A Body of Individuals
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The Paradox of Community in Contemporary Fiction

SUE-IM LEE
To My Parents
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his book argues that community is a perennial source of contention because it holds a self-contradictory proposition in its most basic definition—that multiple individuals become “a body of individuals.” “A body,” after all, indicates a person, an individual, a singleness of being. So how can community be a condition of multiple, disparate, and distinct individuals as well as of a single body of being? Two vastly different responses to this paradox circulate in contemporary literary criticism, philosophy, and cultural criticism, and these two conflicting responses, I suggest, represent the competing discourses of community that dominate current debates over community.

In one response, community functions as an aspiration and an ideal. This idealized discourse of community argues that the paradox of community is superseded when multiple individuals are bound by forces of commonality, sharing, belonging, connection, and attachment. As these forces perform the seemingly impossible task of transforming many into one, the enormity of the feat explains why community functions as the ultimate expression of human unity. Indeed, there are numerous other terms to describe unity—for example, organization, association, membership, collectivity, union, affiliation, group. Yet none of these terms approaches the cultural prevalence, emotional appeal, and political heft of the term community. The reason, this book ventures, rests squarely on the paradoxical proposition of community: that many can become
one through fusion. While other terms of unity describe an aggregate number of individuals and particular modes of relationship between them, community as an ideal promises a fusion of multiple individuals into one subject position. Promising a degree of oneness that no other term of unity delivers, community becomes the seat of the most desirable human relationality—a unity that is convivial, productive, safe, familiar, comforting, intimate, and healing. Enacting what Raymond Williams calls the “warmly persuasive” connotation surrounding the word community (76), the many expressions of idealized community emerge from divergent sources—from ordinary speech, political discussions, communitarianism, feminist criticism, ethnic minority discourse, and, most importantly for the argument of this book, literary criticism of contemporary fiction.¹

Conversely, no other term for unity provokes as much criticism and dismay as does the term community. Because community functions as the ultimate expression of fusion, community becomes the bearer of totality. In this response, the proposition of transforming many individuals into one body becomes the ultimate logic of totalitarianism. Rather than being the seat of conviviality and health, community’s promise of oneness becomes the seat of all human organizations that are exclusionary, coercive, and oppressive, as found in historical evidences of nationalism, regionalism, racism, ethnicism, sexism, and heterosexism.² Relatedly, concepts that are valorized for their ability to fuse many into one, such as commonality, sharedness, belonging, and attachment, become synonymous with forces that demand homogeneity, regulation, and obedience. In its fundamental negation of the idealized community, this response may be called the discourse of dissenting community—a dissent from the assumptions, values, and goals of idealized community. To the paradox of community, then, dissenting community offers an antithetical answer. No, there cannot be a single body of individuals, and to aspire to one ignores the vital fact that heterogeneity, conflict, difference, and unbreachable singularity of being are inextricable ingredients of any unity. This negation of idealized community foregrounds postmodernist inquiry into power, identity, difference, and hegemony, as well as feminist and cosmopolitanist revisions of community.

This book examines contemporary American fiction that offers a third response to the paradox of community: to simultaneously believe and disbelieve in the proposition of “a body of individuals.” As these novelists simultaneously pursue and critique the alchemy of community, they intervene in the debate over community in a unique manner.
They highlight the fact that the two competing discourses of community share a commonality: both of them remove the paradoxical nature of its proposition. Idealized community supersedes the paradox by arguing the transformative power of commonality, sharing, belonging, and attachment to fuse many into one. Dissenting community dismisses the paradox as a dangerous delusion. In profoundly different ways, then, the two competing discourses conceive of community only by excising the paradoxical nature of “a body of individuals.”

In contrast, the fictions examined in this study conceive of community as full of paradoxes, impossibilities, and contradictions. Their conflicted movement between the values, assumptions, and ideals of community means that they invoke the two competing discourses of community in a dialectic manner. They idealize the proposition of community and pursue the transformative powers of commonality; in the next breath, they interrogate the nature of that commonality and even the very category of commonality. They expound the impossibility of many becoming one and follow that dismissal with the thought: but how nice it would be if it were possible. What these novels offer us, then, is a dialectic community without synthesis. While they richly illustrate the pulse points of idealized community and dissenting community, they do not arrive at a stable vision of community by legitimizing one vision over the other. I suggest that the concept of ambivalence becomes an important theoretical category for understanding their dialectic community without synthesis. To be ambivalent is to be undecided between two contrary values, pursuits, or entities, to appreciate the desirability of one while still heeding the pull of the other. The state of ambivalence, then, attains a rich epistemological value in this study of community, affording a unique vantage point from which to intervene in debates over community, commonality, and fusion. As Dennis Foster eloquently describes, the state of ambivalence is a characteristic feature of American literary and cultural expression of community:

[W]e express an ambivalence about community that is part of a fundamental American tension; fleeing compulsory society, we find some way to light out for the territories, where people unite freely. But once there, we again draw around us the strictures that had previously driven us from civilization. ‘Community,’ it turns out, refers both to a fantasy of a place we lost and hope to regain, and to the real, often agonizing condition of living in proximity with the separate bodies and minds of the others. (20)
Ambivalence about community certainly shows no abatement in contemporary American fiction. If anything, the philosophical, cultural, and political implications of imagining community present one of the greatest challenges to contemporary fiction. This book demonstrates the continuing challenge of community by tracing the ambivalent community in vastly different areas of contemporary American fiction—through a multicultural spectrum of writers, ranging from canonical to avant-gardist, whose works engage a wide range of social locations and topical issues.

In addition to demonstrating the ambivalence over community as a central tension in contemporary fiction, the unusual combination of writers examined in this book—Toni Morrison, Karen Tei Yamashita, Richard Powers, Lydia Davis, Lynne Tillman, and David Markson—uniquely contributes to the two aims of this book: to expand the critical framework for discussing community in literary criticism, and to have the two competing discourses of community talk to each other in a way that is missing in contemporary scholarship of community. First, aside from Toni Morrison, none of the other writers represents a familiar face in literary discussions of community. While Morrison’s novels anchor discussions of community in contemporary fiction, and her presence in this study seems self-explanatory, the array of other writers requires some explanation. What does Yamashita, an Asian American writer whose works centrally explore global migration, have to do with considerations of community? What does Powers, a leading writer of science and technology in contemporary fiction, have to do with concerns over community? What do Lydia Davis and Lynne Tillman, whose works are better known for their epistemological quests, have to say about community? What does David Markson, one of the most avant-gardist writers of contemporary fiction, have to show about community?

Although it may sound quixotic, precisely the seeming irrelevance of these writers to discussions of community is the point—to expand the critical framework of community beyond the idealized vision. These writers seem unrelated to the concerns of community, I suggest, because their literary visions of community diverge from the idealized community dominating contemporary literary criticism. The rich topical concerns, diverse social locations, and different ideals brought into play by these writers challenge the established discursive pathways by which “community” as such is discussed in contemporary literary criticism. Furthermore, the ambivalence these writers evince towards notions such as commonality, unity, and fusion brings the two competing discourses of community into dialogue.
In order to fully encompass these novels’ unique intervention in discussion of community, this study does not begin with a fixed definition of community. Instead, it approaches the paradox of community through a study of the literary manifestation of first-person plural “we.” As a pronoun that proposes to be singular and plural at the same time, the paradox of the pronoun “we” is metonymic of the paradox of “a body of individuals.” What forces endow a single subject with the heft of the multiple? How does a single “I” presume to be a plural “we”? What needs and desires are met in this transformation into a single “we”? When we move beyond the prevailing understanding of community as the most benevolent, ultimate expression of unity, we can see that Yamashita’s interest in global migration is an attempt to formulate a global “we”; that Powers’s defense of human uniqueness is an attempt to say “we, the human” and make it mean something special in the face of virtual reality and simulation technology; that Davis’s and Tillman’s treatment of intersubjective transparency is an exploration of “we” as intersubjective continuity; and that Markson’s philosophical treatment of language games is a dramatization of the biggest “we,” the fact of coexistence. Through their complex arrival at a first-person plural “we,” these works invoke a multifaceted vision of community that expands the critical framework for discussing community.

Furthermore, each of these literary manifestations of “we” calls up various ideals central to the community debate—the ideal of identification, universalism, humanism, universalism, communion, and coexistence. As familiar rationale for transforming multiple individuals into a unity, each of these concepts is thoroughly embedded in the philosophical, political, and cultural valence of community. Like community, every one of these concepts is subject to political contestation as rationale for unity, and, like community, each is under suspicion as a rationale for totality. Thus the literary drama of asserting a “we” becomes the drama of negotiating a whole host of contested ideals surrounding the very notion of unity. Finally, each of these literary instances of “we” articulates a need, a desire, or an expectation—that “we” are alike, that “we” are connected, that “we” are unique, that “we” fully know each other, or even that there is a “we.” Addressing the work of “we” in contemporary fiction allows me to address the issue of functionality at the heart of the community debate. What does community do? At a more fundamental level, should community do anything? The answer to this question has severe repercussions in the debate over community.

In order to contextualize the significance of ambivalent community,
let me begin with an overview of what I am calling the competing discourses of idealized community and dissenting community.

**Idealized Community**

“Community Is like Family, Sisterhood, Brotherhood, Village, Neighborhood, Friendship”

In the discourse of idealized community, community as an ideal fundamentally relies on the kindness of analogies. In the familiar similes of community as family, kinship, village, and friendship, there is a direct transfer of affect between community and the particular relationship made analogous to that concept. That is, community becomes as natural, as primary, as normal, and as essential as family, kinship, neighborhood, village, or friendship. From such analogies, furthermore, community attains the benevolent relationality among its members (of sharing, support, understanding, warmth) as well as the consensual logic of operation (governed by common aims, consensus, and shared fate).

In using community as an aspiration, contemporary discourse of idealized community performs a revolutionary maneuver between Ferdinand Tönnies’s *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society). The enormity of this maneuver lies in the fact that while Tönnies theorizes Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft as contrasting models of human organization, contemporary discourse of idealized community utilizes the two in seamless conjunction, incorporating aspects of both in a strategic manner to generate a brand-new theory of community. As the most influential theory of community not only in sociology but in any consideration of community in the twentieth century, Tönnies’s *Gemeinschaft Und Gesellschaft* (1887), translated as *Community & Society* (1957), offers a nostalgic description—and prescription—for what he sees as a way of life fast disappearing in the urbanization, industrialization, and fragmentation of late-nineteenth-century Europe. Tönnies theorizes the benevolent and consensual nature of community informed by “natural will” (“Wesenville”). This natural will expresses itself through the kinship group, the neighborhood, and friendship as relationships of intimacy and unconditional emotional bonding. The identifying feature of community is the “common spirit” that runs through it (224), and the ultimate seat of the common spirit lies in the form of the family. As the “simple,” “organic,” and the “only real form of life” (226–27), the
family best exemplifies the concord, folkways, mores, and religion that make the Gemeinschaft “the body social”: “Each individual receives his share from this common center, which is manifest in his own sphere, i.e., in his sentiment, in his mind and heart, and in his conscience as well as in his environment, his possessions, and his activities” (224).

In contrast, the instrumentalist and depersonalized nature of Gesellschaft is manifest in “rational will” (“Kurville”). This rational will expresses itself in business, economy, the state, and social relationships that are exchange-based and driven by self-interest. As the core characteristics of community gradually dissipate in society, Gesellschaft is distinguished by the absence of common will. Thus Gesellschaft is a movement away from the “simple form” towards the “complex form of social life”: “The ‘house’ maintains the ‘family character of the house’ the most, then the village, and the town. When the town develops into the city, the ‘family character of the house’ is entirely lost. Individuals or families are separate identities, and their common locale is only an accidental or deliberately chosen place in which to live” (227).

Strictly speaking, contemporary discourse of idealized community is neither Gemeinschaft nor Gesellschaft. In using Gemeinschaft models of family, neighborhood, and friendship as aspirations for community, the discourse of idealized community performs a careful adjudication between Tönnies’s theory of natural will and rational will. While it directly continues the benevolence of the family, neighborhood, and friendship in arguing the benevolence of community, it diverges from Tönnies’s use of such groups as expressions of “simple” or “organic” expression of “natural will.” Instead, idealized community seamlessly merges aspects of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, so that community is “a body of individuals” who aspire to achieve the benevolence of a relationship like that of family, neighborhood, and friendship. By carefully negotiating between the two wills set in opposition by Tönnies, contemporary ideal community discourse introduces a voluntary dimension to the formation of community, thereby acknowledging a late-twentieth-century political, cultural, and theoretical suspicion of “natural” expressions. Rather than being a given expression of “natural” or “primordial” will, community is the rational movement towards natural unities. This seamless movement between aspects of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft and between the “natural” and the “rational” generates an even more significant effect. Community becomes inherently teleological: it becomes a body of individuals united towards a final objective of achieving a unity like that of family, kinship, neighborhood, village, or friendship. Furthermore, these
telos of community—the Gemeinschaft categories of unity—directly inform the benevolent nature and politics of idealized community. This teleological view of community as the “rational” movement towards “natural” unities will be best demonstrated in Morrison’s construction of community, in which kinship models of community lead to the healing of all its members.

Precisely such a teleological thinking of community underwrites idealized community’s invocation of family, neighborhood, and friendship as aspirations for community. Limited to no one ideological group, this teleological view emerges from divergent political views, social locations, and cultural arenas, such as conservative political theory, African American discourse, feminist discourse, literary criticism, and popular culture. In “good communities,” writes the conservative communitarian philosopher Amitai Etzioni, “people treat one another as ends in themselves, not merely as instruments; as whole persons rather than as fragments; as something like an extended family rather than only as employees, traders, consumers or even fellow citizens” (25). Similarly, “family is the original human community and the basis as well as the origin of all subsequent communities. It is therefore the norm of all communities, so that any community is a brotherhood. . . . The more a society approximates to the family pattern, the more it realizes itself as a community, or, as Marx called it, a truly human society” (MacMurray 155).

Consider, also, the centrality of kinship models in Martin Luther King Jr.’s vision of “Beloved Community,” a vision that holds global “sisterhood” and “brotherhood” as its final aim of progress and is still vital to African American discourse. For instance, the ideal of “Beloved Community” informs bell hooks’s vision in Teaching Community. Taking inspiration from June Jordan’s statement, “We look for community. We have already suffered the alternative to community, to human commitment” (qtd. in hooks 3), hooks argues that the ultimate aim is to achieve “beloved communities where there is no domination,” communities in which members understand “the truth of our essential humanness” (66).

Similarly, the kinship model of sisterhood prevails as the aspirational model of community in feminist discourse, as well as for asserting commonalities of female-gendered identity, experience, and body politics. In close company with the trope of sisterhood in feminist visions of community are other Gemeinschaft models of friendship, village, and neighborhood. Marilyn Friedman’s “Feminism and Modern Friendship: Dislocating the Community” is an example of idealized community expression that uses the voluntary relationship of friendship as the ideal model of
community: friendship is a unity “arising out of one’s own needs, desires, interests, versus expectations assigned, demanded by one’s found communities” (199–200). It is no coincidence that “neighborhood” is often used synonymously with “community,” or that “neighborly feeling” is used synonymously with friendliness or conviviality. The use of neighborhood as the aspiration for community retains much of the Gemeinschaft connotations of the village: a small-scale locality, a living arrangement of face-to-face interaction, leading to an intimacy that generates a greater sense of belonging and attachment. The intimacy of the village as the telos is perhaps best represented philosophically, politically, and culturally as a specific vein of communitarianism, which emphasizes the heightened civic responsibility, engagement, voluntarism, and activism fostered by small-scale, unmediated interactions. As Iris Marion Young describes this communitarian ideal expressed by Carol Gould, Michael Sandel, and Michael Taylor, “[t]he ideal society is composed of small locales, populated by a small enough number of persons so that each can be personally acquainted with all the others[,] . . . decentralized, with small-scale industry and local markets” (Young 316). These aspirational models for community powerfully shape many of the ambivalent communities analyzed in this book. The telos of the family, sisterhood, and friendship propels the motivations and actions of Morrison’s protagonists. Likewise, the intimacy and shared fate of the neighborhood as the model for community reigns strong in Yamashita’s exploration of the globe as a village.

Just as importantly, the aspirational and teleological views of community give rise to a thoroughly naturalized view of commonality. With “commonality,” we arrive at one of the most hotly contested sites of contemporary debates about community, identity, and unity. What is the politics of commonality? What is the politics of asking, “How are you like me?” Why, in the discourse of idealized community, does that question seem the most basic, the most essential—indeed, the most natural—question to ask? I suggest that the degree to which similarity, sameness, and sharedness become seemingly inevitable criteria of community is the same degree to which idealized community depoliticizes the concept of commonality. Of course, no concept is inherently political as such, bearing an essential ideological allegiance to a value system, worldview, or power deployment. Rather, the issue at hand is the discursive context in which the concept of commonality becomes relevant or visible. And in idealized community’s fundamentally benevolent teleology, the practice of uniting along the axis of similarity seems an obviously justified and legitimate procedure. In a mutually supporting manner, then, the
teleology of idealized community renders the question of commonality into a self-evident imperative, and vice versa. The search for commonality in order to become a community like a family, village, or friendship becomes an apolitical activity, an operation that does not prioritize the interests of one group over another or strengthen the power of some over another. Free of any self-serving partiality, searching for the ways “you” are like “me” becomes a search for what is already “out there.” Indeed, the degree to which commonality functions as the identifying marker of community is evident in the way the definitions of “community” and “common” are interdependent.

For many of the fictions discussed in this book, too, commonality operates as the constitutive feature of forming a “body of individuals.” Commonality sits at the heart of Morrison’s use of identification, as her female protagonists bond according to the similarity of their life experiences and struggles, as well as to their shared objective of collective healing. Yamashita explores the numerous ways that universalism assumes—and exploits—commonalities. In Powers’s novels of science and technology, humanism becomes the pursuit of that one uniquely human commonality that will, in the final analysis, demarcate the human from the machinic. Although the “what” or the “content” of commonality differs, each of these literary attempts at imagining a single “we” employs the concept of commonality as an imperative.

Yet these fictions also question that imperative, and this antithetical treatment of commonality sits at the center of their ambivalence about community. In these literary works the very search for commonality becomes a process fraught with struggles, partiality, negotiations, conflict, and dissent. There is no simple commonality “out there” about the determinate features of “we” of the village, of the human, of the globe, or of “you” and “me.” Instead, searching for that commonality necessitates partiality—for some to determine, and enforce, the criteria of commonality—and constructivism—to impose and shore up arguments about “our” similarities and sharedness—and, if all else fails, conscription—to impose a commonality onto all of “us.” These struggles highlight the inevitably political nature of searching for commonality. In their self-reflective examination of their own uses of commonality, these fictions challenge the apolitical vision of commonality in the discourse of idealized community. Their ambivalence towards their own deployment of commonality, then, negates the central myth of idealized community and engages the concerns and arguments of dissenting community.
The various expressions of dissenting community, emerging from divergent political, philosophical, and disciplinary quarters, converge upon the negation of community as an ideal. But the negation of idealized community is not limited to those specific debates over community. The discourse of dissenting community is thoroughly imbricated in contemporary cultural theory’s reconsideration of unity, in poststructuralist critique of the neo-Kantian liberal philosophy and politics, and in the larger postmodernist interrogation of single body ideology, teleological view of community, and valorization of wholeness, oneness, and unity. Postmodernist philosophical dissent from idealized community begins by negating the final aim of idealized community as an impossibility—a unity in which multiple bodies become a single body. This negation foregrounds postmodernist recuperation of concepts such as difference, dissent, heterogeneity, antagonism, and conflict, precisely the concepts categorized as contaminants or obstacles that must be overcome or excised in the “progress” towards a unity like that of family, kinship, village, or friendship. By emphasizing the fissures that render “a body of individuals” impossible, dissenting community reinvigorates those fissures and recategorizes them as constitutive features of a community whose final telos is not a single body community.

A classic expression of poststructuralist theory and radical democracy, Ernesto Laclau and Chantel Mouffe’s influential work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* might be read as just such a reclassification project of dissenting community. When they famously state that “society is impossible” because antagonism and hegemony are key ingredients in a radical democracy (114), they are arguing the “impossibility of a final suture” that would make society into one single body (125). Thus the impossibility they address is the single body ideology at the heart of community as a proposition. Rather than being temporary instances of conflict that give rise to feelings of aversion, hostility, or antipathy, they argue, antagonism is a perennial condition expressing the uneven, fluid, always changing, always relative nature of subject positions and proclaimed identities. Far from being an incidental irritant or obstacle that must be resolved and eliminated, antagonism describes “the incomplete, open and politically negotiable character of every identity” (104). As antagonism expresses the “limits
of society, the latter’s impossibility of fully constituting itself” (125), it critiques the very desire for commonality and consensus in the teleology of idealized community.

Indeed, the presence of antagonism is crucial to a “free society,” as Laclau further expounds in “Community and Its Paradoxes: Richard Rorty’s ‘Liberal Utopia.’” Laclau’s critique of Rorty’s “liberal utopia” is representative of the way postmodernist philosophy’s critique of the neo-Kantian, Enlightenment liberal tradition enacts the discourse of dissenting community. More specifically, the postmodernist-liberal tradition debate demonstrates how the discourse of dissenting community emerges as a critique of any philosophical or political theory that holds a teleological view of human history as a progress towards unity, and as a critique of any rationalist view of a “foundational” human nature in which consensus is the ultimate achievement. Laclau writes: “Antagonism exists because the social is not a plurality of effects radiating from a pregiven center, but is pragmatically constructed from many starting points. But it is precisely because of this, because there is an ontological possibility of clashes and unevenness, that we can speak of freedom” (“Community” 92). In contrast, in Rorty’s “liberal utopia” outlined in Contingency, Irony, Solidarity, there is an untenable distinction between “legitimate” and “illegitimate” conflict, Laclau argues. As Rorty claims, “A liberal society is one whose ideals can be fulfilled by persuasion rather than force, by reform rather than revolution” (Contingency 60). But such are distinctions, Laclau continues, that can be made only when consensus is the determining criterion of legitimacy: persuasion is distinguished by the presence of consensus, while force is distinguished by the absence of consensus.

But might not the very achievement of consensus involve force? “The question that remains is to what extent in persuasion/consensus there is not an ingredient of force” (“Community” 89). The valorization of consensus as the legitimate, democratic form of struggle is possible only in a value system in which antagonism can only be a problem or an obstacle that must be removed. A social arrangement whose telos is the absence of antagonism strives for a “totally determined society,” “a society from which violence and antagonisms have been entirely eliminated” (92; original emphasis). On the contrary, Laclau argues, “the existence of violence and antagonism is the very condition of a free society” (92). Hegemony, then, is the very expression of a society in which antagonism is a constitutive feature. Rather than being an oppressive force that one group wields upon another and that must be eradicated, hegemony describes the perennial struggle between subjects whose self-identifica-
tions are inextricably contingent and mutually related to each other. It
describes the struggle by different subject positions that take place in
the field of limitless, differential relations that is the social sphere. Fun-
damental to the larger commitment of dissenting community is post-
modernist philosophy’s resuscitation of antagonism and hegemony from
the teleology of liberal emancipation. Other notable expression of post-
modernist dissenting community takes place in the theoretical exchanges
between Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek in Contingency,
Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left, in which
“antagonism,” or “the incommensurability or gap” between identity
and identity-claims, forms the theoretical basis for radical democracy:
“we each value this ‘failure’ as a condition of democratic contestation
itself” (1–2).

Jean-François Lyotard’s dissent from Enlightenment rationality, well
represented in his critique of Habermasian consensus, is another rich
expression of the way postmodernist philosophical critique of liberal
tradition contributes to the discourse of dissenting community. Like the
postmodernist repositioning of antagonism and conflict as inherently
necessary ingredients to any open-ended, democratic society, Lyotard’s
theory of heterogeneity and the differend directly negates the telos of
unity in social, cultural, and political theory. By exploring the fissures
that render a single body impossible, Lyotard calls attention to the ways
in which the pursuit of unity always “betrays” itself. Voicing one of the
harshest condemnations of the valorization of unity, he compares the
political call for solidarity as a:

totalitarian apparatus, constituted as a result of the elimination of debate
and by the continuous elimination of debate from political life by means
of terror, [which] reproducers within itself . . . the illness that it claims to
cure [that is, call for solidarity]. Disorder within, an internal proli-
feration of decision-making authorities, war among inner-circle cliques: all
this betrays the recurrence of the shameful sickness within that passes for
health and betrays the “presence” of the unmanageable (intratitable), at
the very time that the latter is hidden away by the delirium and arrogance
of a unitary, totalitarian politics. (“À l’insu [Unbeknownst]” 43)

As solidarity “passes for health,” it follows that heterogeneity passes
for illness: “With the horror resulting from this sanitizing operation,
the phantasm of oneness and totality is sustained by the belief that this
heterogeneous thing has, or is, a face (Medusa’s face?), and that it would
sufficient to turn it around to get rid of it” (43).
Likewise, Lyotard’s theory of the differend explores the disruptive power of the “unmanageable” in the movement towards unity. Extending Wittgenstein’s theory of language, Lyotard argues an anti-instrumentalist theory of language, in which language use—what can be said and what cannot be said—is metonymic of the material and discursive disparity in power. As he begins The Differend: Phrases in Dispute: “You are informed that human beings endowed with language were placed in a situation that none of them is now able to tell about it” (3). The differend shows itself in disputes in which the experience, reality, and testimony of one party cannot be “phrased”—has no means of being credited or legitimated and is repeatedly made to account for itself without any hope of attaining either. Like the testimony of Holocaust victims who are repeatedly questioned, or the language of the worker who can make himself visible only by speaking of his labor in the language of capitalist value system, the differend testifies to the fundamental falsity in the social, political, philosophical, and cultural myth of a single body community and valorization of consensus. Reading for the differend in literary formations of community indeed reveals the material and discursive disparity in power and the coercive and exclusionary maneuvers at work in formations of community. The teleology of health and healing in Morrison’s Paradise, for instance, means that practices and values that do not contribute to collective healing remain unphraseable in the novel. For Powers’s protagonists, the machine’s differend poses the greatest challenge, and their inability to phrase the machine in any idiom other than the “human” reveals the instability of the human community.

Reappropriating the “Common” in Dissenting Community

While expressions of dissenting community emphasize the fissures that render the single body community impossible, another instance of dissenting community might be located in those postmodernist philosophers who negate the role of community as an instrument towards achievement. In arguing for a community that is “inoperative” (désœuvrée), theorists such as Jean-Luc Nancy, Maurice Blanchot, and Giorgio Agamben voice the anti-instrumentalist theory of community. While heterogeneity, dissent, and antagonism are well established as postmodernist negations of idealized community discourse, lesser known is the postmodernist project of reappropriating the word “common” for the purpose of an anti-instrumentalist theory of community. No other contemporary thinker has emptied and redefined the meaning of the “common” more
the paradox of community

vigorously towards this aim than Jean-Luc Nancy. Like the larger postmodernist philosophical project, Nancy critiques the depoliticized use of the common as the “natural” binding agent for community. But going beyond a critique of the common as the rationale for community, Nancy offers the most expansive understanding of the common by way of a Heideggerian understanding of Being. For Heidegger, Nancy points out, “‘being ‘itself’ comes to be defined as relational, as non-absoluteness, and, if you will—and in any case this is what I am trying to argue—as community” (6; original emphasis). For Nancy, the only utility for the common is to assert existence itself as a fact of “being-in-common.” Rather than being a descriptor of a parochial similarity, the common in Nancian terms is a descriptor of coexistence itself. When that foundational fact is ignored, and unity is founded on the fact of what “we” have in common—in history, self-interest, life experience, objective, and so on—the primary fact of being-in-common is elided. The unity that arises out of parochial sameness finds its final expression in ideological totality. Nowhere is this danger more strident, Nancy argues, than in the discourse of single body community.

*The Inoperative Community,* published in 1987, addresses the fall of the Soviet Union and the unprecedented force of free-market global economy as primary examples of single body community. As instances of unity conceived through “economic ties, technological operations, and political fusion (into a body or under a leader)” (3; original emphasis), they represent how:

> the community that becomes a single thing (body, mind, fatherland, Leader . . .) necessarily loses the in of being-in-common. Or, it loses the with or the together that defines it. It yields its being-together to a being of togetherness. The truth of community, on the contrary, resides in the retreat of such a being. Community is made of what retreats from it: the hypostasis of the ‘common,’ and its work. (xxxix; original emphasis)

For Nancy, “communal,” “communion,” “communitarianism,” or “communism” represents the ultimate misuse of the common, the pursuit of “essence” as the logic of community:

> [When] thinking of being-in-common [is folded] within the thinking of an essence of community . . . it assigns to community a common being, whereas community is a matter . . . of existence inasmuch as it is in common, but without letting itself be absorbed into a common substance. Being in common has nothing to do with communion, with fusion into
Similarly, in disrupting the parochial function of commonality, Agamben uses the provocative expression “whatever” in his theory of community. “Whatever” stands as the central trope for a theory of community that is without any criteria of common attributes and properties, such as “being red, being French, being Muslim” (1). The kernel of “whatever” is “the idea of an inessential commonality, a solidarity that in no way concerns an essence. . . . Whatever is constituted not by the indifference of common nature with respect to singularities, but by the indifference of the common and the proper, of the genus and the species, of the essential and the accidental” (18–19; original emphasis).

Nancy’s and Agamben’s anti-instrumentalist theory of the common speaks directly to their anti-teleological theory of community. Just as commonality should not “work” as the logic of unity, community should not “work” towards a final objective—towards a more efficient and productive unity, or a “return” to a lost, “ purer” community of bygone years, or towards the aspirational model of Gemeinschaft community. Yet, Nancy notes, the history of community is irrevocably a history of single body ideology and teleological thinking. “How can the community without essence (the community that is neither ‘people’ nor ‘nation,’ neither ‘destiny’ nor ‘generic humanity,’ etc.) be presented as such? That is, what might a politics be that does not stem from the will to realize an essence?” (xxxix–xl).

The answer, Nancy argues, lies in a community whose commonality says nothing about its “essence” and serves no final function. As any unity with a final objective locates its “strength” in the degree of its fusion, any community conceived in a teleological manner inevitably operates within a single body ideology; it moves towards ideological totality. Only a community that has no final objective, whose commonality has no function, can become a unity whose final destination is neither “progress”—achievement of an ideological goal, greater productivity, political reform—nor totalitarianism. As the rationale for a community that is inoperative, Nancy’s being-in-common offers the most basic fact of coexistence as the originary community. Coexistence means that “there is no singular being without a singular being, and there is, therefore, what might be called, in a rather inappropriate idiom, an originary or ontological ‘sociality’ that in its principle extends far beyond the simple theme of man as a social being” (28). “Coexistence holds itself just as far from juxtaposition as it does from integration.
Coexistence does not happen to existence; it is not added to it, and one can not \textit{sic} subtract it out; it is existence” (187).

By emptying the category of commonality of any use-value, the anti-instrumentalist theory of community offers a profound challenge to the functionality of the first-person plural “we” in the contemporary fictions analyzed in this study. As each literary deployment of “we” serves a specific function—that “we” are alike, that “we” are interrelated, that “we” are unique, that “we” understand each other, that “I” exist among a “we”—each fictional instance must justify the work of commonality in transforming many into one. The fine balance between community that works and commonality that oppresses finds parallel expression in contemporary intellectual and political projects with reformist, activist vision. What theory of community can sustain a theory of commonality without also valorizing oppressive homogeneity? Let me hold up feminist and cosmopolitanist discourses of community as they grapple with this challenge and, in the process, highlight the dimension of deliberativeness that distinguishes them from fiction’s ambivalent community. This deliberative deployment of commonality is what enables feminist and cosmopolitanist theories to do what fiction’s ambivalent community cannot do—to synthesize the competing politics of idealized and dissenting community.

Dissenting Community That Works

Feminist and Cosmopolitanist Community

As Iris Marion Young writes, her critique of the single body ideology is instigated by the fact that “feminists have been paradigm exponents of the ideal of community I criticize.” At the same time, her intervention in imagining alternatives to community is inspired by feminist scholarship’s attention to difference (300). There is no better site for understanding feminism’s problematic relationship to community than in the debate over the trope of “sisterhood.” As I addressed earlier, sisterhood is the dominant aspirational model of community in feminist discourse. Inversely, feminist critique of idealized community emerges most vocally through its critique of sisterhood. Emphasizing the fissures that render a single “female” community impossible, feminist discourses of dissenting community argue the dangers of assuming “natural” commonality among women—of biological, acultural, prediscursive sameness, affinity, and empathy. Feminist critique of the sisterhood ideal also
dissents from the single body ideology that holds consensus as a self-evident goal and, above all, from the elision of difference that takes place in the name of unity. \(^{10}\)

However, while sharing many of the concerns raised in postmodernist dissenting community, the reformist politics of feminist dissenting community demands that community does *something* rather than do nothing. The horizon of feminist negative community cannot be anti-instrumentality, a commonality that has no function except that of observing coexistence. Indeed, the feminist break from postmodernist dissenting community articulates the complicated and uneasy relationship between feminism and postmodernism—their parallel inquiry into power, politics, and identity, and their irreconcilable intellectual and political aims. As Linda Nicholson writes in the Introduction to *Feminism/Postmodernism*, a central question for feminist use of postmodernist theory is whether the “theorizing needs some stopping points” (8) so as to enable the category of gender and to sustain the possibility of unity.

It is no little surprise, then, that feminist expressions of dissenting community critique the anti-instrumental community of postmodernist philosophy. Miranda Joseph’s *Against the Romance of Community*, while criticizing the discourse of idealized community, notes that “the not-surprising truth is that the critique of community offered by feminist poststructuralists has made not a dent in the pervasive and celebratory deployment of community in popular culture and even on what used to be the left” (xxxii). Joseph reserves her strongest criticism, though, for Nancy and Agamben as instances of postmodernist philosophy that “promote political passivity or paralyzing relativism” (xxx). In particular, Joseph finds Agamben’s provocative use of “whatever” as too easily dismissing the fact that “collectivities often persist in their project despite the catachrestical and disputed nature of the identity terms under which they are mobilized” (xxx). Likewise, Nancy Fraser balances her estimation of Nancy’s theories of politics with a criticism that his scholarship walks a “tightrope” that involves a “rigorous exclusion of politics, and especially of empirical and normative considerations.” Thus Fraser expresses a dissatisfaction with Nancy’s “middle way of a philosophical interrogation of the political that somehow ends up producing profound new, politically relevant insights without dirtying any hands in political struggle” (87).

What these feminist critiques express is, first, how reformist politics needs to maintain the concept of unity as the basis of collective work and, second, how that project requires the deployment of commonality in some specific, particular sense (e.g., similarity of history, subject posi-
tioning, experience, or shared objective or interest). Indeed, feminist critique of anti-instrumentalist community recalls, and sheds a new light on, the strategies by which postmodernist feminist theorists in the 1980s maintained the concept of unity amidst criticism of essentialism. Butler’s “contingent foundations,” Gayatri Spivak’s “strategic essentialism,” and Satya P. Mohanty’s “postpositivist realism” represent feminism’s constructivist use of essentialism—as a modified, contingent, fluid use of commonality to enable strategic formations of unity. In their balance of postmodernist fissures with the strategic use of commonality, these contingent deployments of essentialism may be read as modified arguments for dissenting community—a theory of community that negates the values and politics of idealized community while still maintaining a sense of unity that “works.”

Furthermore, these gestures of feminist dissenting community represent a moderated answer to the paradox of achieving “a body of individuals”: unlike the idealized community that supersedes the paradox with apolitical claims of commonality, or dissenting community that throws out the paradox as being impossible, feminist dissenting community argues for a deliberative body of individuals. In shoring up a theory of instrumentalist community, feminist dissenting community relies on the foundational concept of feminism: agency. By emphasizing the deliberative deployment of commonality, this instrumentalist community suggests that the work of commonality need not equate the oppression by commonality. As the following chapters will demonstrate, precisely this deliberative, contingent, and strategic view of commonality is what is absent in the ambivalent community under analysis, and it is what causes them to continually question their uses of commonality.

Like feminist dissenting community, the deliberative formation of unity is pivotal to recent cosmopolitanist projects that attempt to theorize unity without oppression. As a negation of the values and politics of idealized community, the new cosmopolitanist corrective to single body ideology theorizes the deliberative nature of unity by targeting the concept of belonging. As a keyword and central value in the discourse of idealized community, “belonging” describes a relatedness or connection to a specific unity, such as to a nation, a region, an ethnicity, a locale, or a family. Another way to define belonging is as a form of limited attachment. Thus the concept of belonging implicitly calls up a sense of restricted belonging—belonging to one nation and not to another, to one culture but not to another, to one region over another. Recent cosmopolitanist projects that negate the theory of single body community argue that altering this limited logic of belonging leads to a model of com-
munity with multiple attachments, belonging, and loyalties. As Amanda Anderson succinctly describes in her overview of contemporary projects of cosmopolitanism, cosmopolitanism “denote[s] cultivated detachment from restrictive forms of identity” (“Cryptonormativism” 266).

The best-known example of cosmopolitanist corrective to the single body ideology is perhaps found in Martha Nussbaum’s well-known citation of Plutarch—the call “to regard all human beings as our fellow citizens and neighbors” (qtd. in Nussbaum, “Reply” 9). Nussbaum’s notion emerges as a response to Richard Rorty’s call for patriotic ideas and American values in a *New York Times* editorial in 1994. Motivated by the fear of national chauvinism and jingoism that such a call risks, and by her belief that global problems of hunger, poverty, inequality, and ecology require an international basis of collectivity and agency, Nussbaum theorizes a “world citizenship” in which one’s nationality is an “accident of birth” (“Reply” 133). As a prime example of a non-limited belonging, Nussbaum points to the multinational and multireligious nature of people who participated in the World War II rescue operations for Jews. The French, Belgian, Polish, Scandinavian, Japanese, German, atheist, and Christian and other religious people who took part in the rescue efforts represent an instance of a world citizenship—a “we” that is not forged out of a single attachment, a unity transcending specificity of belonging.

Like the political and moral utility that Nussbaum locates in multiple and expansive belonging, Ross Posnock’s “post-identity cosmopolitanism” theorizes cosmopolitanism as a community that works. Locating the emergence of cosmopolitanism in eighteenth-century republicanism, most famously enunciated by Kant, Posnock argues the progressive utility of cosmopolitanism as a careful adjudication of Enlightenment liberalism and a simultaneous distrust of the ideal of progress. The egalitarian potential of cosmopolitanism emerges from the fact that the expansive and multiple nature of belonging translates into the fact that no ideal, practice, or tradition belongs to any specific body of people. For Posnock, the exemplary expression of this *post*-identity cosmopolitanism rests in black cosmopolitanism’s claim of modernity, in which formally marginalized groups can appropriate, without consideration of “origin,” all the world’s cultures, ideals, and politics without being charged of “assimilation.” “[A]s an instrument of cultural democracy that, historically, has been particularly congenial to those on the periphery,” post-identity cosmopolitanism presents a mode of agency to those who wish to form a deliberative unity (807).

By dethroning the specificity and the limited nature of belonging, cos-
mopolitanist community, like feminist negative community, postulates a vision of unity that is as instrumental as it is nonoppressive. These deliberative formations of community that “works,” yet whose telos does not lead to a totality, represent a modified answer to the paradox of “a body of individuals.” They represent a synthesis of the competing discourses of idealized community and dissenting community, a synthesis in which commonality is deployed deliberatively, not as a “natural” expression, in which unity is taken as a contingent, not as a given, and in which the instrumentality of community is not evidence of its totalitarian nature. This synthesis, I argue, is what distinguishes these moderated dissenting communities from the ambivalent communities of contemporary fiction. Reading contemporary fiction’s inability to synthesize the competing discourses of community reveals the difficulty of excising the paradox from the proposition of community.

Ambivalent Community in Contemporary American Fiction

In the face of all these possible responses to the paradox of community, what does it mean to be ambivalent about community? To be ambivalent is to simultaneously entertain two contradictory attitudes towards one concept. Put another way, ambivalence describes a unique vantage point, of acknowledging the appeal, as well as the undesirability, of any alternative. And because one is not fully “given over” to the attraction of one alternative, the state of being undecided elucidates the lingering call of the other. I am not suggesting that ambivalence offers an all-seeing vantage point, an unbiased perspective that is superior in its scope, depth, and balance to a more determinate position. Instead, I am suggesting that ambivalence holds valuable epistemological utility in the way it captures a conflicted stance, the moment of hesitation, in which the compelling nature of one alternative competes with that of another alternative.

Indeed, as they are pulled by the two contrasting answers to the paradox of community, these fictions express a multivocality in their manifestation of the literary “we.” Their conflicted stance towards concepts central to the debate of community—such as commonality, sharedness, belonging, attachment, and difference—stands in contrast to the more or less stable discursive role of those key terms in the two competing visions of community. Is community like family, kinship, friendship, and village? Or is community like totalitarianism, communism, and fascism? The discursive “fate” of concepts such as commonality,
belonging, and attachment is already predetermined by the figurative analogy employed to describe community. The multivocality of ambivalent communities is also different from the synthesized dialectic represented by feminist dissenting community or cosmopolitanist corrective to community. In contrast to these moderated expressions of dissenting community, ambivalent community retains the paradox of community as an unresolved challenge.

Each chapter examines the way the competing pulls of idealized and dissenting community manifest themselves through competing models for saying “we.” The degree of that competition, and the degree to which the final “we” endorses one vision of community over another, informs the progression of the chapters that unfold. The first chapter, “What Ails the Individual: Community Cure in Toni Morrison’s *Jazz* and *Paradise,*” begins with the least ambivalent assertion of “we” in Morrison’s use of identification. Pointing to the celebrations of Morrison’s community in critical scholarship of her work, I suggest that Morrison’s affirmation of identification is representative of the idealized community discourse dominating contemporary literary criticism. While identification in literature has been primarily approached psychoanalytically, as expressions of primary parent-child identification or of trauma, loss, or melancholia, I highlight the centrality of the term in the current debate over community. I explore identification as the key process by which commonality attains its transformative role as the binding agent of community. Identification, then, rationalizes the use of the question “How are you like me?” as the criterion of community formation. Upon the condition of likeness, a subject regards herself to be identical to another and, indeed, regards herself to be one with another in experience, feeling, and positionality. Conversely, as the centripetal force rationalizing the fusing of multiple individuals into one subject positioning, identification becomes the face of the oppressive single body ideology.

Like all the writers examined in this study, Morrison engages the competing discourses of community, and she explores vastly different deployments of identification, from the most benevolent “sisterhood” and “family” model of community that directly invokes the discourse of idealized community, to the most totalitarian and coercive community that manifests all the critiques of dissenting community discourse. However, what ultimately renders *Jazz* (1992) and *Paradise* (1998) the least ambivalent assertions of “we” in this study is the degree to which these novels ultimately return to and affirm the aspirational models of idealized community. Furthermore, dissenting community discourse, especially Lyotard’s theory of the differend, highlights the vision of idealized community.
community and the telos of healing that dominate Morrison’s novels and contemporary literary criticism.

Moving from the strongest endorsement of idealized community found in Morrison’s novels, the next two chapters delineate the increasing power of dissenting community discourse to unsettle the central assumptions and values of idealized community. However, what groups these three chapters together is the way that the values of idealized community, especially the “work” performed by community, ultimately underpin their formations of the first-person plural “we.” The second chapter, “‘We Are Not the World’”: Global Community, Universalism, and Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange,* turns to the global “we” as another unstable site of the debate over community. The leap from the singular “I” to the plural “we,” in this instance, rests upon the ideal of universalism—the condition of absolute inclusiveness that encompasses the whole of the world. This chapter engages the recent poststructuralist recuperations of universalism, such as those of Ernesto Laclau, Étienne Balibar, Judith Butler, and Slavoj Žižek, whose works argue a dialectic model of universalism: as a constitutive ingredient in any discussion of human rights or progressive politics, yet whose particular instantiations invariably fall short of an absolute inclusiveness vision. Precisely this impossible/necessary dialectic is central to Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange* (1997). The novel presents a skeptical look at the “global village” sentiments that pervade discussions of globalization, and it critiques the First World’s deployment of a global intimacy and shared fate as the latest rendition of imperialist—that is, unidirectional—universalism. In its place, the novel postulates another model of global community, a “romantic” universalism that asserts the transnational “we” without imperialist dimensions. However, the novel’s fantastic representation of this global “we” aesthetically enacts the “romantic” dimension of universalism—as a quixotic, imaginary, unrealistic, indeed *impossible,* achievement. The multiple significance of the novel’s global community, then, lends a deeper nuance to the incompleteness at the heart of universalism: as an ideal whose impossibility is essential to its perennial appeal.

Chapter 3, “Unlike Any Other: Shoring Up the Human Community in Richard Powers’s *Galatea 2.2* and *Plowing the Dark,*” turns to Powers’s novels of science and technology to examine the role of humanism in literary manifestations of the human community. I suggest that Powers’s ambivalent but ultimately defiant allegiance to humanism is a rich instance of the human “we” as an assertion of *distinction.* These novels’ central question, “What is uniquely human?” directly engages the issue
of commonality and differentiation at the heart of the community debate. As Chantel Mouffe puts it, constructing a “we” necessitates a “they,” a “constitutive outside” that makes the “we” possible (12). “The human” has never been a stable category, of course, as other categories of being, principally “the animal,” have perennially challenged those attributes purportedly exclusive to the human. In the late twentieth century, the biggest threat to the ontological stability of “the human” comes in the form of the intelligent machine, and posthumanist theories highlight those sites of fluidity between the machine and the human. I read posthumanist theories, such as those of Katherine N. Hayles, in light of the dissenting community discourse, and argue that humanism’s pursuit of human uniqueness engages not only the singleness of the human “we” but the singularity—the essence—of the human “we.” Powers severely tests his humanist-protagonists of Galatea 2.2 (1995) and Plowing the Dark (2000) as they desperately try to maintain precisely this human essence that will absolutely demarcate the human from the machine. And as posthumanist arguments push the humanist defense to its very edge, dismantling its immanental and essentialist logic, the human “we” seems all but defunct. But ultimately, Powers offers a startling response to buttress the human community: ineffability as the ultimate commonality that enables the human “we.”

In contrast to the first three chapters, the fourth chapter examines a literary “we” in which competing values of community do not find a resolution through idealized community. At the same time, this irresolve presents a challenge to the dissenting model of “we” as well as to the reign of idealized community. “Motion in Stasis: Impossible Community in Fictions of Lydia Davis and Lynne Tillman” examines the ideal of communion as a rationale for community formation. Befitting a concept central to the etymology of community, “communion” describes a spiritual union or meeting of souls, and this meaning continues to inflect the prevailing understanding of community as a condition of intersubjective continuity and transparency. The fictions of Davis and Tillman interrogate this lingering influence of communion. In mundane, everyday settings, their characters feel the dual press of the other’s contiguity as well as the other’s opacity. However “close” one is to the other, relationally or physically, one cannot “know,” “figure out,” or “see through” the other. Indeed, the taunt of transparency remains the most pressing task for the prototypical protagonist of these writers. Furthermore, the two writers demonstrate the paradox of community in different and complementary ways. Davis’s short stories and her novel The End of the Story (1993) explore the impossibility of communion through the concept of inmea-
surability. The countless number and ways of knowing the contiguous other announce the fact of the other’s opacity. If there are just too many ways of knowing the other in Davis’s fiction, the inverse is true in Tillman’s fiction: there are too few, and they are too predictable. Tillman’s *Motion Sickness* (1991) explores how, at every turn, the protagonist’s attempt to know the other falls upon congealed ways of knowing. In this task, Tillman applies the concept of recognition under Barthesean pressure and examines the ways in which recognition is a way of knowing by repetition. Ultimately, their inevitable failure invokes and dramatizes the rejection of communion, amply voiced by dissenting community—but with a crucial difference. I suggest that in these instances of ambivalent community, the expectation of and the desire for communion as the condition of “we” are not as easily banished as in the discourse of dissenting community. Here, “we” becomes an assertion caught between the desire for communion and the knowledge of its fundamental impossibility.

From an examination of community as an incomplete and an impossible project, this book turns to a literary instance in which community is understood in the most expansive manner—as the fact of coexistence. The final chapter on David Markson examines the most direct representation of dissenting community model of “we” and stands as a counterpoint to the most idealized model of “we” that began this book. Chapter 5, “Community as Multi-Party Game: Private Language in David Markson’s *Wittgenstein’s Mistress*,” studies Markson’s novel, *Wittgenstein’s Mistress* (1988), which engages the paradox of community by asking: Can one be absolutely alone? Can there be an “individual” outside “a body of individuals”? In one of the most philosophical and formally challenging treatments of the question, Markson presents a character who believes that she is the only person alive on earth. Most importantly for the argument of this book, she experiences her absolute-aloneness in antithetical ways: as a source of absolute freedom and as a source of absolute indeterminacy. Despite her freedom to do and say anything she wants, she spends her life “looking” for others, and her greatest concern is that she will be misunderstood because her language use is less than perfectly clear. Her dilemma invites the question: misunderstood by whom? Using Wittgenstein’s theory of a private language game, I suggest that the protagonist’s failure to play a private language game is an enactment of the impossibility of being absolutely alone. Attempts at evading a “we” simultaneously invoke the presence of a “we,” and community becomes an expression of coexistence. However, in contrast to the anti-instrumentalist argument of dissenting community, the “we” that emerges in *Wittgenstein’s Mistress* cannot be an expression empty
of all utility or “work.” Like all the other “we” in this study, the “we” of coexistence can only be an assertion that serves some purpose or does some work.

This book concludes with that observation: all communities do something. All manifestations of first-person plural “we” serve a need, answer a desire, respond to an anxiety, forestall a fear, or guard against a threat. In concluding with the inevitability of community that “works,” this book argues the limitations of dissenting community’s anti-instrumentalist and anti-teleological view. A community that works is automatically an argument for something, an assertion rather than an expression of a given fact. And what these ambivalent communities demonstrate is the fact that assertions of community, like every other argument, are vulnerable to counterarguments. A Body of Individuals traces how the ambivalent community of contemporary fiction manifests community as an argument, and an argument that must wear its counterarguments on its sleeve.
Introduction

1. The prominence of “searching for,” “reclaiming,” or “building” community speaks to the dominance of idealized community discourse in critical assessments of contemporary fiction. Some monograph examples are John F. Desmond’s Walker Percy’s Search for Community; Philip Page’s Reclaiming Community in Contemporary African-American Fiction; Bonnie TuSmith’s All My Relatives: Community in Contemporary Ethnic American Literatures; and an edited volume by Linda S. Coleman, Women’s Life-Writing: Finding Voice/Building Community.

The idealized community discourse also operates, albeit in a more complex manner, in those studies that study the “failure of community”—instances of community that fall short of the possibilities held by community. Such works include Thomas Fink’s A Different Sense of Power: Problems of Community in Late-Twentieth-Century U.S. Poetry and Linda J. Holland-Toll’s As American as Mom, Baseball, and Apple Pie: Constructing Community in Contemporary American Horror Fiction. Feminist studies of community voice the “failure of community” thesis most vocally, as in Jean Wyatt’s Risking Difference: Identification, Race, and Community in Contemporary Fiction and Feminism; Cynthia G. Franklin’s Writing Women’s Communities: The Politics and Poetics of Contemporary Multi-Genre Anthologies; and Dale M. Bauer’s Feminist Dialogics: A Theory of Failed Community.

2. For many contemporary thinkers, community is the site of that very slippage between unity and totality. Peter Hallward characterizes a feature of contemporary postmodernist philosophy as “a profound distrust of the very concept of a community. For these thinkers, ‘community’ often connotes a notion of fascism” (89). For Iris Marion Young in “The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference,” the word community bears an “urge to unity” that is indistinguishable from an urge to totality, exclusion, and oppression (320). Likewise, Elizabeth Frazer argues that the use of “community” as a self-evident commendation in the discourse of idealized
community obstructs, rather than assists, politically progressive collectivities; the discourse of idealized community “diverts attention from the material conditions that might generate” the concrete social relations towards equitable unity (84).

3. See Elizabeth Frazer’s *The Problems of Communitarian Politics*, especially chapter 6, on the prevalent use of the family as the ideal and model for community in contemporary philosophical, political, and legal scholarship and social sciences.

4. The phrase “Beloved Community,” first coined by philosopher-theologian Josiah Royce in the early twentieth century, pursued a higher-order reality in which an absolute interconnectedness and unification of people bring disparate and disconnected aspects of reality into a single vision. King changes the “Beloved Community” from Royce’s phrase of absolute idealism to an aspiration for the realization of justice, peace, and equity on a global scale. See The King Center’s Web site, named “Beloved Community”: http://www.thekingcenter.org/prog/bc/.


6. For instance, Friedman imagines a friendship model of community as the basis for a feminist communitarianism; Judy Whipp’s “Jane Addams’s Social Thought as a Model for a Pragmatist-Feminist Communitarianism” holds Addams’s locality-based activism as a model for feminist communitarianism.

7. Here is an instance in Charles Taylor’s *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*: “Common meanings are the basis of community. Inter-subjective meaning gives people a common language to talk about social reality and a common understanding of certain norms, but only with common meanings does this common reference world contain significant common actions, celebrations and feelings. These are objects in the world that everybody shares. This is what makes community” (39).

8. See Mark Poster’s “Postmodernity and the Politics of Multiculturalism: The Lyotard-Habermas Debate over Social Theory.”

9. Maurice Blanchot’s *The Unavowable Community*, like Nancy’s *The Inoperative Community*, finds its inspirational point in George Bataille’s critique of communism, fascism, and various versions of communalism. Nancy identifies Bataille as having “gone farthest into the crucial experience of the modern destiny of community” (16), and Blanchot’s first section, entitled “The Negative Community,” credits Bataille as a founding member of “unworking” or “negative” community. See also Giorgio Agamben’s *The Coming Community*.


Cosmopolitanism’s fluid and deliberative formation of unity is often times equated with postnationalism. But as the essays in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* show in their measured and conflicting assessment of cos-
mopolitanism as ideal and practice, it is difficult to sustain a view of cosmopolitanism as a clean break from nationalist unity. Cosmopolitanist theory of unity is also the subject of skepticism, as in Timothy Brennan’s *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now*, which wonders at the limited—and privileged—nature of a subject positioning that can claim to be “at home” everywhere.

13. Amanda Anderson’s *The Way We Argue Now* offers another expression of cosmopolitanism as deliberative unity that “works,” whose self-moderating powers rest in its careful balance of Enlightenment ideals and simultaneous interrogation of them.

Chapter 1

1. An MLA Bibliography search for “community” in Morrison’s work produces seventy-eight scholarly entries. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, and as the following sample titles indicate, a strong continuity in values exists between Morrison’s idealized discourse of community and her critics’ appreciation of her vision. Indeed, in praising Morrison’s literary exemplification of ideal and aspirational models of community, the scholarship directly continues the use of kinship relationships, such as “sisterhood,” “brotherhood,” and “family.”

   See O’Reilly’s “In Search of My Mother’s Garden, I found My Own: Mother-Love, Healing, and Identity in Toni Morrison’s *Jazz*”; Mbalia’s “Women Who Run with Wild: The Need for Sisterhoods in *Jazz*”; Romero’s “Creating the Beloved Community: Religion, Race and Nation in Toni Morrison’s *Paradise*”; Holland’s “Marginality and Community in *Beloved*”; O’Shaughnessy’s “‘Life life life life’: The Community as Chorus in *Song of Solomon*”; Christian’s “Community and Nature: The Novels of Toni Morrison”; Blake’s “Folklore and Community in *Song of Solomon*”; LeSeur’s “Moving beyond the Boundaries of Self, Community, and the Other in Toni Morrison’s *Sula* and *Paradise*."

2. In a notable departure from the celebration of community in Morrison scholarship, the following essays suggest that in *Beloved*, Morrison argues the failures of community: King’s “‘You Think like You White’: Questioning Race and Racial Community through the Lens of Middle-Class Desire(s)”; and Jesser’s “Violence, Home, and Community in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved.*”

3. Jean-Luc Nancy’s *The Inoperative Community* and *Being Singular Plural*; Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*; Giorgio Agamben’s *The Coming Community*; Ernesto Laclau’s “Community and Its Paradoxes: Richard Rorty’s ‘Liberal Utopia’”; Jean-François Lyotard’s “Àl’insu [Unbeknownst]”; Iris Marion Young’s “The Ideal of Community and Politics of Difference”; and Jean-Luc Nancy’s *The Inoperative Community*. See also my longer discussion of dissenting community in the Introduction.

4. Precisely in this message does Morrison invoke the negotiation of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft values that I described in the Introduction. The discourse of idealized community, in which community is given the status of an ideal, justifies the transformation of many into one as the “rational” movement (Gesellschaft value) towards “natural” unities (Gemeinschaft value).
5. As numerous critics of Jazz have noted, the vibrancy and primacy of the City elevate it beyond the narrative category of a setting; it attains the narrative potency of a character. See, for instance, Treherne, Sherard, FitzGerald, and Ludigkeit.

6. See Fraser’s “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy.”

7. See also Young’s Justice and the Politics of Difference for the use of the city as the ideal politics of difference. The popularity of the city as the favored trope (e.g., of difference, of heterogeneity, of globalization) in contemporary theory is well-known, so much so that Laclau and Mouffe warn against the “totalitarian myth of the Ideal City” (77). See also James Donald’s Imagining the Modern City for this caution.

8. Locating the study of the city in the beginnings of Greek and Roman philosophy, Nancy’s redefinition of the city leads to a redefinition of the task of philosophy. Rather than being a study of a city’s “origins,” “political institution,” or “civil coexistence” (31), philosophy should be a study of being-with. “[T]he city is primarily not a form of political institution; it is primarily a being-with as such. Philosophy is, in sum, the thinking of being-with; because of this, it is also thinking-with, as such” (31; original emphasis).

9. For approaches to identification as primary identification between parent and child, see Jean Wyatt, Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, and Jessica Benjamin; for approaches to identification as melancholia, see Diana Fuss, Judith Butler, and Anne Cheng.

10. For example, see Wyatt’s chapter 3; Tidey’s “Limping or Flying? Psychoanalysis, Afrocentrism, and Song of Solomon”; Baker’s “Knowing Our Place: Psychoanalysis and Sula”; Campbell’s “Images of the Real: Reading History and Psychoanalysis in Toni Morrison’s Beloved”; FitzGerald’s “Selfhood and Community: Psychoanalysis and Discourse in Beloved”; Mathieson’s “Memory and Mother Love in Morrison’s Beloved.”

11. As I will discuss in chapter 4, the wordless dimension of these epiphanic encounters also suggests the notion of communion, the possibility that one subject can be transparent to each other.

12. Celebration of sisterhood, a cornerstone in scholarship of Morrison’s novels, tacitly echoes this theory of commonality-based identification that leads to reciprocal appropriation. Indeed, the language and the value system in scholars’ praise of sisterhood take place within the teleological thinking of idealized community: commonality leads to affirmation and, ultimately, to collective healing. For example, in Jazz, “Morrison reveals that her first priority as an artist is in arriving at solutions for the dilemma of African people. Sisterhoods are needed in the African community, and through them, communication, not silence, will forge the way toward a healthy, wholesome future for all people of African descent, especially women” (Mbalia 642); “Jazz affirms and celebrates the maternal in both life and language. . . . The healing that is made possible through the child’s return to the mother teaches us that hope for change and renewal begin with the mother” (O’Reilley 377). For further examples, see Schomburg, Holland and Awkward, and Jones.

This critical focus on sisterhood and matrilineal fusion is one that Morrison unequivocally affirms in her essays and interviews. In a 1977 interview, she stated: “I knew my mother as a Church woman, and a Club woman—and there was something special about when she said ‘Sister,’ and when all those women said ‘Sister.’ They meant that in a very, very fundamental way” (Stepto 474). Another example can be
found in her essay “A Knowing So Deep,” which addresses the sisterhood of black women in the form of a letter: “I think about us, women and girls, and I want to say something worth saying to a daughter, a friend, a mother, a sister—my self” (230).

13. Philip Page reads Ruby’s founding stories in light of the Israelites’ flight from Egypt and the American Dream; Katrine Dalsgard reads Ruby in light of American exceptionalism; and Ana Maria Fraile-Marcos reads Ruby alongside the American founding trope of the “City upon a Hill.”

14. In an interview, Morrison identifies Richard Misner as the character with whom she identifies the most (Jaffrey 4).

15. Cited numbers in The Differend refer to paragraph numbers.

Chapter 2

1. Yamashita identifies him as “a literary interpretation of [Guillermo Gomez-Pena]. Arcangel’s performance is grotesque, freakish, yet Christ-like, accounting for 500 years of history in the Americas” (Venguá and Tejeda n.p.).


3. Yamashita’s approach also echoes the “internationalizing” vision for a postnational American studies. As John Carlos Rowe describes, postnational American studies “should be contextualized in a larger understanding of the United States in the comparative context of Western Hemispheric and finally global study” (31). Yamashita’s focus on border crossing and hybridity in the Americas recalls works by Native American writers such as Leslie Marmon Silko and Gerald Vizenor, or works by Chican/o writers such as Gloria Anzaldua, Cherrie Morago, Ana Castillo, and Alejandro Morales. Yamashita also aligns the transnational nature of her work to Jessica Hagedorn’s Dogeaters (Gier and Tejeda n.p.).


4. See the special issue of Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies
devoted to universalism, which includes essays such as Étienne Balibar’s “Ambiguous Universalism,” Naomi Schor’s “French Feminism Is a Universalism,” Joan Scott’s “Universalism and the History of Feminism,” and David Palumbo-Liu’s “Universalism and Minority Culture.” See also, elsewhere, Naomi Schor’s “The Crisis of French Universalism” and Eric Lott’s “After Identity, Politics: The Return of Universalism.” Ernesto Laclau’s numerous essays on universalism are collected in Emancipation(s). See also Butler, Laclau, and Žižek’s Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left.

5. For instance, Butler points out that Habermas pursues a “procedural method” “which establishes universalizability as a criterion for justifying the normative claims of any social and political programme.” Although the procedural method distances itself from making declaration about human substance, “it does implicitly call upon a certain rational capacity, and attributes to that rational capacity an inherent relation to universalizability.” In a roundabout way, then, the procedural method implicitly makes a foundational claim about human beings (Contingency 15). Another example of the antifoundationalist approach to universalism can be found in Laclau’s constructivist defense. In response to Richard Rorty’s assertion that liberals who disown commonalities among humans must also disown universalism, Laclau responds that if we approach universalism as a social product that emerges from specific historical necessities, we can have a universalism that is not a metaphysical fact about human nature or the human condition. “It is enough to recognize that democracy needs universalism while asserting that, at the same time, that universalism is one of the vocabularies, one of the language games, which was constructed at some point by social agents and which has become a more and more central part of our values and our culture. It is a contingent historical product” (Emancipation(s) 122; original emphasis).

6. Huyssen notes that while McLuhan’s theory of the media was crucial to the political strategies of the 1960s counterculture, his “unbounded optimism about the effects of electronic communications on human community and his blindness to the relationship between the media and economic and political power could only be read as an affirmative culture, as an apology for ruthless technological modernization, or, at best, as naïve politics” (9).

7. A critique of such imperialist views of travel has been offered by postcolonial writers such as Derek Walcott and Jamaica Kincaid. In Asian American fiction, too, the critique of the reification of ethnic-specific locales (e.g., Chinatown) has been a central theme.

8. An example of such discourse: “And, the fact is, NAFTA has been an outstanding success. Between 1993 and 2002, merchandise trade between the United States and Mexico increased by 178 percent, from $79 billion to $220 billion, and, between 1988 (the year before the Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement, NAFTA’s precursor, went into effect) and 2001, agricultural trade among the United States, Canada, and Mexico increased by 155 percent. According to the U.S. Trade Representative’s office, trade between NAFTA partners increased 104 percent between 1993 and 2000—twice as fast as U.S. trade with the rest of the world. By lowering barriers, NAFTA has reduced the costs of imports for American businesses and consumers” (“Unfair” New Republic).

9. Molly Wallace, in “Tropics of Globalization,” astutely points out that proponents of NAFTA use the metaphor of the weather to argue the inevitability of
south-north economic integration. Such rhetorical moves “not only naturalize capitalism” but make it “a veritable law of nature” (145). In discussing the inexorable global community in *Tropic*, it is important to distinguish between the inevitability of greater economic, political, and social interdependence from the particular policies put in place for regulating such an activity and from the celebratory view that such policies uniformly benefit a singular, global “we.” To discuss the three as if they are one and the same phenomenon is a disingenuous move that parallels the unidirectional nature of imperialist universalism.

10. It is important that “hegemony” in this discussion be understood not as the negative force wielded by a few to oppress the many, but as in Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, as the contingent articulation by different subject positions that take place in the field of limitless, differential relations that is the social. Hence, rather than being the political logic/attribute of a specific social sector or identities, hegemony is the articulation of power for which all subject positions strive.

11. The three thinkers diverge on theorizing the incomplete nature of universalism, a divergence that rests on their different theorization of the incomplete nature of the subject. More specifically, they differ on their respective use of Hegel and Lacan in theorizing the negativity at the heart of identity (the discrepancy between identity-claims and the actual constitution of identity).

12. See, for instance, Nancy’s *Inoperative Community* (xxxi), Lyotard’s “À l’insu [Unbeknownst]” (43), Hallward (89), and Young’s “The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference” (302, 320).

13. See Anderson’s “Cosmopolitanism, Universalism, and the Divided Legacies of Modernity”; James Clifford’s “Traveling Cultures”; Bruce Robbins’s *Secular Vocations*; and David A. Hollinger’s *Postethnic America*.

Chapter 3

1. Other exemplary expressions of the posthumanist “we” can be found in Ray Kurzweill’s *The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence* and Danny Hillis’s *The Pattern on the Stone*. See Timothy Lenoir’s introductions to the two-part special issue of *Configurations* devoted to the topic of posthumanism. In “Part One: Embracing the Posthuman,” Lenoir surveys leading posthumanists such as Hans Moravec, Marvin Minsky, and Danny Hill who exemplify the view that “the brain is a kind of a computer, and that thought is a complex computation” (Lenoir 206). As Lenoir makes clear, articulations of “posthumanism” are diverse, particularly in theorizing the division between materiality and information (i.e., body and mind). Thinkers of posthumanism who insist on the inextricability of body and mind (e.g., N. Katherine Hayles, Antonio Damasio, Francisco Varela, George Lakoff, and Mark Johnson) contest precisely thinkers such as Kurzwell and Hillis who practice the Cartesian division between body and mind.

Gerd Gigerenzer and Daniel Goldstein, in “Mind as Computer: Birth of a Metaphor,” trace the mind-as-computer interpretation to cognitive psychology in the early 1970s. Norbert Wiener’s foundational work on the relationship between the human body and information-processing technologies (*Cybernetics of Control*
and Communication in the Animal and the Machine 1948) and Marshall McLuhan’s work on communication technologies as extensions of the human body remain central to posthumanist disruption of organicist discourses of the body, gender, and sexuality.

2. The English mathematician Alan Turing (1912–54) proposed the original Turing test in “Computing Machinery and Intelligence” (1950). The Turing test demands that a human examiner decide whether the written answers given to his or her questions are generated by a computer or by a human. If the examiner fails to distinguish between human and machine responses, the machine may be deemed intelligent. Turing drew an analogy to “a sexual guessing game,” in which an examiner tries to identify the respective sex of the test takers based on their answers.

3. The Gold Bug Variations also features a humanities reference librarian who finds herself untangling the scientific complexity of the genome research project. As Snyder observes regarding The Gold Bug Variations, “[e]ven as men appear in Powers’s work as having produced much of the celebrated work of historical record, his valorization of amateur, cross-disciplinary thinking restores his female characters to a central role in his fiction where they serve as model proponents of the skills of border crossing and inspired collaboration” (95). It remains a strong pattern in Powers’s novels of science and technology that the amateur agent who crosses disciplines is invariably a humanist, whose bewilderment and learning process stand as those of the implied reader’s.

4. April Linder discusses Powers’s ambivalence to “nineteenth-century realism” in “Narrative as Necessary Evil in Richard Powers’s Operation Wandering Soul.” James Hurt in “Narrative Powers: Richard Powers as Storyteller” argues a “narrative therapy” that Powers practices, “not only therapy through narrative but also therapy for narrative” (24; original emphasis). Jeffrey Pence, in “The End of Technology: Memory in Richard Powers’s Galatea 2.2,” reads Powers’s defense of narrative as a defense of “a model and a modeler of memory” (344). See James Berger who locates a “persistence of Arnoldian ideas of culture” in Galatea (113). Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s “The Exhaustion of Literature: Novels, Computers, and the Threat of Obsolescence” reads Galatea as an anxious expression about the role of traditional humanities and the role of the computer as the harbinger of posthumanist demotion of the book as the cornerstone of traditional humanities. Powers is indeed aware that Rick’s use of the term “humanism” holds conservative and repressive significance in contemporary intellectual discourse, and he uses the graduate student A., the human counterpart in the novel’s Turing test, to voice them. A. calls Rick’s view of literature the views of “a complete throwback” who is “not even reactionary” (285).

5. In the extreme degree to which Powers’s humanist-protagonists are amateurs in the fields of science and technology, Powers shows an interest in sketching out the humanist’s alarm in its plainest and most extreme pitch. It is an alarm that recalls the extreme fears voiced in the early developmental years of computer technology, robotic technology, and artificial intelligence—that seeing the machine in a fluid and continuous relationship with the human means the displacement or the extinction of the human as we know it, that the human will “lose” the body, the mind, and consciousness. Lenoir’s introduction to the special issue of Configuration, “Makeover: Writing the Body into the Posthuman Technoscape. Part One: Embracing the Posthuman,” details humanism’s fears of humankind’s displacement or extinction that are expressed in the early years of artificial intelligence.
6. Miller’s “Deeper Blues, or the Posthuman Prometheus” provides a rich overview of contemporary fiction’s and popular culture’s use of intelligent machines as artistic inspirations. Miranda Campbell’s “Probing the Posthuman” locates in *Galatea* a critical stance towards posthumanist devaluation of materiality, but she asserts that the novel explores the humanist-posthumanist debate without “anxiously seek[ing] to reinstate the boundaries of this [human] subject” (1).

7. In his novels and interviews, Powers uses “narrative” interchangeably with “story,” “fiction,” “novel,” and “storytelling.” As I have addressed above, the centrality of narrative as a thematic topic in Powers’s oeuvre is well noted in his scholarship.

8. I hasten to add that such division of materiality/information is not a maneuver that Hayles endorses in her own theory of posthumanism. As I will discuss further, theories of posthumanism differ in their treatment of the body/mind relationship, and Hayles here is noting a characteristic feature of those posthumanist thinkers who demote the relevance of the body, a move that she actively contests. Despite the differences in theories of the body/mind relationship, in the final analysis, posthumanism asserts the continuity and fluidity in the ontological category of the human and the machine.

9. As Helen’s unworldliness performs a politically critical function, Rick’s characterization of Helen recalls the political work of innocence in mid-nineteenth-century American sentimental fiction. As Nina Baym argued in *Woman’s Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820–1870*, the unworldliness of young female characters was central to the familiar plot typology in mid-nineteenth-century American women’s fiction, wherein the innocence of the female children/adolescents was expressive of an ethereal goodness and moral purity.

10. In reading the deployment of gendered attributes in *Galatea*, however, it is difficult to assess Powers’s gender politics as simply continuing patriarchal scripts. Certainly, the overwhelming power that Rick wields over Helen bespeaks the masculinist will to control the female-identified machine. His characterization of his old love C. is rife with stereotypical images of the moody, emotionally unstable female, as Hayles argues (*Posthuman* 266–69). He habitually envisions himself to be in love with female acquaintances. Thus there is considerable evidence in *Galatea* of the female-gendered identity being equated with passive receptivity.

Counterbalancing this masculine despotism are Rick’s frequent allusions to *Frankenstein* (55) and *Pygmalion* (182), references that express a self-consciousness of his role as the shaper of identities. There is also the figure of A., the female graduate student who ridicules Rick’s traditional humanist views: “And you wonder why the posthumanists reduced your type to an author function” (286). When Rick professes his love for her, she flatly refuses to be a projected ideal and scolds him for flightiness and “self-indulgence” (316). As the female character who shows up Rick’s controversial views towards canonized literature’s “greatness” and fantasized attractions towards women, A. functions as the counterpart to the emotionally unstable C. and the childish helplessness of Helen. This dyadic arrangement of two female-gender characterizations also appears in *Plowing the Dark* between Adie the artist-humanist and Sue the programmer-posthumanist.

11. Significantly, while Adie’s chapters follow a third-person omniscient narration, Martin’s chapters follow a direct address to “you” the reader, affecting the oldest virtual reality technology—simulation through words. See Marie-Laure Ryan’s *Nar-
rative as Virtual Reality.

12. The second part of Configurations special issue on posthumanism, “Part Two: Corporeal Axiomatics,” features posthumanist projects that highlight the irreplaceable role of the biological body in conceptualizing the mind. As a primary example, Lenoir highlights Mark Hansen’s work in relocating visual sense-making in the body as a principal example of conceptualizing the extended mind. Even in a digital context of virtual reality, Hansen argues, the visceral element of the body is the active framer of the image. “Virtual reality is, Hansen argues, a body-brain achievement” (Lenoir 378).

Chapter 4

1. See Elizabeth Frazier’s discussion of the concept of communion in theories of community in political science, especially in communitarianism (75, 82).

2. In writing against the ideal of transparency, Davis and Tillman may be read as formally defying a convention of realism—the convention of the character, generally the protagonist, who comes to eventually attain the “truth” about the other characters and about her world. I emphasize this point in relation to Tillman’s Motion Sickness in “Recognition as a Depleted Source.”

3. Lydia Davis’s short story collections include Samuel Johnson Is Indignant (2002), Almost No Memory (1998), Break It Down (1986), Story and Other Stories (1983), Sketches for a Life of Wassily (1981), and The Thirteenth Woman (1976). Davis is also well-known as a translator of leading French fiction, criticism, and philosophy (notably those of Marcel Proust, Maurice Blanchot, and Michel Leiris, as well as of Jean-Paul Sartre and Michel Foucault). Her many literary awards include a 2003 MacArthur Fellows Award.


5. My use of “recognition” in this chapter diverges from another approach to recognition, notably found in the field of political science, which grounds the concept upon the following definition: “To acknowledge by special notice, approval or sanction; to treat as valid, as having existence or as entitled to consideration; to take notice of (a thing or person) in some way”; “To admit to consideration, or to a status, as being something” (OED online). Charles Taylor’s “The Politics of Recognition” is an exemplary study of recognition as the acknowledgment and distribution of goods and rights. Julia Eichelberger’s Prophets of Recognition is an example of a literary study of recognition as the apportioning of acknowledgment, respect, rights, and goods. Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, Saul Bellow, and Eudora Welty are “prophets of recognition” who “offer readers a vision of as-yet-unrealized democracy in which individuals acknowledge or recognize the innate worth of one another” (2).

6. This skepticism raised its head in a slightly different fashion in Richard Powers’s interrogation of how the human might “know” the machine. Highlighting the
way that interpretation inevitably becomes translation, Powers emphasized the connection between the tautological dimension of the human's interpretation of the machine and humanism's insistence that the human is a unique body of individuals.

7. As Larry McCaffery points out, however, Davis's “minimalist” nature is a vastly different sort of minimalism from that of Raymond Carver, Ann Beattie, Mary Robinson, or Frederick Barthelme, whose pared-down language use, form, and narrative premise were in direct response to what they saw to be excesses of their “postmodern” or “experimental” contemporaries (61).

8. This contradictory significance of alterity echoes the contradictory significance of the unknowable city that I discussed in chapter 1 in relation to Morrison's Jazz. While the postmodernist ideal of the unknowable city begins the narrative of Jazz, that vision is progressively rendered into a problem that the protagonists must solve. Thus the competing discourses of idealized and dissenting community manifest themselves in the contradictory significance of concepts such as alterity and the unknowable city in these novels.

9. The exemplar quotations for this definition are: “Linnell has made us recognize a new beauty in the heather”; “Kepler first recognised the fact that the eye is a camera” (OED online).

10. Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes will henceforth be cited as RB. Barthes draws on Ancient Greek, especially Aristotle's use of endoxa, which, in Aristotle's writing, meant “all that is considered true, or at least probable, by a majority of people endowed with reason, or by a specific social group” (Amossy 369). In theorizing the oppressive nature of the form of repetition, Barthes works in and through Gustave Flaubert's criticism of received ideas. Critics such as Michael Moriarty and Christopher Prendergast have argued that Barthes's use of endoxa simplifies what is a more expansive concept in Aristotelian usage. Also, see the special issue of Poetics Today (Vol. 23, 2002) devoted to the topic of doxa in contemporary disciplines.

11. Anne Hershberg Pierrot in “Barthes and Doxa” offers an insightful examination of Barthes's use of metaphor (layer, petrification, glutinous, stickiness) in his conceptualization of doxa.

12. Tillman's use of the term “recognition” in her interview refers to what I have been calling proper recognition, “to perceive clearly, to realize.” Furthermore, Tillman's use highlights another dimension of the word—recognition as the acceptance of or resignation to an irreducible fact. Such acceptance or resignation, of course, can only rest upon the second definition of recognition, upon the epistemological certainty of knowing-afresh.


Chapter 5

1. My analysis of madness departs from existing approaches to the topic of madness in the novel. For some critics of the novel, the fact of Kate's sanity is directly related to her reliability as a narrator. That Kate is not mad is requisite to appreciating the important philosophical ruminations in the novel. “We must believe that Kate is truly the last person on earth—otherwise, we are left with an insane
woman. . . . As an investigation into the workings of thought and memory, the book would be invalid if the mind through which we follow this investigation were diseased. This is how an insane mind works, would be the caveat we would have to apply to everything we read” (Sullivan 241). “[Kate] is intrepid (only think of all that traveling), tough (dismantling things, improvising chimneys), curious and cheerful; her parody of Wittgenstein’s philosophical discourse . . . is marvelously, if unconsciously funny, and she never whines or collapses in despair” (Grace 209). In such readings, the reader’s literal acceptance of the narrative premise (i.e., Kate is the last person alive on earth) is fundamental to an empathetic reading of the novel, as well as to a full appreciation of the philosophical import of the novel. However, in my analysis, the condition of Kate’s sanity as a protagonist-narrator is irrelevant. Rather, I emphasize the centrality of madness as a formal, thematic, and philosophical tool of inquiry.

2. See Joseph Tabbi’s “David Markson: An Introduction” and “An Interview with David Markson” which address the inspirational role of Wittgenstein’s thinking in the novel. The novel “appears not as an illustration of a set of philosophical ideas or even a novelization of the philosopher’s life and thought, but as an original reading of Wittgenstein” (Tabbi, “Reading David Markson” n.p.). While the connection is not made explicitly in the novel (Kate professes not to have read a word of Wittgenstein), Markson explains: “The title just seemed to work for me, my woman as mistress to his thought, so to speak” (Private Correspondence, May 30, 2005).

3. This impossibility attains further complexity through David Markson’s experimental form. As a foremost figure in contemporary American avant-garde fiction, Markson has long explored the figure of the isolated artist as a source of narrative premise and literary inspiration. Most importantly, Markson has rendered that isolated figure through a disjunction in form. As “Writer,” the narrator of This Is Not a Novel (2001), announces best, Markson’s literary oeuvre has consistently disrupted the conventions of the novel formally and thematically:

A novel with no intimation of story whatsoever, Writer would like to contrive.
And with no characters. None. . . .
Plotless. Characterless.
Yet seducing the reader into turning the pages nonetheless. (2–3)

This announcement of a novel that is not a conventional novel informs the formal strategy that is uniquely Markson’s in contemporary fiction—a book-length collection of trivia about the lives of writers, artists, and philosophers throughout Western history, odd and unusual facts about their sanitary habits, their idiosyncrasies, their sexual habits and illnesses physical and mental, and gossip about their family lives. These entries thwart the conventional practices of the novel, and Markson achieves the avant-gardist act of “seducing the reader” through a form highly disruptive of conventional reading practices. This symbiosis between the isolated artist figure and the form of the non-novel appears most explicitly in Reader’s Block (1996), in which an aged writer, isolated from his family and friends, finds that his attempt to write a novel continually comes into conflict with his life as a reader; thus the collection of literary, philosophical, historical trivia surfaces as the memory of a life spent reading. As I will show, Markson’s non-novelistic form attains particular significance in Witt-
genstein’s Mistress, since the highly unusual and idiosyncratic form will be inextricable from the single-party nature of Kate’s private language game.

4. This question has been thoroughly revisited in the scholarship over Wittgenstein’s “later stage” of thinking (The Blue and Brown Book and, of course, Philosophical Investigations). As many have noted, this debate is fueled by Wittgenstein’s own refutation of a systematic use of language and the resulting indeterminacy in his writings. In explicit refutation of the systematic theory of language he offered in his “early” scholarship, such as Tractus, in his later scholarship Wittgenstein’s central arguments are fueled principally by figurative expressions—through similes, metaphors, and analogies. The analogy-driven process of argument (e.g., language is like “a game of chess,” using language is like “playing chess” or like “performing a transaction”; “use” is like “meaning” and like “understanding”; etc.) rests on an array of examples, and each example gives rise to a proliferation of possible interpretations. This excess of possible interpretations emerging from distinct, concrete examples fuels the debate over the possibility of private language, as each critical camp uses, and highlights, different propositions to support distinct versions of Wittgenstein’s theory of language.

5. An important distinction needs to be made here. Since the term “community” is not evident in Wittgenstein’s discussions of language games, I am not claiming to uncover, per se, Wittgenstein’s theory of community through his writings on language. What I wish to highlight is the fact that the central presupposition of Wittgenstein’s theory of language rests on the concept of agreement, and it is precisely this key presupposition that parallels the centrality of agreement, commonality, and consensus in idealized community discourse.

6. For a large overview of the debate, see Canfield and Gustafsson. For examples of the community view argument, see Malcolm, Bloor, Kripke, and von Savigny; for the individualist view, see Baker and Hacker, McGinn, Champlin, Moser, and Blackburn.

7. This multiplicity of language games defies the kind of mathematical, systematic accounting of language that is offered in his earlier work Tractus, which argued a singular logic underlying all of language use. However, in Philosophical Investigations, Wittgenstein argues that just as there can be a limitless number of games, there can be a limitless number of language uses, each use with its own set rules.

All propositions are cited by their paragraph number in Philosophical Investigations; propositions from Part II are cited by page numbers.

8. My method of intervention, arguing a wider understanding for the key terms in the debate, shares a similarity with Edward Minar’s approach, which argues that to fault Wittgenstein for not offering a definitive answer to the private language question is to fundamentally ignore Wittgenstein’s own approach to language use and to the task of philosophy—that the task of philosophy is to describe, not to define. Canfield’s and Gustafsson’s works, in reassessing the debate by offering different understandings of key terms, also show the scholarship’s movement away from seeking a definitive exegetical answer to the private language question in Wittgenstein’s language theory.

9. Lacking “outward criteria” has direct consequences for the “usage” of private language: “For a large class of cases—though not for all—in which we employ the word ‘meaning’ it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its usage in the language” (43; original emphasis). The modified subject of the phrase (“For a large class of cases—though not for all”) stands as another example of Wittgenstein’s
pursuit of “everyday use” of language and eschewing of “extreme subtleties” (106) in his approach to philosophical language. This emphasis on the actual use of language might stand as the response to critics who argue that Wittgenstein’s equation of “meaning” and “use” is too sweeping in nature, leaving too many exceptions unexplored.

10. It is important to note here that I am not asserting a model of transparent communication as the ideal of public language game, an ideal that is more representative of the Habermasian ideal of communicative rationality. Rather, I am emphasizing the fact that “if language is to be a means of communication,” as Wittgenstein argues (24), a given language game must possess the possibility of performing its specific function.

11. The indeterminacy that arises from Kate’s account must be appreciated as being more than the effect of free indirect discourse. Certainly Markson takes full advantage of the homodiegetic narrator whose exclusive focalization obstructs the reader’s ability to view the narrative events from any other consciousness. Like Oedipa Maas in Crying of Lot 49 or Charles Kinbote in Pale Fire, Kate is a protagonist whose reliability as the narrator of the story events cannot be determined. The narrative premise of Wittgenstein’s Mistress, with its explicit engagement with the linguistic and ontological implications of the last person alive, complicates the effects of free indirect discourse with philosophical challenges of the sole consciousness in operation.

12. The sentence structure anchored by adverbs of clarification and modification simulate, of course, the sentence structure of Wittgenstein’s Propositions in Philosophical Investigations and elsewhere.


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