagement with widespread social change, neoliberalization, on behalf of academics. It is less clear, however, whether this inward projection of social developments onto the academy ultimately heralds the university's increasing perfusion by and interlinkage with the social—as the proponents of Critical University Studies would have it, or whether it signals a new stage of the university's detachment from the social—its mistaking, as it were, of institutional politics for social relevance.

In the first decades of the twenty-first century, these concrete, material developments and the responses they triggered gelled with much longer-running, ritualized and often habitus infused crisis discourses that are staples of humanities practitioners' identity formation.[266] Together, they formed a particularly dense and "seamless garment of crisis," "one complexly interwoven web of trouble" (Bérubé, "Humanities"). Russel A. Berman observes as much when he comments on how "doom and gloom abound" in humanities departments, and on how "agitated panic and immobilizing despair take turns standing guard at the gates where the barbarians are expected momentarily" (210). His self-distancing, ironic tone notwithstanding, Berman, too, registers a number of tangible institutional, financial, and social changes that threaten the humanities as we know them, but he nevertheless focuses on the "narratives of decline" that to him are as characteristic of the humanities' self-perception as they are problematic. For one, these narratives "posit, implicitly or explicitly, a preferable *status quo ante*, a better age in which universities were happier places, where the humanities were indisputably respected and culture was gleefully independent of commerce." This nostalgia, then, does not only stand in the way of a meaningful reform and modernization of the humanities project. It also, secondly, fails to "recognize how contemporary anxieties regarding the relation between the humanities and globalization derive, ultimately, from deep-seated ambiguities within the humanistic project itself" (211). Berman traces these ambiguities to a "double fault line": humanism's original construction against religious dogma and against facts and science (213), but Justin Stover's blunt assessment that "there is no case for the humanities" suggests a different emphasis.

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[264] In a letter to the members of the MLA, Stephen Greenblatt prominently warned that university presses, faced with smaller budgets and responding to dwindling demand from financially similarly atrophied university libraries, had accepted significantly fewer monographs for publication. This, in turn, made it difficult for young scholars to meet the tenure requirements in many literature departments. The letter, asking tenure committees to "discuss" this situation and suggesting that "books are not the only way of judging scholarly achievement" (Greenblatt), also shows how these financial changes fed into a reconsideration of the value of the long-form of linear arguments typically characterizing monographs.

[265] Given its quantitative nature, it is surprisingly difficult to find a full consensus on even the scope of this decline. As Benjamin Schmidt points out, enrollment numbers had actually enjoyed "a long period of stability" between 1985 and 2008, following an earlier contraction after the rapid growth of the humanities in the 1950s. It was only in 2008 that "the crisis of the humanities [...] resumed, with percentage drops that [were] beginning to approach those of 40 years ago. Unlike the drops of the '70s, though, [there was] no preexisting bubble to deflate" (Schmidt).

In Stover's *longue-durée* view, the humanities "have always been about courtoisie, a constellation of interests, tastes, and prejudices." Their social function has been to forge a certain degree of coherence —"similar tastes in reading, art, food, travel, music, media, and, yes, politics"—among the political and bureaucratic classes, functionaries in the widest sense of the word, that keep modern societies running. This concrete, *realpolitik* function of the humanities is mostly kept tacit, repressed, glossed over by a discourse on abstract values and skills, as intellectuals try to make the case for the humanities. It is here that Stover's and Berman's assessments dovetail: there are indeed "deep-seated ambiguities within the humanistic project," and they powerfully feed into the sense of crisis in the 2000s and 2010s. In fact, Stover's view suggests a double connection between these tacit functions of the humanities and the currency of crisis discourses in the early twenty-first century. On the one hand, the pathos of victimization in the humanities-in-crisis discourse helps repress the extent to which the humanities, despite their appeals to universality, have always also been complicit in perpetuating existing distributions of power and upholding the social order and its stratifications: it is simply more comfortable to lament one's own disenfranchisement than to register one's role in the disenfranchisement of others. On the other, the crisis-of-the-humanities discourses of those decades register a widespread loss of faith in the social order the facilitating, moderating, and regulating of which had always been the tacit responsibility of the humanities. As our social and political structures' ability to meaningfully regulate the current stage of globalized 'late-late-capitalism' seems less and less certain, there is a concurrent decline of trust in the very institution that was always expected, tacitly so, to bring forth the social groups that would both advance and moderate the forces of modernity. This, to Stover, is the most important link between the economic crisis in 2008 and the surge of the crisis-of-the-humanities discourses around the same time. As Stover puts it: "It is not the humanities that we have lost faith in, but the economic, political, and social order that they have been made to serve. Perhaps we demand a case for the humanities only because we cannot fathom having to make a case for anything else."

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[266] For a particularly wide-ranging discussion of how the humanities have always defined themselves through a "permanent crisis," cf. Reitter and Wellmon (18).

These intermingling discourses of a decline of the humanities, then, fulfill a plurality of varied functions two major ones of which are indicated by the publishing environments in which they thrive. On the one hand, these discourses register a set of social changes, and they thus form an important interface between society and the academy. As such, they circulate in more public-facing venues, such as *The Atlantic* or *The New Yorker*. On the other, they are powerful instruments of communal self-definition and self-reasssurance, a function mostly played out in the more closed-circuit ecosystems of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *PMLA*, the *ADE Bulletin*, *Profession*, and others. In the oftentimes routine quality of their lamentations, and in their hospitability to gestures of cultural pessimism, they are clearly identifiable as ritualized performances of community and of distinction vis-a-vis an imagined outside. Assuming a position of victimization that marks distance to, if not alienation from, society, and casting this position as a precondition for understanding and criticizing social developments, they operate a powerful, gratifying pathos of critique. As I will argue in the third subsection below, it is this pathos of critique, and the particular critical moods and dispositions that it expresses, that DH, to some of its more vocal opponents, lacks.

5.4.2 W(h)ither Reading? Reading Close, Surface, and Distant

Many of the features of this general discourse of a crisis of the humanities return in a more narrow incarnation of it: the sense that literary reading is in decline. This concern, too, straddles public and academic spheres, circulating in both in slightly different but often compatible versions. It assumes that literary reading—or its disciplinary version: close reading—is under attack and in need of protection. This reading-in-crisis discourse plays an enormous role in debates over DH as critics cast digital innovation as a major contributing factor in this presumed demise of reading.

The public version of the reading-in-crisis discourse is inherently political, and commentators pointing to a presumed decline of reading often find themselves, voluntarily or not, arguing deeply conservative positions. This conservatism in turn stems from the two well-worn scripts that these contributions typically operate: a script of generational conflict and a script of cultural pessimism and *kulturkritik*. Sven Birkerts's 1994 *Gutenberg Elegies*, still a touchstone for discussions in the 2000s, exemplifies this well: Birkerts opens by lamenting that his students, standing synecdochically here for a younger generation, are unable to meaningfully connect with the "inward and subtle [...] ironies and indirections" of Henry James, and he regards this generational failure as signaling a decline of reading skills due to the rise of electronic media and information overload (19). Noticing, and apparently feeling uncomfortable about, the political allegiances of this position, he acknowledges that this "so-called 'Luddite' stance is not especially popular these days, at least among intellectually 'progressive' people," and he thus attempts to carve out a position of cultural conservatism that steers clear of "the conservatism of the N.R.A. stripe" (4). Birkerts's discomfort with the conservative politics of his narrative of cultural decline are thus palpable, but other commentators are much more willing to more fully inhabit the cultural politics of lamenting a decline of reading. Nicholas Carr's *The Shallows* and Mark Bauerlein's *The Dumbest Generation* are examples of texts that flat-out choose an invective mode to lambaste the rise of digital reading as the main reason for a presumed decline in the intellectual (or even cognitive) capabilities of the generations to come.[267] Openly eyeing a (print) mass market, these texts utilize their scripts of generational conflict and *kulturkritik* as discourses of distinction: Their main attraction, their main selling point indeed, is how they allow their readers to feel good about themselves and superior to others.

Similar to these public lamentations of a decline of reading, the more narrowly disciplinary discourse around the future and presumed demise of (close) reading is an inherently political one; its politics stem in no small part from how it negotiates the relationship between textual exegesis and social and political concerns. This shows, for example, in Jane Gallop's essay on the "Historicization of Literary Studies and the Fate of Close Reading." In it, Gallop, perhaps the most frequently cited representative of this discursive genre, asserts that close reading was "the most valuable thing English ever had to offer." The practice "injected methodological rigor into what had been a gentlemanly practice of amateur history." It was close reading, the practice at the heart of John Crowe Ransom's "Criticism, Inc.," that "transformed" English literary studies "into a profession" (183).[268] Blaming New Historicism and its willingness to read a plurality of literary and nonliterary materials, textual and other, side by side, she complains that this widening of the discipline had had catastrophic, de-professionalizing effects. "[T]oday's literary historians with their leftist leanings and insistence on understanding literature in a generally cultural and especially political context" had thrown close reading out "with the dirty bathwater of timeless universals" (183; 182). This, in turn, had returned literary studies to the condition of amateur work. Practitioners of English of the New Historicist bent, Gallop claims, "are—despite their archival work—amateurs. Certainly that is what our colleagues in history think" (183).

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[267] Bauerlein directed the 2004 NEA study *Reading at Risk*, which did not hide its feelings of alarm when it determined that the "percentage of adult Americans reading literature has dropped dramatically" across all demographics, and that such a "decline in literary reading foreshadows an erosion in cultural and civic participation" generally (Bradshaw ix; xii). In Bauerlein's no less dramatic albeit more graphic words, the survey showed that the "digital universe" was "creeping down into the lives of toddlers and infants." As "the majority of young adults drift to [...] less enlightening sites and activities," he demands, "means [have to be] found to inspire young people to seek history, literature, science, and culture while online." After all, as Bauerlein's summary for the Midwest Modern Language Association prescribes, "the reading of books should be a preferred occupation" (105).

[268] Cf. Kopec on how this "Inc." in Ransom's title expresses a strategy that "transformed [the New Critic's] polemic against industrialism into a professionalizing strategy" (328). For both Ransom and Gallop, the legitimacy of literary studies hinges on it being a profession.

Like Birkerts, Gallop here evokes the register of generational conflict, both in her "today" and when she admits that she is writing "at the risk of sounding like the aging curmudgeon [she was] becoming" (181). Moreover, like Birkerts, she acknowledges the politics at stake: As she writes, the New Critics' "ahistoricism had been persuasively linked to sexism, racism, and elitism; attacks on the canon had called into question the notion of timeless works; literary studies," she admits, "had been ahistorical for too long" (181). However, tellingly pitching close reading and historicism as two mutually exclusive modes of engaging literature and thus narrowing the meaning of both terms, she concludes that choosing the former over the latter is a matter of survival, which ultimately trumps the liberatory potential of historicism: "My point here is not to argue about the relative intrinsic merits of historicism and close reading as methods for studying literature; I have no doubt that both produce worthwhile knowledge. Rather, I am looking at the question historically and also ultimately, if less cleverly, in terms of institutional survival" (183).

The somewhat problematic outcome of Gallop's argument—in which overcoming sexism and racism gets weighed against and, ultimately, forced to take a backseat in favor of "institutional survival"—throws into relief how heavily this debate around a presumed crisis of (close) reading relies on a highly abstract and monolithic vision of what it means to properly 'read.' It also, as in the case of the public version of the discourse, marks the debate as a deeply political one that is massively invested in drawing boundaries and performing acts of distinction. In Gallop's case, this is expressed most poignantly in the split between the socio-political interests of history and the aesthetic interests of literary studies and in the distinction between the professional and the amateur academic.

In both the public and the disciplinary version of this decline-of-reading discourse, a concern for the future of reading imagines 'reading' as 'literary reading' in massively limiting ways, and it worries over a flattening of distinctions and a corresponding inflation in the economies of cultural capital these distinctions underwrite. Most fundamentally, perhaps, both versions of this narrative of decline, the public and the institutional one, then read the presumed demise of close reading as a symptom of a more fundamental, underlying malaise: a malaise that shows in how literary reading no longer generates the kind social capital it once did.

In contrast to this perspective, a number of other scholars have taken a less pessimistic stance, one that reads changing reading habits not as a symptom of but as a response to cultural change. Tending to these helps illuminate matters further. In several articles between 2007 and 2010, N. Katherine Hayles for example takes note of the same developments as Birkerts and Galloway do, but she does so in a very different tone. To her, we are "in the midst of a generational shift in cognitive styles" ("Hyper" 187). As "people in general, and young people in particular, are doing more screen reading of digital materials than ever before," reading skills, as they are typically understood, are indeed "declining"—a fact evidenced by several reports, most prominently among them the *Reading at Risk* report by the National Endowment for the Arts (Hayles, "How We Read" 62). To Hayles, these traditional reading skills, vanishing as they are, are aligned with the "cognitive style" of "deep attention," which is "traditionally associated with the humanities [and] is characterized by concentrating on a single object for long periods (say, a novel by Dickens), ignoring outside stimuli while so engaged, preferring a single information stream, and having a high tolerance for long focus times." However, while Hayles acknowledges that this style's fading "poses challenges to education at all levels, including colleges and universities" ("Hyper" 187), her focus on cognitive styles allows her to contrast the "literary" cognitive style of "deep attention" with the digital media compatible style of "hyper attention." This cognitive style is "characterized by switching focus rapidly among different tasks, preferring multiple information streams, seeking a high level of stimulation, and having a low tolerance for boredom" (187). Whatever one may think of Hayles's quasi-evolutionary model of stimulus and response, her view is valuable for how it steps outside of the dominant, routine narratives of decline to instead cast the fading of traditional reading skills, and the challenges this poses to the humanities, as not simply a symptom of a larger cultural malaise but as a response to a change in media ecosystems; a change that comes with its own opportunities.

Thus viewing the changing modes of attention not as a loss *of* culture but as a change *in* culture helps perspectivize the practice of close reading differently. John Guillory does as much when he reads the work of I. A. Richards as a “prologue” and Hayles’s as an “epilogue” to the practice’s thriving in between.[269] Such a historicization of close reading as a socially and historically contingent practice then aligns this current presumed ‘sunset phase’ of close reading with the rise of other modes of giving attention to literature. As Hayles points out, responding in turn to Guillory, the forms of reading usually captured under the label of close reading have started to come under increasing conceptual strain in recent years: Loosely understood, close reading had thrived not least because it facilitated a particular form of critique. Far from being limited to formalist discussions, it constituted one powerful way of situating textual exegesis at the interface between literature and society, and it thus helped endow literary reading (and the skills it practices) with political and social relevance. Even if close reading was originally introduced as a formalist tool for appraising the aesthetic, literary value of texts, it thrived as a tool of ideology critique long after formalism went out of fashion.[270] Lately, however, Hayles remarks, there has been increasing unease about how such “‘symptomatic reading’” envisions a “heroic [...] critic” who will “wrench a text’s ideology into the light” (“How We Read” 64).

Indeed, a number of scholars express reservations about this particular, ‘critical’ modality of close reading around the time of Hayles’s writing. Proposing a different, “postcritical reading,” Rita Felski, for example, disapprovingly observes the limiting and stale “mood” of sus-

[269] Notably, as John Guillory points out, Richards already imagined close reading as a tool to combat reader’s lack of attention, a lack caused by the new media at the time, TV. “At base, then, the problem of reading could be understood as a matter of attention, of devising tactics for overcoming the ‘inattentive activity’ of our ‘ordinary reading’ (297).[...] For Richards the cause of misreading was unquestionably an earlier version of what Hayles calls hyper attention [...]. The source was the same: new media” (Guillory 12-13).

[270] Gallop makes the point that close reading is so valuable precisely because it transcends the literary. It is not even “necessarily the best way to read literature,” she claims. Rather, it is “a widely applicable skill, of value not just to scholars in other disciplines but to a wide range of students with many different futures.” Literary studies was able to successfully broaden into cultural studies “precisely through the power of this move to close-read nonliterary text” (183).

picion that underwrites most contemporary close reading practices (*Limits* 12). Reconsidering the value of this intellectual stance, for her, is part of more general trend to rethink methodology, a trend in which "tempers can run surprisingly high" and for which she thus suggests the term "method wars" ("Introduction" v). Similarly, Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus assemble five different interrogations of the viability of such critical close reading in a special issue of *Representations*—an issue which prominently proposes "surface reading" as an alternative form of engaging texts that is less invested in a demystifying, antagonistic penetration of the text in search of its hidden meanings. Both the articles by Felski and the introduction by Best and Markus, in turn take cues from Bruno Latour's earlier observation that "critique [has] run out of steam," that unveiling a text's hidden mechanisms by subjecting it to 'deep attention,' has lost its power to effect social or political change (225).[271] In this view, the decline of (close) reading is not simply a symptom of a malign social development—the rise of screen reading turning people into inattentive, distracted readers. Rather it is part of a more general transformation, a transformation that also encompasses a shift away from modes of critique that had been the dominant register of humanities work for several decades now.

Hayles's historicizing, contextualizing view is comparatively rare, and it runs counter to the larger tendency to regard the presumed demise of literary reading as symptom of a broader cultural malaise. After all, both the more broadly public and the more narrowly academic versions of the reading-in-crisis discourse tend to operate scripts that assume an underlying, worrisome trend of cultural decline—a view that notably jibes with a rejection of digital methodologies as further contributing to the demise of close, literary reading. In contrast, frameworks that look at changes in reading, and in styles of attention, as responses to cultural change, as Hayles's does, afford a different view: now the rise of digital reading appears as part of the usual, necessary, and perpetually ongoing adaptation of both cultural routines and scholarly methods. It is easy to see how both views would find themselves in conflict with one another.

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[271] Latour's essay is part of a special issue of *Critical Inquiry*, which was convened in response to an earlier upswell of the crisis of the humanities discourse. As W. J. T. Mitchell writes in the issue's preface, the editorial board had decided to meet in response to a "critical or theoretical 'crisis,'" to a concern over the "prospects of criticism and theory at the historical juncture of spring 2003," to "anxieties about the fate of literature or art or the aesthetic," and to "a much broader front" of concerns (326; 331).

5.4.3 Method Wars as Class Wars? Digital Humanities and the Stratified University

All of these debates, then, animate the controversies around the institutionalization of the digital humanities in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Similar to how the concern for the future of the humanities folds a larger dynamic of social transformation inward onto the academy, and similar to how debates about reading ultimately address the relationship between textual exegesis and political change, these debates are utterly political, but they, too, are political only by way of proxy. To a considerable extent they engage questions of power and of group identity not by reaching outwards into society but by turning inward and engaging the stratification of the university itself. In this, and in ways similar to the above, they can be grouped into two larger camps: one group of respondents to the advent of digital humanities reads this new set of methods as a symptom of larger, negative developments: neoliberalization and the corporatization of the university. A second group reads 'DH' not as a symptom but as a response.

Indeed, both the symptom and the response camp are deeply invested in the relationship between society and the university. This shows, exemplarily so, in Richard Grusin's prominently critical engagement with "the dark side of the digital humanities." In the piece, Grusin invokes the sense of a decline of the humanities in face of the university's neoliberalization when he argues that "it is no coincidence that the digital humanities [have] emerged as 'the next big thing' at the very same moment in the first decades of the twenty-first century that the neoliberalization and corporatization of higher education has intensified" (87). Rather, he suggests, the "emergence of digital humanities" is a symptom of "the intensification of the economic crisis in the humanities in higher education" (79). Grusin's primary concern is that the digital humanities are not sufficiently critical and that they are thus complicit with the neoliberalization of higher education; in other words, that the "recent turn to the digital constitutes a turn away from issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality, an escape from the messiness of the traditional humanities to the safety of scripting, code, or interface design" (81).[272] Notably, Grusin here does not criticize individual DH projects for their lack of attention to race, class, gender, or sexuality. His argument instead is that the methodological movement is so narrowly aligned with neoliberalization and corporatization that it is inherently incapable of formulating critique.

A considerable part of Grusin's argument here is about the role of 'reading' in DH, and it is underwritten by the assumption that 'critique' is a function of reading (and, perhaps, reading alone). In his paper, this concern is modeled on the distinction between reading and building, which in turn picks up on a discussion inside DH that was particularly vigorous at the time. A number of DH-positive scholars, among them Tara McPherson, Cathy Davidson, and Stephen Ramsay, had started to emphasize the value of building tools that give users access to culture in ways other than reading, such as visualizations and query interfaces, or to do other kinds of hands-on work remediating or reprocessing existing cultural materials. Such tools, in this view, are meant to provide a more experientially rich interface to cultural artifacts, while the process both of designing and implementing interfaces and of performing remediations is seen as a particularly 'haptic' hermeneutic, a point I will return to below.[273] To Grusin, the resulting emphasis on producing new, non-reading ways of accessing culture invariably de-emphasizes critique: While the "digital humanities can teach students how to design, develop, and produce digital artifacts that are of value to society" these "marketable skills" are "quite different from those gained by analyzing literature or developing critiques of culture" (85). In this line of thinking, reading's potential for critique lies exactly in how it is a skill that is not particularly marketable—how it is thus inherently placed outside of or even in opposition to logics of commodification. After all, as Grusin argues, "[c]onsciously or not," DH proponents tend to "echo the instrumentalism of neoliberal administrators and politicians in devaluing critique (or by extension any other humanistic inquiry that doesn't make things) for being an end in itself as opposed to the more valuable and useful act 'of making stuff work'" (86-87).

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[272] Grusin here alludes to a blog conversation started by Adeline Koh and Roopika Risam about whether the digital humanities work, to some, as "a historical 'refuge' from Race/Class/Gender/Sexuality/Disability." This stance is also mirrored in Kirschenbaum's list of "the terrible things" people say about DH: "Digital humanities cannot abide critique. Digital humanities appeals to those in search of an oasis from the concerns of race, class, gender, and sexuality" ("What Is 'Digital Humanities,' And Why" 50). For another extensive critique, cf. Golumbia's *Cultural Logic of Computation*.

[273] Cf. Ramsay's discussion of the importance of building (and coding) on page 387 below; Grusin cites a twitter exchange between McPherson and Davidson in which McPherson expressed her dissatisfaction with how "much of theory/cult studies tends toward critique as end in itself" and Davidson's reply that "[c]ritique [was] hard. New ideas much harder. Making stuff work really, really hard!" This vision of engaging materials more haptically by way of computer code obviously also testifies to the interdisciplinary crossroads at which the DH movement was most alive at the time: the intersection of English, media studies, computer science, and information and interface design (86).

Remarkably, and in line with the underlying framework of ideology critique, a considerable part of Grusin's argument here is not primarily about the actual, individual outcomes of traditional and digital humanist projects but, in an allusion to Raymond Williams, about the "structure[s] of academic feeling" underwriting both endeavors. His paper accordingly opens to the observation that the "two recent MLA conventions" had been characterized by a problematic "disparity" in the "collective affectivity and moods" of two groups of academics. This disparity had been emerging "at least since the financial meltdown of 2008" but had now burst into the open. On the one hand there were scholars focusing on "the hard times for the humanities" and giving "papers filled with pessimism, anger, and sometimes sobering solutions to the diminished and diminishing funding streams devoted to the humanities."[274] On the other were "[p]anels on the future of digital humanities or the role of social media in fostering public intellectuals" that were "filled with laughter, hope, and a growing sense of empowerment coming in part from the resources being furnished to DH by corporate, nonprofit, and governmental foundations" (80). Clearly sympathizing with the pathos of the former, Grusin's essay is written not least to temper the presumably uncritical optimism and the can-do ethos of the latter.

[274] As one facet of these "crisis humanities," Grusin approvingly notes the rise of "critical university studies" at the 2011 convention. As its proponents claim, this "emerging field [...] takes a resolutely critical perspective" in discussing the university. While it "is not only academic" but imagines itself as more hands-on political (Williams), Grusin's praise leaves open what the tangible, actionable, political outcomes of its critique could be. In his description, this field's main value seems to be its ability to formulate a "historical critique of the devastating effects of the neoliberal university and its catastrophic legacy for the future" (81).

Indeed, it is here that several lines in Grusin's argument converge in meaningful ways: reading here is imagined as a solitary, silent, receptive enterprise, a conversation between a person and a text. The alienation from society that this may entail becomes an asset; it facilitates critique. Seen thus, the pessimism, anger, grief, and despair that marked the traditional humanities panels become a token for a position of alterity that is not complicit with the dominant ideology of neoliberalization. Victimization, be it at the hands of the corporate university's administrators or at the hands of the digital humanists, proves ideological purity.[275] The pathos of the "crisis humanities" (81), in this view, facilitates critique.

Notably, Grusin's focus on the "collective affectivity" of DH scholars, their "mood" to reprise Felski's term (*Limits* 1), corresponds to how countless other accounts of the movement locate its political and socioinstitutional effects less in its methods or in its actual outcomes than in the ethos it expresses and which resonates, "[f]or better or worse," with "the hallmarks of postindustrialism" (Kopec 325). The digital humanities, Kopec thus insists, "reimagine professional modes of production in ways that revolve not just around the power of the algorithm but also around the quintessential form of postindustrial work: the team" (332). Indeed, it is the evaluation not of its outcomes but of its ethos that a lot of the assessments, both critical and affirmative, of the digital humanities hinge on—an ethos that variably gets interpreted as indicative of postindustrial capitalism or as heralding a new, welcome egalitarianism. Matthew Kirschenbaum, for example, characterizing DH as less of a method than a "methodological outlook," points out that the "digital humanities [are] also a social undertaking." He, too, uses terms typically associated with the neoliberal transformation of society, but he insists that the digital humanities' "culture," which prizes "collaboration, openness, nonhierarchical relations, and agility might be an instrument for real resistance or reform" ("What Is Digital Humanities and What's" 197; 201). Clearly, in Kirschenbaum's and Grusin's takes on DH there are very different visions of "real resistance and reform" at stake.[276]

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[275] For a prominent example of such (self-)victimization, cf. Stanley Fish's "Mind Your P's and B's": He identifies in the digital humanities' promise "the double claim always made by an insurgent movement. We are a beleaguered minority and we are also the saving remnant," and he imagines, in a grandiose gesture of self-victimization, that this new movement will eliminate traditional scholars like him: "whatever vision of the digital humanities is proclaimed, it will have little place for the likes of me and for the kind of criticism I practice: a criticism that narrows meaning to the significances designed by an author, a criticism that generalizes from a text as small as half a line, a criticism that insists on the distinction between the true and the false, between what is relevant and what is noise, between what is serious and what is mere play. Nothing ludic in what I do or try to do. I have a lot to answer for" (Fish, "Mind").

One site at which the digital humanities' potential to become "an instrument for real [...] reform" unfolds with vigor, then, is the stratified sociotope of academia. Here, its rhetoric of team spirit, flexibility, and transparency runs counter to the traditional (or: crisis) humanities' vision of painstaking work done by lone scholars reading by the light of a reading lamp (cf. Hayes 262). As DH proponents keep insisting, this individualist myth of solitary academic work not only flatters the intellectual critic by downplaying the importance of academic peers.[277] It also renders invisible the presumably menial work of those who provide the material thus read. In a paper on "Information Technology and the Troubled Humanities," Jerome McGann expresses as much when he calls out a "system of apartheid [that] has been in place in literary and cultural studies" for decades: "On one hand we have editing, bibliography, and archival work, on the other theory and interpretation. I don't have to tell you which of these two classes of work has been regarded as menial if somehow necessary" (56). As McGann notes, and as others have expressed even more programmatically, the digital humanities' interest in remediation and in building tools, i.e. in exploring ways of engaging culture that are not reading, theory, or interpretation, constitutes an attack on this particular form of stratification, an affront that does not go unnoticed by either side.[278] This affront is further exacerbated by DH's willingness to embrace the 'alt-ac' movement—i.e. a willingness by nontenured academics to seek out alternatives to an academic career and to either leave the university for other employment opportunities or to relocate to the fringes of the university, taking on nontenured, non-teaching positions as librarians, archivists, curators, or other academic 'service workers' while continuing to stay involved in academic work.[279] The digital humanities' promise to endow its practitioners with marketable skills—coding and analytics, to name the two most prominent ones—takes center stage here, but it is a promise that lays bare the ambivalences at stake: accepting that tenure will likely be out of reach and planning one's life accordingly is two things at once: It is a reasonable, realistic choice necessary in order to survive in the current academic landscape. But it is also a politically acquiescing decision in face of the ongoing dismantling of the institution of tenure.

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[276] Indeed, as part of his criticism of the digital humanities as insufficiently critical, Grusin laments that digital humanities practitioners, in their turn, had attacked the traditional humanities as being politically impotent, as performing critique for critique's sake. In part, his essay is written to call on digital humanists to "stop (as many already have) making invidious distinctions between critique and production, between academic work pursued for its own ends and academic work that is instrumental for other ends" (89).

[277] Note how this vision of solitary work also resonates with a hermeneutics of suspicion, criticized by Felski's and others' interventions, that casts the critic as a "detective" who "interprets clues, establishes causal connections, and identifies a guilty party: namely, the literary work accused of whitewashing or concealing social oppression" (Felski, "Suspicious" 215).

[278] Cf. Peter Robinson's characterization of the work of the literary, "textual scholar" and the digital humanist. Even though Robinson writes from the

Indeed, in many of the debates over the place of the digital humanities in academia, multiple stratifying fault lines overlap, among them not just those between a professoriat and the members of the lower echelons doing the presumably more menial, clerical work of archiving, redacting, editing, and so on; or that between tenured and nontenured scholars.[280] Part of the conflict certainly is also generational. Accordingly, the discussion over whether one needs to be able to write computer code in order to be part of the digital humanities in-crowd, most famously expressed in Stephen Ramsay's controversial "Who's In and Who's Out,"

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position of having worn both hats, in his view, one line of work is clearly in the service of the other: "I think we should begin, as textual scholars, by declaring exactly what it is we do: we do textual scholarship. We may use digital humanities to be better textual scholars, but we do not pretend to be digital humanists. In return, digital humanists might also declare: we do digital humanities, and we try to help textual scholars to be better textual scholars through digital humanities, but we do not pretend to be textual scholars" (Robinson).

[279] It is no coincidence that William Pannapacker, whose blog posts on the MLA conferences for the *Chronicle of Higher Education* advertised DH as "the Next Big Thing" is also the author of several scathing pieces, published under the pseudonym of Thomas Benton, that told students not to pursue a PhD in the humanities.

[280] It is perhaps needless to say that the argument that one should oppose the dismantling of tenure rather than working around it is easier said from a tenured position. Similarly, Grusin's characterization of "the problem of reforming criteria for tenure and promotion" as "a 'first-world problem'" certainly speaks of a particular situatedness (82).

always also invokes the inability to code as a chiffre for age and seniority—regardless of the existence, in the early 2000s already, of several prominent, tenured, senior, yet coding digital humanities professors and regardless of the fact that Ramsay was one such professor at the time.

In effect, DH's postures of attacking stratification inside of academia are thoroughly underwritten by a more general rhetoric of anti-elitist egalitarianism. William Pannapacker's early, particularly positive view on the movement as a "big tent" exemplifies this well. Pannapacker not only notes that a "high percentage of DH'ers" are "graduate students and postdocs" and that others had "gone off the grid of traditional tenure-track academe without regrets" and were now part of "the 'alt-ac community.'" Digital humanities, Pannapacker continues thus brought together a diverse crowd,

> including librarians and technologists along with a variety of new professional identities who find homes in research centers rather than traditional departments.
>
> The conventional academic hierarchies are quite muddled in the digital humanities. A new graduate can be more famous in the field than a senior professor. It's an informal culture of tie-dyed T-shirts and cargo shorts; interactive conversational presentations; and nonstop twittering involving audience members and DH'ers all over the world.

The description brims with optimism as it envisions digital humanities as a site of a new techno-utopia, but its most striking feature, of course, is its repeated insistence on the egalitarian quality of this crowd. Whether or not it accurately captured dynamics in the early digital humanities, Pannapacker's account is a testament to the hopes the movement was invested with.

A similar rhetoric of egalitarianism speaks from many others of the affirmative discussions of the digital humanities, and it ties these to the data imaginary. A comparably straightforward instance of this rhetoric of egalitarianism is the argument, frequently advanced by distant reading scholars, that the scope of their project bypasses the hierarchies of canon formation.[281] But gestures of a dehierarchizing egalitarianism permeate the rhetoric of DH more generally. Ramsay's discussion of the value of building vs. reading, a distinction that is at the center of Grusin's criticism, is a case in point. Ramsay begins by explaining the difference between the two methods, using maps as an example for 'reading':

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[281] In his programmatic introduction of "distant reading," Franco Moretti for example casts his data-driven investigations as an attempt to "enlarge the literary field" in order to overcome "the old, useless distinctions" of "high and low; canon and archive" (91). To put this approach in Leo Marx's terms cited above, he opts to neither represent culture by way of a canon nor by statistical sampling but by engaging all of it (cf. page 361 above).

> As humanists, we are inclined to read maps [...] as texts, as instruments of cultural desire, as visualizations of imperial ideology, as records of the emergence of national identity, and so forth. This is all very good. In fact, I would say it's at the root of what it means to engage in humanistic inquiry. Almost everyone in Digital Humanities was taught to do this and loves to do this. But *making* a map (with a GIS system, say) is an entirely different experience. DH-ers insist—again and again—that this process of creation yields insights that are difficult to acquire otherwise. It's the thing I've been hearing for as [long as] I've been in this. People who *mark up* texts say it, as do those who *build* software, *hack* social networks, *create* visualizations, and pursue the dozens of other forms of haptic engagement that bring DH-ers to the same table. Building is, for us, a new kind of hermeneutic—one that is quite a bit more radical than taking the traditional methods of humanistic inquiry and applying them to digital objects. ("On" 244)

Notably, this "new kind of hermeneutic" does not only provide insights different from those of "reading and critiquing" (243). It's "haptic" quality is also markedly classed: Further developing his argument, Ramsay discusses the work of Alan Liu, who "tried to describe himself as *not* being a builder, but those of us with long memories know better" (245, emphasis mine). While Liu now does "very brilliant things" in media studies, Ramsay continues, he is recognizable as a DH scholar because he started along "with the rest of us bumbling hackers in the early nineties. [...] One of the reasons the DH community is so fond of Alan is because we feel like he gets it/us. He can talk all he wants about being a *bricoleur*, but we can see the grease under his fingernails. That is true of every 'big name' I can think of in DH" (245). From the opposition between the "traditional" and the "radical" to the lovingly self-deprecating description of the early "DH-ers" as "bumbling hackers" all the way to the reference to the "grease under [Alan Liu's] fingernails," Ramsay's description brims with references to a classed system of academic work.[282] In this system, those at the top read and critique, while the rest gets their hands dirty building the machinery. The digital humanities, this stance imagines, is a methodological revolution from below.

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[282] Along those very lines, note how his "bumbling hackers" imagines an amateur quality in DH work that is openly and positively contrasted to the 'professionalization' of academic work. Ramsay's view here is diametri-

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Obviously, much of this is pure rhetoric, and scholars like Ramsay and Pannapacker are simultaneously acutely aware that the digital humanities are as much aligned with and co-opted by the power structures of the university as every other methodological disposition is. The digital humanities, Ramsay notes in another piece, is also a "series of concrete instantiations involving money, students, funding agencies, big schools, little schools, programs, curricula, old guards, new guards, gatekeepers, and prestige" ("Who's" 240). But the rhetoric of DH is, of course, exactly the point of interest for this chapter. Both proponents and critics of DH mobilize a rhetoric that registers the advent of this new "methodological outlook" as an attack on the stratification inside of academia. If, as the beginning of this section has argued, the debate over the place of the digital humanities in academia is, to a considerable extent, an inflection of what Felski refers to as the "method wars," this particular inflection articulates the method wars in the tropes of class war. For the proponents of DH, this endows the movement with a form of politicality similar to that of more broadly socially oriented counterhegemonic methods. For the critics, the attack on the hierarchies of academia is doubly mistaken: It attacks class structures in a setting, the university, that is presumably not classed; and it aligns with the larger assault on the standing of the humanities, and on the university itself.

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Writing a history not of literary studies in the United States but of "quantitative literary studies" generally, and doing so from a German perspective, Toni Bernhart notes three "culmination phases": one around approximately 1900, when a number of "non-philological practitioners" turned to quantification to talk about literature; a second phase around the 1950s to '80s, marked by "intense interdisciplinarity" and the increasing use of computers, in which structuralism and cultural material-

cally opposed to a concern for professionalism, as expressed in Gallop's comments above (page 376). Clearly, Ramsay is inclined to wear the status of 'amateur' as a badge of honor.

ism fed into debates in the field; and a third phase, beginning in the 2000s, in which quantitative approaches to literature get "absorbed by the digital humanities" signaling a conversion of quantitative and qualitative approaches.[283] Bernhart suggests that the second phase was spurred on primarily by technological developments and by the rise of descriptive and prognostic brands of sociology in the US (214), but by and large he is more interested in identifying these three phases than he is in explaining their underlying causes. At least in the US, however, these three phases in which quantitative approaches thus happened to gain traction coincide with phases in which the relationship between academia and society became more dynamic, phases in which, as the previous pages have shown, the social function and the meaning of the university, the humanities, and of literary studies in particular had to be negotiated anew.

Indeed, as this coda chapter has argued, it is not incidental that there would be synchronicity between Bernhart's "culmination phases" of quantitative approaches and this study's three phases of a dynamization of the relationship between the university and society. Rather, this synchronicity is expressive of how rethinking the contours and the social function of the university has, at least in the US, always also meant rethinking the relationship between literature and data. Put differently: Whenever Americans felt compelled to rethink the university, they turned to the data-literature divide—the emergence and consolidation of which in the nineteenth century is at the heart of this book.

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[283] Bernhart identifies "drei Phasen [...], in denen quantitative Ansätze zur Analyse und Interpretation von Literatur und Sprache kulminieren. Eine erste Phase bilden die Dekaden um 1900, in der sich vorwiegend Nicht-Philologen quantifizierend mit Literatur beschäftigen. In den Jahrzehnten zwischen etwa 1950 und 1980 lässt sich eine zweite Phase identifizieren, die durch ausgeprägte Interdisziplinarität gekennzeichnet ist und in der sich maschinelle Rechnertechnik und das junge, sich erst formierende Fach der Informatik an den Debatten beteiligen. Als eine dritte Phase tritt die Zeit ab etwa 2000 hervor, in der quantitative Ansätze in den Geisteswissenschaften von den Digital Humanities absorbiert werden und eine deutliche Konvergenz der Konzepte ›Quantität‹ und ›Qualität‹ zu verzeichnen ist" (212). On the time frame, cf. also Lisa Gitelman's remarks on the "extended moment at the end of the nineteenth century when the humanities emerged in something like their present form" and the "the extended moment at the end of the twentieth century when the humanities in the United States may have enjoyed the possibility of centralization, in the form of state sponsorship, yet entered what is widely perceived as a period of ongoing 'crisis'" (*Always* 12).

This chapter's attention to these three phases of dynamization has spotlighted three different inflections of this returning to the data-literature divide: In the case of Lucius A. Sherman's *avant-la-lettre* work in digital humanities, his interest in quantification reflected institutional transformations happening in the wake of the Morril Land Grant Act. This act had contributed to a massive expansion both of the university itself, with new institutions being founded and existing ones growing rapidly, and of its mission: With its emphasis on practical learning and a vocational profile, the Land Grant Act at least partially transformed the US academy from a place of elite education to a much more broadly serving (upper) middle class institution. The rhetoric with which Sherman explains and justifies his data-driven form of literary studies speaks to this moment of dynamization and democratization. It associates some few students' penchant for literature with their cultured, upper-class upbringing, and it accordingly turns to a quantitative, data-driven, quasi-mechanical approach of reading-by-counting in order to offset this unearned advantage by some and to instill a love for and an understanding of literature in a large student body coming from a diverse educational background. Whether or not his approach had the desired effect, it operated a strong egalitarian rhetoric to justify its appeal to data.

The decades around the 1950s, then, saw a somewhat similar dynamization: a phase of growth in which new, more diverse student cohorts entered the academy and in which the public university took on a much broader social role of integrating society. This transformation increased existing institutional pressures on literary studies to explain its own function vis-a-vis society, and I have identified the emergence of American studies as responding to, among other things, these pressures. In thus rethinking literature as not primarily an aesthetic but a socially embedded enterprise, the data-literature divide constituted a key conceptual touchstone that has largely been overlooked so far. The debates over "method" in American studies accordingly had to negotiate the young field's position in relation to traditional, qualitative, "humanistic" forms of literary studies on the one side and sociology, understood as an emphatically data-driven discipline, on the other. The sociological method of 'content analysis' here took on a central role: a form of data-driven, distant reading of sorts, it occupied an ambiguous in-between position in relation to which an Americanist disciplinary identity could articulate itself.

Finally, the contemporary debates around the advent of the digital humanities, too, are expressive of social and institutional transformations. These debates typically evoke a number of longer-running crisis discourses—narratives of an imminent decline of the humanities and of reading—to cast the digital humanities variously as participating in the neoliberal dismantling of the university or as positively responding to it. In this, these debates identify more broadly social developments, having to do primarily with the current neoliberal, globalized form of late capitalism, but they engage these developments by folding them inward and projecting them onto the university's sociotope. This allows the debate over the institutionalization of a particular method, the digital humanities, to become a proxy for much broader debates about stratification inside the university and, by implication, also outside of it.

Indeed, social stratification, class, is a key concept in all three of the discursive complexes this chapter has discussed. In varying degrees of intensity and explicitness, the renegotiation of the data-literature divide in all three cases works through a concern that the university, and literary studies in particular, is too detached, too lofty, too much focused on the aesthetic rather than the practical, to speak to the social and to, ultimately, deserve a place in the academy. Sometimes choosing the register of 'class' and sometimes choosing that of 'democracy,' these debates associate data and dataesque disciplines, such as sociology, with a potential for egalitarianism that they wish for literary studies to also have. In all of these debates, however, this longing is conflicted: a desire for a democratic integration into a classless social body that is nevertheless invested in those qualities of the literary that make it stand apart from data. In this conflictedness, and in the resulting ambivalences, these three contemporary debates thus reprise many of the features of the nineteenth-century US data imaginary.

6 Conclusion

6.1 “Through These Vast Accumulations of Ciphers”

> Big data is coming for your books. It’s already come for everything else. All human endeavor has by now generated its own monadic mass of data, and through these vast accumulations of ciphers the robots now endlessly scour for significance much the way cockroaches scour for nutrition in the enormous bat dung piles hiding in Bornean caves. [...] Artificial intelligence has already changed health care and pop music, baseball, electoral politics, and several aspects of the law. And now, as an afterthought to an afterthought, the algorithms have arrived at literature, like an army which, having conquered Italy, turns its attention to San Marino.

Thus opens Stephen Marche’s eloquent piece in the *LA Review of Books* in 2012, a piece that carries its main argument in the title already: “Literature Is not Data.” In it, the Canadian novelist describes how Google Books, in its “disbinding” of books and the conversion of volume after volume into pure, uniform data, had undone “one of the original Christian acts” and “literally [returned] to the forms and modes of paganism”; how digital archives had made obsolete such venerable institutions as the Bodleian library; and how data-driven literary analysis had killed “the most sacred idea in literary history—the pure and lonely genius of Shakespeare conjuring his work out of a mythy mind.” Perhaps Marche is slightly ironic here. Perhaps. After all, he does note, albeit implicitly, the gentle*man*ly behavior of the professors at the Bodleian, “relics” in his eyes, and he points out that Trithemius, the German abbot who famously decried the secularizing rise of the printing press in 1492, ended up having his *De Laude Scriptorum Manualium* printed, not copied by scribes. Cultural pessimism and Luddite rejections of technology, Marche seems to suggest, tend to be about habitus—and they are quickly dropped in the moment in which they would have to pass over from performance to practice, from preaching water to not drinking wine. And yet, there is not a hint of irony when he claims that “digitization leads to the decline of the sacred.” Indeed, there is no hint of irony as the article offers up Marche’s central claim: “Literature cannot meaningfully be treated as data. The problem is essential rather than superficial: literature is not data. Literature is the opposite of data."

Claims like Marche's, and the underlying cultural negotiations they at once express and perform, are at the heart of this study. As I have argued, these claims, in their telling vigor and their decisive (if not defensive) insistence, speak of a binary that emerged in the middle of the nineteenth century and that is being culturally maintained ever since. In it, data and literature get defined in mutual opposition to one another. Whatever their merits or shortcomings may otherwise be, claims like Marche's thus speak of the co-evolution of literature and data in a long-running discursive constellation in which the cultural institution of literature—its formal outlines, its value, and its social function—came to be articulated in pointed contradistinction to the symbolic form of data and to the cultural institutions this particular, 'other' form projected.

This larger cultural project of constructing and maintaining the opposition between literature and data, I have argued throughout this study, brings with it considerable tensions and ambivalences, moments in which the two threaten to collapse (back) into one another, and moments in which attempts to fuse them lead to uncanny effects, to artifacts that appear to their readers to be 'queer' "literary mermaids" (Kennedy), strange objects that are half data and half literature. Often, the contingent quality of this data-literature binary becomes most palpable in the intensity with which its presumably natural obviousness is being asserted. Marche's triple insistence—"literature cannot [...] be treated as data," "literature is not data," "literature is the opposite of data," with each iteration upping the ante—is a case in point. It leaves the reader wondering: if the distinction is so clear, doth he not protest too much? The same is true of his recourse to essence: Does not his forceful insistence on data and literature being different in "essential" ways perhaps suggest the opposite? Does it not, perhaps, even serve to compensate for Marche's own sneaking suspicion that they might be more similar than he claims? After all, the examples he gives are all examples in which literature gets treated as data. They are examples of practices. If anything, they are examples of how fundamentally practices determine what things 'are.'

What Marche here works hard to unsee is this: The digitization efforts of Google Books or the analytical procedures of the digital humanities are not about what literature *is* but about how people or institutions *do* literature, not about what books *are* but about what they are *made* *into* by the ways in which they are engaged. If anything, these examples seem to say that texts can be approached as literature, or they can be approached as data, and neither engagement is inherent in the object itself. And yet, or perhaps precisely because of that, Marche feels compelled to insist on a difference that is "essential rather than superficial." Literature, his article claims more than once, is not something we do, it is not a practice, a form of engagement, or a kind of attention; literature, Marche's essay insists, at times in spite of itself, is a thing in the world, characterized by inherent, natural, absolute, "essential" qualities, by solid boundaries that set it apart from everything else.

Throughout this book, I have worked against such essentializing views, arguing that the relationship between data and literature is best understood not as one of essential, categorical alterity but as one of repressed similarity—a relationship that is in need, as it were, of constant othering to stay in place. I have used this interest in the constant mutual othering of data and literature as a platform to explore four different sites: four debates in which US culture has engaged in particularly interesting forms of such boundary work; four debates in which it has thus articulated the contours of the literary in significant, impactful ways by invoking its dataesque other; four debates that are familiar to Americanists not least for the roles they have played in the formation of the academic field of American studies.

Indeed, throughout the resulting four chapters, I have repeatedly identified moments in which debates over the contours of the literary crossed over into debates over the contours of the academic fields investigating it, prime among them literary studies. Often these latter debates were marked by a latent anxiety, a sense that admitting, even briefly, the similarity of data and literature was a "dangerous [...] game" to play (Folsom and Price 33). Apparently, as Jesse Rosenthal puts it, acknowledging the "role of data" in literary studies inherently "presents a threat to business as usual." It is, as if "many literary critics [were] afraid of having their bluffs called" (4; 6). What Rosenthal observes about the resistance to data-driven methods in the humanities is true of the realization of the similarities between data and literature more generally: Many literary critics respond as if the value of what literary studies does, or its justification for existing in the first place, depended on the essential, distinguishing qualities of its object and not on the insights it can garner or on the "ongoing relation with the past" (8)—or with the present, with self and with society—it can foster.

Finally, focusing on the discursive work that is being done in keeping literature and data apart, on the cultural efforts, as it were, of continually unseeing their similarities, has invited me to focus on the cultural imaginaries that these two forms entail: It has invited me to think about and unpack the sets of cultural associations and representative desires that nineteenth-century US culture projected onto data and literature, respectively. Speaking in the most general terms, doing so has thrown into relief how the data imaginary came to be invested with various egalitarianisms—moral fantasies that tied into one dense web equality, democracy, and objectivity. In the US, perhaps more so and earlier so than in other national cultures, this complicated the project of defining the outlines of the literary, which, after all, was often and increasingly being associated with moments of distinction—elitisms that obviously ran counter to the young republic's self-conception.

Unsurprisingly, this particular tension also reappears in Marche's text when he notes, approvingly, how the digitization of Google Books promised to "[bring] the wealth of the tradition to the widest possible public for free" in a "free global library." To him, the one important "pleasure of big data, and the algorithmic analysis of it, is its democratic spirit." It invites literary scholars to take on "the spirit of the engineer: open-minded, clear about the limitations of the data and the methodology, and frank about what they think they are accomplishing. That attitude is unspeakably refreshing, brushing away [an] entire apparatus of professorial self-importance." However, in the next sentence Marche already realizes the trade-off this entails, and, writing in defense of his narrow, conventional understanding of literature as a thing, asserts that the gains in egalitarianism are not worth it: After all, all of this democratic spirit, all of this dehierarchization, he notes, would come at the prize of

> treating all literature as if it were the same. The algorithmic analysis of novels and of newspaper articles is necessarily at the limit of reductivism. The process of turning literature into data removes distinction itself. It removes taste. It removes all the refinement from criticism. It removes the history of the reception of works. *To the Lighthouse* is just another novel in its pile of novels.

In laying out these presumed horrors of equalitarianism, Marche clearly assumes that there is a consensus that "distinction itself" is a good thing, that "taste" is a value in its own right, that "refinement" is desirable, and that some texts just *are* different from, and better than, others. It is no coincidence, or if it is, it is a telling one, that Marche here invokes British literature and Modernism as the hallmarks of real literariness. A novel by Virginia Woolf, Marche insists, is not just different from data, it is also different from "just another novel"—from novels, in other words, that do not meet a culturally ingrained, canonical taste. Most readers of the *LA Review of Books* might, in fact, easily agree.

Looking at the data-literature divide from within American studies, and thus taking on a disciplinary perspective that is particularly attentive to and inherently suspicious of the mechanisms of social stratification and exclusion expressed in such untempered celebrations of "taste" and "distinction," I find it harder to agree. Instead, I have used this study to trouble the presumably natural boundary between literature and data. Rather than regarding this boundary as expressing an actual, essential difference between things that just *are* different, data, literature, (and, perhaps, bad literature), I have looked at their boundary as a border zone, a liminal in-between space that hosts a variety of boundary practices: performances that create the conditions of alterity that they presume to describe, as well as practices of transgressing this boundary, of blurring, blending, and mixing.

Notably, Marche's essay seems to be at its most conflicted, if not at its most confused, right here when it acknowledges both the value of a "democratic spirit" and the simultaneous threats to "distinction." It is here, that it reads "very strange, very ill-informed, [and] very incoherent" indeed, as one respondent puts it, who mockingly also notes the difficulty of "reconcil[ing] Marche in Matthew-Arnold-mode with Marche in Google-Books-acolyte-mode" (cf. Syme and Selisker). Seen from the vantage point of this study, however, the problem in the essay here is not so much that Marche is "ill-informed" or "incoherent." The problem he encounters, as he tries to draw a hard, "essential" line that leaves literature on one side and humanity's ever-growing "vast accumulation of ciphers" on the other, is that he has involuntarily stepped into deep and long-running tensions, unresolved and unresolvable ambivalences that have occupied American culture ever since the data imaginary began to take shape.

7 Appendix

The appendix is available online-only as part of this study's digital companion at: http://www.data-imaginary.de/companion. It is structured as follows:

- A Source and processing stack
  - A.1 Line similarity
  - A.2 Poem inheritance
  - A.3 Catalogicity
- B Additional information on individual graphs
  - B.1 Fig. 6: Number of lines and words in the seven major editions
  - B.2 Fig. 7: New, modified, and kept lines in the seven major editions
  - B.3 Fig. 8: Lemma composition of each edition color-coded to show the edition in which a lemma was first used
  - B.4 Fig. 9: Number of lines / of unique lemmas in the seven major editions
  - B.5 Fig. 10: Mobility of lines in the seven major editions, based on similarity ≥ 50
  - B.6 Fig. 11: The poems of the seven major editions linked to their predecessors and successors
  - B.7 Fig. 12: Rare Noun Containers in "Song of Myself" (1855)
    1. Container A
    2. Container B
    3. Container C
  - B.8 Fig. 13: Catalogicity Metrics
  - B.9 Fig. 14: "A Young Man Came to Me"
  - B.10 Fig. 15: Catalogicity and containericity in the seven major editions
  - B.11 Fig. 16: Percentage of each edition that is catalogic, containery, or both

  - B.12 Fig. 17: Rare Noun Density (top) and Catalogicity (bottom) of “Come Closer to Me”

- *C* Additional Graphs on *Leaves of Grass*
  - C.1 Average line length (Words per Line)
  - C.2 Sankey graph
  - C.3 Number of rare-noun-storing poems per edition

- D Force graph visualization of this study (used on chapter separator pages)

- E Search Terms for the graphical index

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Data Imaginary

Data Imaginary is about the co-evolution of the literary and of data around the middle of the long nineteenth century. It argues that, during romanticism, US culture negotiated the outlines of the literary – what literature is, what literary value consists of, and what literature can do – in relation to the outlines of another representational project that was gaining sharper contours and a stronger foothold in public perception at the time: data. As the young nation was searching for a national literature of its own, data and data-driven practices formed an important foil, a conceptual resource to articulate the desire for a new, democratic literature.

Revisiting formative decades of US literary self-perception through the conceptual lens of data, this book rethinks the representative project of transcendentalism, the catalog poetry of Walt Whitman, the formal experimentation of abolitionist literature, and the evolution of American (literary) studies.

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