

**Cognitive Constellations:  
Neurodivergent Aesthetics in 20th Century Experimental Poetries**

by

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A thesis

presented to the University Of Waterloo

in fulfilment of the

thesis requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2023

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## **Author's Declaration**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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## Abstract

“Inaccessible” is a term shared by both Critical Disability Studies (CDS) and literary criticism, although this term means different things to each discipline. For CDS, an inaccessible space is one that prevents physically or cognitively disabled people from fully participating as valued members of society. For literary scholars, “inaccessible” refers to strategies used by authors to estrange readers. Inaccessible techniques necessitate strenuous close reading, and may either increase or decrease the absorption and investment a reader experiences. Inaccessible strategies are often present in texts labelled “experimental” or “conceptual.” However, some of the techniques modern and post-modern authors use in order to estrange readers mimic or perform disabled patterns, practices, and aesthetics. Ironically, the cultural value assigned to famous inaccessible texts often separates poetic techniques from disabled people’s embodied experiences; scholars may praise representations or metaphors of disability while rejecting disabled perspectives as valuable critical lenses for reading literature. In this way, inaccessible texts may also become inaccessible literary spaces that perpetuate ableist academic systems. For example, even if a literary scholar identifies as neurodivergent (a person with a cognitive disability) they are still expected to write in neurotypical forms, and interpret literature using neurotypical methodologies: they still must “access” ability to be academically successful. This project joins interdisciplinary scholarship that refuses to categorize CDS and English Literature as discrete areas of study, but suggests that physically and cognitively disabled aesthetics illustrate important reading values. This is especially true for scholarship that already acknowledges the presence of disability in inaccessible poetic texts without naming or engaging with disabled perspectives. This dissertation tracks some of the ways that readers have reacted to disability aesthetics in experimental texts like James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, Gertrude Stein’s *Tender Buttons*, and Hannah Weiner’s *Code Poems*. It traces how ableism, specifically ideas associated with the pseudoscience of eugenics, is connected to “inaccessible” labels bestowed on these texts. This project then offers readers creative interpretive modes that will help them engage with and explore disabled aesthetics in the text instead of dismissing such poems as too difficult, or diagnosing them as symptomatic of a disabled writer and therefore not worth reading. This dissertation is also written using the form of my own neurodivergent expressive practice, ADHD, as one example of how literary scholarship might encourage scholars to celebrate their neurotype instead of leaving it behind in favour of the exceptional level of ability expected in academic spaces.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my readers, Dr. Kevin McGuirk and Dr. Aimée Morrison, for lending their invaluable expertise to my project. Thank you Kevin for all your challenges and the books you lent me. Thank you Aimée for your enthusiasm for the project and for the Pomodoro method; I use it to this day.

This project would not have been completed without the steady patience and irreplaceable support of my supervisor, Dr. Jay Dolmage. Jay, you have demonstrated exactly what unwavering generous support and excellent disability oriented teaching looks like. You employed me, encouraged me, and pushed me to keep going one word at a time when it was all too overwhelming. You told me to “keep it a bit weird” which I am very grateful for.

An eternal thank you to my parents, who have carried me on loving shoulders my entire life, and have given me every single thing they have ever had, even when I chose a “do you want fries with that” degree. Dad and mum, if you ever read this, I am sorry that I talk so much shit in the first chapter. Thank you also to my brother and my original partner in crime, who helped me hone my editing skills by constantly asking me to go over his high school and undergraduate papers. David, I love our Thursday phone calls.

Thank you James for celebrating my wins more than I ever could have myself, for cooking endless dinners when I worked late, and for dragging me through the final 10% of this dissertation. The champagne is on me this time.

## **Dedication**

For Becky. Because she asked.

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## **Introduction**

### Part 1: “Inaccessible” 20th C Poetry and Disability:

When one thinks of an “inaccessible” space for a disabled person, one likely imagines some architectural feature that bars a person with a mobility aid like a wheelchair from entering a room or a building, and participating fully in public life. A physical structure with steps instead of ramps; elevators, doorways, or hallways too small for mobility devices to get through. Disabled author Nancy Mairs recalls wheeling through a hallway crowded with tables and throngs of participants during a luncheon for the Dalai Lama. She describes the inaccessibility of the space, inattentive bodies pressing against her, none who “seemed to think that any life was going on below the level of his or her own gaze. ‘Down here!’ I kept whimpering at the hips and buttocks and bellies pressing my wheelchair on all sides... ‘There’s a person down here!’ My only recourse was to roll to one side and hug a wall” (59).

Labelling a space “inaccessible” is becomes complicated when one thinks about cognitive disabilities. Jay Dolmage points out that while physical spaces have more easily recognizable barriers to disabled people, “attention to disability shows that physical structures equate with ideological structures” (“Mapping Composition” 15). While a cognitively disabled person might be able to get in the door of an architectural structure, they may still encounter ideological exclusion. These categories are also not mutually exclusive, but often entangle material and symbolic barriers, as well as physical and cognitive barriers. Dolmage specifically considers how university departments use metaphorical “steep steps” (“Mapping Composition” 15) which function like physical steps to bar admission or maintain ableist ideological standards. He outlines

how these metaphors are “spaces that are produced, ideologically, in the world in which you move” (“Mapping Composition” 15) that maintain material exclusionary practices.

Ideas of “access” are also used in literary scholarship, albeit differently. Often, difficult, esoteric, avant-garde or experimental poetic texts are deemed metaphorically “inaccessible.” Poet and modernist critic Bob Perelman notes in his book *The Trouble with Genius* that “works of literature are presumed to have social value, but they must be inaccessible to some degree or there would be no need to study them and no need for the structures of authority that study produces” (1). This metaphorical inaccessibility does not generally refer to whether an audience can physically read a text, but whether it is comprehensible. As poet and disability studies scholar Nicole Markotić suggests, “accessible” as a metaphoric label for poetic texts generally refers to how easy the poetry is to understand, saying “access...provides admission, entrance, inclusion” (*Disability in Film and Literature* 50), while inaccessibility denies the average hypothetical reader full access to meaning or understanding.

Take, for example, this section of James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*: “the circumflexuous wall of a singleminded men’s asylum, accentuated by bi tso f b rok engl a ssan dspl itch ina,—Yard inquiries pointed out—> that they ad bîn ‘provoked’ ay Λ fork of à grave Brofèsor; àth é’s Brèak—fast—table; ;” (124. 6-10). While some readers might find such a puzzle intriguing, many will feel they are denied any way to make meaning from such a text.

Poet and critic Charles Bernstein further complicates the label of “inaccessible” by proposing that difficult poetry can be positioned on a continuum of absorption. He frames “absorption” and “its obverses—impermeability, imperviousness, ejection, repulsion” as “reading value[s]” (Bernstein, “Artifice of Absorption” 20). Authors use absorptive strategies to pull in

the reader's attention. Anti-absorptive techniques resist readers' attempts to easily read and understand the poem by intentionally preventing the reader from becoming absorbed in or by the poetry. These anti-absorptive strategies often exemplify what Victor Shklovsky of the Russian Formalists refers to when he suggests that "The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged" (in Newton 4).

Bernstein further asserts that often writers of anti-absorptive or impermeable poetry use these strategies to prolong textual engagement as political acts of resistance, or "as part of a technological arsenal to create a more powerful...absorption than possible with traditional, & blander, absorptive techniques" ("Artifice of Absorption" 53). Perelman also points out that inaccessible works offer a "lure for endless study" (*The Trouble with Genius* 1). Thus, inaccessible, anti-absorptive, or impermeable poetry can, through estrangement and inaccessibility, be more impactful for the reader, providing the potential for an "endlessly" valuable reading experience.

### 1.1. Inaccessible modernism: Ways of Not-Reading

These poems are often colloquially categorized as "experimental," "conceptual," or "avant-garde" by writers, critics, or readers. Something these inaccessible or impermeable poetries have in common is that readers do not generally "read" them the same way one reads a "normal" poetic text, and instead of experiencing the text as rich with a "lure for endless study" they may experience a poem that prompts "boredom, exaggeration, attention scattering, distraction, digression" or is "interruptive, transgressive, undecorous, anticonventional, unintegrated, fractured, fragmented...repellent" and induces "doubt, noise, resistance" in the reader (Bernstein

“Artifice of Absorption” 29-30). Perelman posits that the value of these inaccessible texts “has most often to be transmitted through hearsay as the writing remains illegible or semi legible for anyone who is not a Poundian, Joycean, Steinian or... a Zukofskian” (*The Trouble with Genius* 1). Because of this “semilegibility” for the majority of readers, experimental poetic texts are often labelled “unreadable” and encourage various strategies of “not-reading” (Cecire 283) for the general public. Stein scholar Natalia Cecire theorizes that “not reading is of course the only logical way to handle something unreadable” (283).

Cecire explains that when a reader labels a text as unreadable, they also often diagnose the author with a disability and situate their poetry as symptomatic of disability. While this is not always the case, this dissertation will describe some notable instances of this process. Indeed, in Bernstein’s list, quoted above, many of the terms he uses to describe impermeable or anti-absorptive poetic devices have been applied to descriptions of cognitive disabilities like Attention-Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (“boredom, exaggeration, attention scattering, distraction, digression”); Autism and ASD (“interruptive, transgressive, undecorous, anticonventional”); and schizophrenia (“unintegrated, fractured, fragmented”) (“Artifice of Absorption” 29-30).

While Bernstein asserts that these terms should not be “morally coded” (“Artifice of Absorption” 23), he has chosen words that clinicians use to describe undesirable or “problematic” features of cognitive disability. Julie Miele Rodas points out that features of cognitive disability are both celebrated as modernist poetic techniques and pathologized by clinicians as negative symptoms of disability when such poetic techniques are located within a context of disability (22). She asserts that recognizing the positive value of disability in such techniques is essential because while such modes are already privileged poetic devices, they are not celebrated in the

lives of disabled people. In this dissertation, I trace these overlaps between antiabsorptive poetic techniques and descriptions of cognitive disabilities. I consider how readers and critics often recognize symptoms of cognitive disabilities in modernist and postmodernist conceptual poetic texts, and diagnose their authors with cognitive disabilities.

For example, contemporaries reacting to Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* at the time of its serial publication in the late 1930s and early 1940s proclaimed that his work could not "be read by any individual normally constituted" (Deming, *Vol. 2*, 494), and diagnosed him with everything from encephalitis to schizophrenia. Early critics of Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*, published in 1914, said that "Stein...casts away every vestige of intelligibility in her madness" (*Pittsburgh Dispatch* qtd. in Diepeveen 199). Behaviourist BF Skinner diagnosed her with hysteria based on her early work, including *Tender Buttons* and *Three Lives*. postmodern American poet Hannah Weiner's *Code Poems* and later her clairvoyant journals are considered "avant-garde journalism" (Durgin, "Psychosocial Disability" 133) that overwhelms the ordinary reader with so much intimate minutia that the Language poets of the 1970s called her conceptual work too personal (Weiner, "LINEbreak" 150). The journals are often categorized, even by her close friends, as symptomatic of schizophrenia.

However, the above texts are also considered to be 20<sup>th</sup> century literary masterpieces that critics and readers pore over and hold up as canonically essential. Bernstein lists "denser sections of *Tender Buttons*" and Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* as "great achievements of antiabsorptive writing" ("Artifice of Absorption," 56). According to William Carlos Williams, *Finnegans Wake* successfully rejuvenates language, and some critics affirm that Joyce "is miles farther from insanity than many other men, past or present who have accomplished a masterpiece" (Deming, *Vol. 2*,

573). Stein positions herself as a genius, and bestows that genius on others (like Picasso). By readers her “unreadable style has been taken as evidence of her genius and of fraud in equal measure” (Cecire 284). As Weiner’s friend and contemporary, Charles Bernstein confirms in his eulogy for her that her “work is not a product of her illness but a heroic triumph in the face of it” (n.p.), positioning her as the artistic hero that struggled against and overcame her disability to produce unique work. Weiner’s conceptual poetry is less well known than Joyce’s and Stein’s in terms of readerly or scholarly scope but as she falls into similar experimental classifications, I argue for her inclusion in this project later in this introduction.

I do not know whether any of these authors necessarily experienced the disabilities they were “diagnosed” with by their critics. Perhaps they did. I argue instead that readers and critics describe symptoms of such disabilities in their writing using both clinical and metaphorical language. For these modern and postmodern writers, such diagnoses frequently resemble audience concerns shaped by eugenics and social hygiene movements of the early 20th century. They reflect a fear of anything that deviated from “the norm,” and of any possible contagion from these deviations.

As Critical Disability theorists like Michael Davidson and Tobin Siebers demonstrate, modernist art and literature in the 20th century responded to these concerns with a proliferation of art that used disabled bodies and pathologized styles of speech to challenge audiences who feared deviation from the norm. These challenging artistic and literary techniques fall under an aesthetics of disability. Siebers proposes that “in the modern period, disability acquires aesthetic value because it represents for makers of art a critical resource for thinking about what a human being is” (3).



The boundaries around what is considered “modern art” are loose. Siebers includes Nazi kitsch to contemporary American culture. For literature, Raymond Williams maintains that while modernism is often thought of as “a complex of movements from around 1910 to the late 1930s....in real practice there are no such convenient break-points” (67) modernism denotes a disparate set of literary practices, including Futurism, Russian Formalism, Symbolism, Naturalism, the Avant-Garde, Imagism and more. These movements were influenced by new disciplines like psychoanalysis and eugenics, events like the First and Second World Wars, and increases in technology, medicine, and industrialization. While such movements are diverse, they unite under the broad goal of modernist literature: “the overthrow and remaking of existing society” (R. Williams 67). In my dissertation, I acknowledge that the most pertinent areas of modernist writing for me draw attention to the materiality of language; eugenic theories and policies regarding deviation and degeneracy, psychology and psychoanalysis, and medicalizing “abnormal” bodies.

My dissertation “Cognitive constellations: Neurodivergent Aesthetics in Conceptual Poetries of the 20th C” analyzes three books of modern and postmodern poetry: *Finnegans Wake* by James Joyce, *Tender Buttons*, by Gertrude Stein, and the *Code Poems* by Hannah Weiner. In this project I aim to do three things:

1. explore the different potential disabilities that readers and critics have “diagnosed” the above poets with through contemporary reviews of their work, and locate the “symptoms” of these disabilities in various aesthetic choices within their texts. These symptoms may not be well-defined, and neither may the diagnoses, but this indeterminacy exemplifies how cognitive disabilities have evolved through complex nosological and

literary processes over the last two centuries. Where applicable I highlight these evolutions and complexities.

2. examine the ways that readers might be affected by cognitive disability aesthetics while reading impermeable poetry, and offer my own neurodivergent-informed readings as personal examples of such an effect. I do so while relying on critical disability theories by Siebers, Quayson, Fraser, Barber-Stetson, Yergeau and Miele Rodas to esteem cognitive disability as a literary aesthetic reading value. More simply, I reconstruct reading methodologies that emerge out of cognitive disabilities as poetic assets rather than “problems” to be overcome.
3. illuminate connections between CDS and modernist/post-modernist poetic criticism by locating and recognizing these valuable cognitive disability aesthetics within established ways of thinking about inaccessible/impermeable poetry (Bernstein; Perelman; Perloff).

In the first half of this introduction, I will outline some of the ways disability scholars theorize disability aesthetics (cognitive and otherwise), discuss some of the limitations of these theories when it comes to conceptual impermeable poetry, and argue for the necessity of strengthening both disciplines by acknowledging overlaps that are already present in descriptions of aesthetic value between modern and postmodern poetics scholarship and Critical Disability Theory (CDT, also called Critical Disability Studies or CDS). In the second half of this introduction, I outline my own investment in this topic, contextualize my constraints as a reader, and explain my own disability-informed methodologies. I describe the expressive practices that I use to write this dis-

sertation, and discuss my reasoning for these practices. I finally provide an overview of my four chapters and my conclusion.

## 1.2 Disability aesthetics: How representations of disability in literature can “short circuit” readers and provoke change:

Aesthetics, Tobin Siebers proposes in *Disability Aesthetics*, represent “the sensations that some bodies feel in the presence of other bodies” (1), and highlight what a dominant culture considers valuable or beautiful. Siebers asserts that modern art is obsessed with the disabled body, and explores how presenting disability as the subject of modern art intentionally returns the focus of the viewer back to the body and its feelings while critiquing an idealist hierarchy of what is beautiful, worthy, and valued in art and literature. Siebers contends that “disability aesthetics embraces beauty that seems by traditional standards to be broken, and yet it is not less beautiful, but more so, as a result” (3). Identifying disability as an aesthetic value in itself allows the embodied viewer to experience moments of self-awareness regarding their conceptions about disabled bodies in the material world. These moments have the potential to reshape and expand ideas of what it means to be human, even or especially when it becomes uncomfortable for the viewer.

Disability scholars like Ato Quayson, Mitchell and Snyder, and Benjamin Fraser have translated Siebers’ disability aesthetic theories from visual aesthetics to the literary-aesthetic sphere. In addition, Jay Dolmage, Robert McRuer, Rosemarie Garland-Thompson, Michael Davidson, Nicole Markotić, Remi Yergeau, and Julie Miele Rodas have highlighted ways in which representations of disabled characters and plots bring questions about disability from the

literary-aesthetic realm into material reality. Their analyses propose that when readers confront disabled characters, symbols, motifs, or plot structures that centre around representations of disability this often “short-circuits” dominant protocols of the text (Quayson 15). Quayson explains that this short-circuiting produces a feeling of “aesthetic nervousness” in the reader which “overlaps social attitudes to disability that themselves often remain unexamined in their prejudices and biases” (15). When feeling this nervousness, which may manifest in sensations of disgust or fear, readers have a chance to examine these biases, and perhaps change their perceptions in the socio-cultural realm. Thus, textual representations of disabled bodies play an important role in how readers feel in the presence of material disabled bodies.

However, disability and film scholar Benjamin Fraser points out that Siebers’ and Quayson’s theories of disability aesthetics (Siebers, and Quayson) don’t explicitly deal with cognitive disabilities but work primarily with physical disabilities, rendering cognitive disabilities often “invisible” (Fraser 6). Fraser asserts that more representation of cognitively disabled characters is needed for readers to properly challenge their biases relating to all sorts of disabilities, not just ones that manifest physically.

In disability scholarship and frequently in cultural conversation, terms like neurotypical and neurodivergent are used to distinguish between people who experience cognitive disability and those who do not. “Neurotypical” refers to people who lack a recognizable cognitive disability, while “neurodivergent” signifies someone who experiences any cognitive disability from autism to depression. In this project I use neurodivergent and cognitively disabled interchangeably, while acknowledging that the terms can be used to reference a broad array of experiences, and should not be considered concrete boundaries—for example, a person with schizophrenia

may rather refer to themselves as “mad” than disabled, as I will explore in Chapter 4.

Cognitive disability aesthetics, or neurodivergent aesthetics, are aesthetic representations of disability in processes of cognition. Fraser points out, however, that it is difficult for literature to represent neurodivergence. Because of this, disability scholarship until recently has dealt mainly with stories and characters: novels, short stories, drama, film, and some narrative poetry that features cognitively disabled characters. For example, the recent American comedy *Everything's Gonna Be Okay* (2020-2021) tells the story of a family with three siblings (one who is Autistic and another who is diagnosed with Autism over the course of the season) struggling to deal with their father's death. The show is considered to be semi-autobiographical, as it was written by and stars Australian Josh Thomas who was recently diagnosed with ADHD and Autism.

However, disability scholarship lacks a robust framework for analyzing neurodivergent aesthetics in modern and postmodern poems that are considered inaccessible or impermeable poetics that do not rely on narrative and character, like Stein's *Tender Buttons* and Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (Perelman, “Trouble with Genius,” 8). While some scholars are working in this area to expand theories of disability aesthetic for such poetry (Barber-Stetson; Davidson; Durgin; Miele Rodas) I argue that CDT can benefit greatly from further interdisciplinary connection with postmodern poetic criticism, especially as it pertains to difficult, inaccessible poetic texts.

Hence, in this dissertation I will primarily track neurodivergent aesthetics in poetic devices and structures, rather than in characters, motifs, and plots. I argue that in conceptual poetry, readers encounter aspects of disabled expression that are laced into the fabric of the poetry itself, prompting reactions or diagnoses not only to disparate sections but to the whole experience of reading or struggling to read antiabsorptive texts. In the works I have chosen, disability aesthet-

ics are not exclusively dependent on a disabled character, symbol, or narrative, but are found in a series of neurodivergent language markers or *expressive practices* (Miele Rodas 29) that frequently correspond to celebrated poetic devices in modernist literary scholarship. Expressive practices often also correlate with what clinicians describe as symptoms of cognitive disabilities like interruption or echolalia.

For example, Miele Rodas asserts in her book *Autistic Disturbances: Theorizing Autism Poetics from the DSM to Robinson Crusoe* that the goal of suggesting a text is using a neurodivergent aesthetic is not to posthumously diagnose an author by treating their writing as symptomatic of a diagnosable disorder, but to “rather point to the autistic value present in the text, regardless of the writer's clinical status” (Miele Rodas 29). Miele Rodas’ text argues that autism “may be understood as an aesthetic, a way of seeing and interpreting, a vantage, a mode, a set of expressive practices” (29).

This view of aesthetics diverges from Siebers, Quayson, and Fraser in that it finds disability value less in the *content* of the writing (ie., narrative, character representation, and literary devices like images, symbols and motifs) than in the structure of the writing—in artistic choices like interruption, silence, echolalia, and many others. What she means by “autistic value” is a recognition of “echoes, tones, patterns and confluences between autistic language, which is typically pathologized and devalued, and language used in culturally valued literary texts” (2). While Miele Rodas describes an autistic aesthetic, my dissertation uses similar methods of analysis to explore language markers of other cognitive disabilities like disfluency, ADHD, and schizophrenia.

At the same time, I acknowledge that poetic structure and content are not discrete or mutually exclusive. Because of this, both chapters 1 and 2 discuss characters and plot points in *Finnegans Wake* that serve as particular loci for neurodivergent language markers throughout the text. I use Quayson's conception of literary-aesthetic disability as a "fulcrum, pivot, radiating point" (208) that expands to include the entire text, making it impossible to analyze only one aspect of a text in relation to disability. He refers to disability not as a "discrete entity" but as a "threshold that opens up to other questions of a textual and also ethical kind" (208). This "disability-as-threshold" (Quayson 208) opens doors, functions as liminal spaces of intersection, and allows for a certain degree of messiness in ideas of disability aesthetics.

My methodology for this project connects postmodern poetic criticism that *describes* an aesthetic of neurodivergence without *recognizing* or *acknowledging* it as neurodivergent, or at the very least without recognizing the possibility of neurodivergence within the aesthetic (recall Bernstein's list of impermeable descriptors), to disability-informed discussions of such aesthetics. This is not to assert that one could identify neurodivergent aesthetics in all experimental poetry, but I propose that once one knows where and how to look for them such aesthetics become easier to spot. They are frequently discussed in poetic scholarship without being labelled as neurodivergent. Indeed, my explorations of *Finnegans Wake*, *Tender Buttons*, and *The Code Poems* build on readings of 20th century conceptual poetry that are already considering disability aesthetics without naming them.

For example, Claire Barber-Stetson describes how poetic techniques like Shklovsky's "defamiliarization" fit into this category of disability aesthetics. I rely on Bob Perelman's socio-poetic discussions of "genius" texts to think through the diagnoses that critics put on both Joyce

and his work, the eugenic concerns inherent in these diagnoses, and Joyce's subsequent dysgenic character, Shem. Marjorie Perloff's readings of the modernist lyric and realism in Stein are invaluable. Paul Stephen's assessment of information overload and "continuous partial attention" (50) in modernist and postmodernist conceptual writing are helpful specifically in connecting Stein's overwhelming writings to ADHD expressive practices.

I argue that recognizing, and naming cognitively disabled expressive practices in inaccessible poetics is productive both for modern and postmodern poetic scholarship and for CDT scholarship. I want to explore how literary scholarship might change if neurotypical and neurodivergent readers are taught to consider different cognitive styles as valuable critical tools used to interpret difficult poetry, instead of just as ways of processing information that need to be changed to do literary work. I further suggest that identifying and analyzing disability aesthetics in inaccessible modern and postmodern poetics provides disability scholarship more ways to think about neurodivergent representations in poetry beyond narrative, motif, and characters.

### 1.3 Questions of Access: what are cognitive styles and why should readers and critics consider them?

Reading through texts rich in neurodivergent expressive practices, autistic or otherwise, forces a reader to confront the limits of what Claire Barber-Stetson identifies as one's personal *cognitive processing style*: the way a reader sorts through received information while reading a text (148). Barber-Stetson uses this term to identify both different "interpretive modes" and ways of writing. For example, what she calls "Slow Processing" is a specific cognitive style of processing and writing shared by experimental modernist poets like Joyce and Woolf as well as



some contemporary autistic writers. This style values slower information processing speeds, and may emerge from writers who have different “access to many aspects of their environment (which includes language) that others do not see” (148). Barber-Stetson suggests that while the authors she names may or may not experience this cognitive style personally, the processing style is intentionally apparent in their poetry, which means “they also encourage its use among readers with the literary techniques they employ; they stimulate while simulating it” (Barber-Stetson 148). I understand these “literary techniques” and Miele Rodas’ “language markers” to point to the same thing: poetic choices in syntax, formal elements, and styles that have neurodivergent aesthetic value.

However, this stimulation into certain modes of processing will not necessarily match the cognitive style of the reader. Hitting the edges of such processing limits may produce reactions in readers similar to Quayson’s “aesthetic nervousness,” or any of the terms Bernstein lists as anti-absorptive strategies. In fact, Barber-Stetson asserts that one of the benefits of reading a text that uses a different processing style is that it will produce estrangement between the reader and the text, making it harder to “access”, but also offering the reader opportunities to begin practicing different interpretive modes. Barber-Stetson asserts that a different cognitive style like Slow Processing “makes new cognitive spaces accessible to the reader by making certain literary spaces less accessible” (Barber-Stetson 161). She uses “estrangement” similarly to Bernstein, who states that strategies of impermeability or anti-absorption can actually lead a reader to greater investment in a poem while potentially frustrating their primary attempts to read and understand. Barber-Stetson asserts that “By using aesthetics and poetics to thwart readers’ cognitive tenden-

cies, this literature makes readers aware of their cognitive capacities” (161), or the limits these capacities have for absorbing certain literary techniques.

I understand Barber-Stetson’s conception of “cognitive style” or “cognitive tendency” to be similar to Miele Rodas’ description of expressive practices, but with an additional personal dimension that illustrates how readers *experience* neurodivergence in a difficult text, instead of practices *expressed* by the writer. This is important because, as Quayson and Fraser assert, it is an experiential event like this that may allow a reader to understand their aesthetic nervous as co-extensive with material reality beyond the literary-aesthetic realm and which could provoke real-world change.

Both terms (expressive practices and cognitive styles) can denote neurodivergent aesthetics in either writing practices or interpretive modes: for example, writers can use autistic expressive practices present in poetic devices like echolalia to stimulate the reader into different “cognitive spaces” (Barber-Stetson 161), and readers can also interpret these autistic cognitive styles in a text as reading values. Throughout this dissertation I also use Miele Rodas’ term “neurodivergent voice” as a synonym for expressive practices which should remind readers that these aesthetic modes often emerge from disabled peoples’ embodied experiences.

Barber-Stetson’s idea of “thwarting” reader’s normal cognitive tendencies is a helpful descriptor for a reader’s personal experience with a text made inaccessible to them. A neurotypical or neurodivergent reader experiencing neurodivergent aesthetics may hit the limits of their own cognitive processing style and become confused and frustrated by the “semilegibility” (Perelman, “Trouble with Genius” 1) of the text, or they may experience familiarity, recognition, joy, or desire. Bernstein asserts that antiabsorptive techniques have their limits

in “some readers’ paradoxically keen interest in impermeability” (65), leading some readers to seek it out such experimental texts. Barber-Stetson points out that while she is not interested in posthumously diagnosing modernist writers, the contemporary autistic writers she studies “exhibit a bias toward this cognitive style, which results from their non-normative and shared forms of neural organization” (150). Similarly, I suggest that some neurodivergent readers, diagnosed or not, may feel more at home while perceiving cognitive styles that are closer to how their brains regularly process information.

I do not mean that all avid “Joyceans,” “Steinians,” or “Zukofskians” (Perelman, “Trouble with Genius” 1) are neurodivergent readers responding positively to language markers familiar to their neural organizations or cognitive styles. Bernstein offers an example of joy by saying that while “too much of the commentary on [Stein’s] work starts with the premise that there is something wrong” his response to her work is “one of intense pleasure...an enormous satisfaction” (143) which informs his scholarship. He does not profess or claim a diagnosis of cognitive disability. I do argue, however, that some antiabsorptive strategies might be more accessible than inaccessible to a neurodivergent mind biased towards a similar cognitive style. Readers with these cognitive styles exemplify important strategies for literary analysis: there may be unique ways for neurodivergent readers to “access” some conceptual or experimental texts that neurotypical readers find more difficult to comprehend, and thus it may be neurodivergent interpretive modes that open such inaccessible writing further. It is this familiarity, a sense that I am seeing odd patterns, that drives this dissertation for me, personally, as well as my commitment to openly neurodiverse perspectives in literary scholarship.

The term “neurodiversity,” coined by autism rights advocate Judy Singer, highlights the

strengths of cognitive difference, an extension of biodiversity that resists the idea that neurodivergence or cognitive disabilities need to be socially eradicated or managed, but are instead essential human variations that should be protected. Neurodiversity illustrates the benefits of neurodivergence. I argue that accepting neurodivergence as a necessary and energizing aspect of human nature could refigure the impermeability of some texts by affirming them as having neurodivergent reading value. My dissertation proposes that developing readings that affirm neurodivergent aesthetics can add to already theoretically rich fields by engaging neurodivergence as a beneficial “way of seeing, and interpreting” (Miele Rodas 29), because not all brains absorb (and are absorbed) by experimental poetics in the same way; it is time to consider that the hypothetical reader might be a reader with a cognitive disability.

While my project begins with poetry, all university disciplines need to expand their repertoire of ways to talk about differences in thinking, feeling and expressing ourselves. Consider the Government of Canada’s 2017 statistics that “among youth, mental health-related [disability] (8%) was the most common type of disability, followed by learning [disability] (6%)” (Canadian Survey on Disability). Cognitive disabilities are often stigmatized or colonized, particularly in academic institutions, both for students and for faculty. Waterfield et al. illustrates that many disabled Canadian academics are pushed to function as “normative optimal academic[s]” (7), and that disclosing disabilities and seeking accommodations is a lonely, exhausting, stigmatizing process. And while it is not just academics who read conceptual poetry, being a “Joycean” or “Steinian” comes with certain assumptions about one’s neurological and academic status, which I will explore in Chapter 1.

Thus, while impermeable poetics are not materially equivalent to inaccessible spaces in

that they may frustrate disabled and abled readers alike, methodologies that scholars use to analyze such difficult poetics frequently either reject or merely neglect expressions of cognitive disability as generative interpretive modes. This furthers the assumption that there is no place for neurodivergent thinking in academic disciplines outside of Critical Disability Studies. Reframing neurodiverse styles of critical interpretation as assets that expand literary understanding privileges disability perspectives in fields of scholarship built on normative and often ableist notions.

Disability scholar Robert McRuer asks what it would be like not to fear or eradicate disability, but to “welcome the disability to come, to desire it?” (207). Queer-crip writer Alison Kafer echoes this sentiment: “I use this language of desire deliberately...I know how my body shifts, leans forward, when I hear someone speak with atypical pauses or phrasing...part of what I am describing is a lust born of recognition” (“Queer, Feminist, Crip” 45). This lust born of recognition for disability as a social value is present at the core of the following chapters. My methodology for this dissertation is specifically oriented by the desire to affirm neurodivergence as an innately valuable way of being, thinking, and theorizing. This project depends on the insights of neurodivergent people that display disabled presences, ideas, joys, and struggles as valuable. In this desire, one realizes they are not alone, and that other brains follow similar starburst pathways; familiar spiral wanderings.

## Part 2: With/Out: Leaning into Desire

I must begin this dissertation by acknowledging my own “lust born of recognition” (Kafer “Queer, Feminist, Crip” 45); by situating myself in space and time while accepting that this is a dynamic position. I vibrate between communities, both real and imagined. I

grew up in the evangelical Christian church. I was home schooled until age ten. When I entered public school, late to some connections that other students had been making since kindergarten, early to others, but consistently “abnormal,” I began to experience a feeling of “wrongness.” Now, at the end of twelve years of post-secondary study, there are a few questions I have been asking, and they begin and continue like this:

what i                    still                    still                    sit still and know that                    i am  
                                  much and                    much and and much more  
  i breathe  
                                  into                    cognitive space                    as meditation teaches me to breathe  
into the corners of my body, release emotions hidden in hips / liver  
                                  xhale into the space between each rib—  
and between each rib                    tenderly wedged words // ask                    (y)  
                                  executive d(i)(y)s/function                    emotional d(i)(y)sregulation  
attention deficit hyperactive di(y)sorder                    anxiety                    and                    depression                    complex (sim-  
ple?) post-traumatic stress dis/order  
—chaos under the same roof                    roof                    my collarbone and  
                                  i breathe in di(e)(y)[s]{ch}ord[id]er{ed}                    bloom  
                                  consistent heart slow booms blood some days,  
                                  nests of shed clothes  
  cognitive/psychiatric/developmental  
                                  fingernails  
share space within/without                    BREAThe                    with/out

in psychological conditions                      out cognitive coalitions  
i arrange my body into columns                      arrange my writing into columns  
arrange my lavender pills                      into columns  
until                      the columns break                      shorn  
spine    w/ arms and eyelashes  
i hit enter                      freckle on my belly                      i hit return                      scar connecting wrist@hand  
space between my fingers or the space between my thumbs                      tapping the bar  
i need a drink or                      i need a moment of silence or  
tap tap ta a a                      ap                      air like air here is a a a a  
water dripping from rib to rib                      me dripping                      spilt or split  
70 percent water or  
or /// anything.

The work of my dissertation unfolds in what William James calls the “interstices of...mind-wandering” (*Principles of Psychology* 270). Firstly, I am mindful that I do not have an official psychiatric diagnosis of any cognitive disability. Writing this dissertation specifically has been difficult for me because I do not wish to take up any space that belongs to disabled communities. I want to honour the necessary commitment of disability activism and scholarship which insists “nothing about us, without us,” and this project is indebted to work by neurodivergent scholars and writers.

At the same time, I have been compensating for ADHD since I was sixteen. In this work I reflect on the feeling of myself as “with/out.” allied with and recognizing myself within cogni-

tively disabled communities, while simultaneously feeling outside the borders of these communities without a diagnosis, and the constant pressure of having to prove that I am “ADHD enough” to speak on these matters, while having to compensate for or limit my expressions of ADHD in other spaces.

The consideration of communal boundaries in a postmodern society that values identity and intersectionality as politically and academically important must come with questions about who has access to these spaces. Like all identity-based critical theories, cognitive disability theory is personal, and actively corresponds to lived experiences. Often when a neurodivergent person reveals how their body or mind functions to someone else, the response is reductively similar: oh, I do this too. I share aspects of your processing style, therefore either you must not be neurodivergent, or I must be.

I lean on autistic author/scholar Remi Yergeau’s assertion that while diagnosis can function as a privilege in many ways it is rarely the stable category that it’s portrayed to be. Diagnoses are dynamic, and are part of a process of becoming or of a “coming-to-know” one’s self that is “always-emerging,” diverging, and unstoppable, signaling “potentially infinite” shifts in self-awareness (Yergeau *Authoring Autism* 160). I work out this “process of becoming” visibly as I write through these chapters.

### 2.1 My Own Coming-to-know:

After learning more about how ADHD presents in academia from poet and disability scholar Nicole Markotić and New Media and rhetoric scholar Aimée Morrison, I began to consider my behaviour as a student, researcher, and human differently. I am not going to list my



ever-shifting symptoms, but I engage with them throughout this project as an example of privileging neurodivergent (dis)order.

In writing this dissertation i

spiral

i weave concentric circles

to get to the centre

of what i'm trying to say

(i question whether there is much use in a

centre.)

I am not going to list my symptoms because

the psychiatrist I presented them to didn't know how to pin them

i don't have a deficit of

attention, but excess enough to spill out in

tendrils and wrap around the

sentence i'm writing

conversation to the right of me

a man putting on his coat

song being played in the café

feeling of my septum ring as I spin it through my nose

rumble of the clothes dryer

But the question remains: beyond a brain scan, how do I know if there's a seat at any table for me, especially when diagnostic processes cost too much time and money and I must rely on peo-

ple other than myself to narrate my experience (specifically my mother, who had to relate any possible symptoms before age 12, but does not agree with my own self-diagnosis)? Especially when ADHD has been chronically under-diagnosed in women? Especially when the presence of ADHD is determined based on how much of a disruption I am to a 9-5 work week.

The psychiatrist I sat with for an hour told me two things:

1: That my awkward transition from being schooled at home to public school didn't have anything to do with ADHD but rather the trauma of socialization in a structure I hadn't experienced before.

2: Medical professionals can't use your doctoral cohort as a comparison group, some of whom can function well through the immense/intense demands of a PhD, and others who cannot; I have deferred completing my project for years.

What the psychiatrist does not realize and what I cannot say sitting across from her in a cold office:

- I wrestle with texts—the cover of my copy of *Finnegans Wake* has chunks torn out of it, the pages red with ink/blood/jam.
- I read sideways, grasping at word association, my heuristic beginning to look like biblical hermeneutics; a theologically dense faith intrinsically linked with the notion of positive suffering, of the blessing-wound.
- How a friend who's been medicated since undergrad acknowledges that if I am/have it, it's "ADHD lite"—same great taste, less calories (and no diagnosis).

These assertions that my body must not function the way I see it functioning, day after day, cast doubt on my own experiential perceptions. I see myself in a red dress and moccasins repaired by

my own hands standing in front of a microphone in my second year of undergrad presenting to my friends and family as part of my creative writing class. I read a poem that ends with: *nosce te ipsum*, know thyself.

Through the process of writing this dissertation, I experience the materiality of writing through a mind and body that doesn't "feel normal" and I edge up against the lines of neurotypical and neurodivergent. I mistake the definition of "enervate"—I tell my friends that I need to enervate, and I think this means I need to energize, move my body, go find running water, turn the volume up in my ears so I can't wander beyond the noise. The word feels like movement.

To enervate actually means: to weaken, to exhaust.

As I write this dissertation I read into a space where I fit or can sit for the time being. My access to communities of neurodivergence feels tenuous. Without a diagnosis, I represent myself as adjacent; part of a coalition that finds some of the experiences alienating, and some of them a homecoming. A homecoming-to-know. This project blooms as I work through methodologies of mind-wandering.

## 2.2 Chapters as (Radiating) Points in a Constellation:

Here, I outline the structure of my dissertation. Firstly, a note on terminology—while two of my texts (FW and TB) can be considered both modernist and avant-garde, in that they both, as Raymond Williams delineates, deal with a renewed focus on "intrinsic value of the poetic word," (67) that is characteristic of modernist poetry, I lean towards terms like "antiabsorptive," "impermeable," "inaccessible," "experimental," or "conceptual" to describe my chosen texts for the sake of consistency in this project. This is because while I argue that Hannah Weiner's *Code Po-*

*ems* also draws particular attention to the “poetic word,” and as I noted, Durgin refers to her as “avant-garde” in the broad or colloquial sense, her work is technically postmodern and beyond the standard characterization of “avant-garde” (1910s to late 1930s) (R. Williams 67). Raymond Williams’ essay “Language and the Avant-Garde” also asserts that the modernist goal of rejuvenating language, or making it creative, has many different ways of achieving this goal, and that these “diverse ways, leading to so many diverse formations and practices” should not be “summarized, but explored” (70). I intend to explore my chosen texts while acknowledging they may not fit neatly into bounded categories.

While the texts I have chosen to focus on for this project connect to different cultural moments, they join thematically as their critics generally advocate for strategies of “not-reading” them. This approach, while potentially unorthodox in the discipline of literature which prefers to carve out geographic and temporal boundaries for textual study, is often practiced by interdisciplinary disability scholars (Marjorie Perloff’s collection *Poetic License: Essays on modernist and postmodernist Lyric* is one exception to this).

My work is organized similarly to the following examples of such thematic discussions in the CDT field:

- Ato Quayson’s *Aesthetic Nervousness* examines works by Samuel Beckett, Toni Morrison, Wole Soyinka and J.M. Coetzee. His texts are assembled thematically instead of chronologically, to “show how the parameters of aesthetic nervousness operate within individual texts as well as across various representations” (Quayson 28).
- Barber-Stetson’s “Slow Processing: A New Minor Literature by Autists and Modernists” explores the concept of an autistic minor literature by comparing modernist British poets like

Eliot and Woolf with contemporary writers like Craig Romkema. Barber-Stetson intends to “unsettle aesthetic distinctions between modernism and postmodernism” (152).

- Miele Rodas in *Autistic Disturbances* “shape[s] a complex and textured web for framing literary autism” (24) and does this by including various works from a 300-year period. While these are “dominated by English fiction of the 18th and 19th century” (24) Miele Rodas also includes readings of catalogue in the *DSM* and poems by modernist American poet/short story writer Raymond Carver.
- Paul Stephens’ *The Poetics of Information Overload: From Gertrude Stein to Conceptual Writing* deals with the 20th century’s information revolution. While he is not working in CDT, he begins with poets like Stein, Pound, and Eliot, and expands to include conceptual writing from poets like John Cage, Bernadette Mayer, and Hannah Weiner (Stephens 4). Stephens tracks aesthetics of information overload through the 20th century into present day, illustrating how “many of the central aesthetic and political questions with regard to information overload are addressed or anticipated within twentieth-century avant-garde writing” (xi).

I structure my dissertation similarly; though my project is not nearly as extensive as the above authors, I explore each of my texts in depth. For me, they appear like individual stars in a constellation—luminous moments that contribute to the larger picture, like Joyce’s “odds without ends” (FW 466).

Secondly, most of the CDT texts I rely on use autism and autistic expressive practices as an anchor (Miele Rodas; Yergeau; Barber-Stetson). My project, while indebted to Autistic scholarship, expands towards other cognitive disability aesthetics. My dissertation sits at the intersections of CDT, feminist/queer literary criticism, rhetorical theories, modernist and postmodernist

critical literary methodologies, and nosological history, in liminal spaces that deal with awkward and unstable boundaries. This project works most notably through positive explorations of aesthetics of disfluency, Attention-Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), and schizophrenia in my chosen texts.

My dissertation considers the dynamic interplay of material readings (affective disruptions, my own interruptions and neurodivergent readings) and symbolic meaning making (identifying connections between linguistic concepts, characters, and cognitively disabled expressive practices). I take Miele Rodas' *Autistic Disturbances* as an invaluable resource, both for the content of the text and the structure, which I hope to emulate.

In their foreword to Miele Rodas' text, Yergeau illustrates the embodied form of criticism that I echo. Yergeau says of Miele Rodas' book that "in venerating the idiosyncratic and the echolalic, Rodas conducts analyses of literary texts notable for their autistic form *by means of an autistic form*. In other words, when discussing interruptive prose, Rodas interrupts her own prose—beautifully, rigidly, and impassionedly" (*Autistic Disturbances* x). Yergeau explains that these examples of autistic strategies give readers "neurodivergent mechanisms" which are at once a *method* and a *style* of apprehending aesthetic autism, across genre and mode (x). I likewise write this dissertation by means of my own ADHD form and method, which encourages finding beauty in and through tangential associations, lateral creativity, interruptions, call-backs that occasionally forget the initial references, and many side trails.

However, the potential neurodivergent mechanisms to be recognized in each text are varied, and obviously go beyond ADHD. As I mentioned earlier in this introduction, there are many ways to practice reading antiabsorptive texts. As Miele Rodas says, this is a "theoretical experi-

ment” (25) not a new construction of categories. She proposes that “The literary autism of each text is conceived as multiple, nonstandard, and elusive, the autistic quality of each sometimes eminently present, sometimes retreating into something like literary convention. As with autistic people, there is no easy ‘diagnostic’ fit, indeed, no desire for such easiness” (25).

In a way, these methodological variations are both about the individual and their social constructedness. My readings will differ from another reader, as my neurotype is distinct, the limits of my cognitive capacities sometimes crisply boundaried, other times fuzzier, sliding into spaces of intersection, crossroad, and liminality, yet still contributing to the larger neurodiversity of my communities. Like Miele Rodas, my exploration offers “descriptive analyses intended to encourage readers to rethink what they know, both about these texts and about autism speaking...an act of faith rather than a gesture of authority” (Rodas 25). My readings in this dissertation are such acts of faith: testimony, and witness.

Why am I starting with *Finnegans Wake*, *Tender Buttons*, and *Code Poems*? This dissertation could investigate numerous other works. I would have liked to look at Weiner’s *Clairvoyant Journal* (and to talk more about Paw, the astral polar bear who drives a limousine and sleeps in a bed in Weiner’s forehead), T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste-Land*, Larry Eigner’s collected works *Windows / Walls / Yards / Ways*, Maggie O’Sullivan’s *A Natural History in 3 Incomplete Parts*, work by Jackson MacLow, bp Nichol, Syd Zolf, Nicole Markotić and New Media interactive digital art.

I have chosen these texts for intersecting and diverging reasons. Firstly, *Wake*, *Tender Buttons*, and the *Code Poems* are examples of 20th C poetry that I argue embrace cognitive disability aesthetics in their notorious “inaccessibility,” but are also considered important yet troublesome canonical readings whose authors have been consistently “diagnosed” by their readers.

Further, their fame is encompassed by their classification of “genius” which also relates to their “avant-garde”ness—not many other authors write in the ways that my chosen texts have. Weiner differs from Joyce and Stein as she is not considered to be as prolific in either readership or scholarship. However, her medical diagnosis of schizophrenia and her “clair-style” writing produces an intriguing inaccessibility for her readers, as does her work with the International Code of Signals. I explain my approach to each of these texts further:

### 2.2a Joyce:

*Finnegans Wake (FW)* is often tagged as an “unreadable” book—a text that forces readers to “forgo most of the conventions about reading and about language that constitute him/her as a reader” (Deane vii). One might argue that *FW* is not poetry, and therefore shouldn’t belong in a dissertation that focuses on impermeable poetry, but it is notoriously difficult to pin a genre to *FW*. It transitions between acting as a novel and ignoring plot altogether, including moments of drama, visual elements, and music as well as dense passages of prose, and consistent poetic syntax. Seamus Deane’s introduction to the *Wake* says that it is “an extraordinary performance, a transcription into a miniaturized form of the whole western literary tradition” (vii). He confirms that “it is difficult to say that the *Wake* is a novel; equally difficult to deny it” (vii). I take this as space to read for prose poetic form in *FW*, established by the syntactical oddities and linguistic invention of the text.

In Chapter 1: “Odds Without Ends” I look at in-depth responses to the *Wake* in its early 20th century context, with unsurprisingly negative results. In this chapter I explore the way that the *Wake* is conceptualized as a text provoking what Quayson calls “aesthetic nervousness” due



to fears of social and moral degeneration that gripped Europe and North America in the early 20th century. Marion Quirici proposes that Joyce's descriptions of his disabled character Shem the Penman and Shem's narrative arc in the text are responses to critics' reviews of the earlier versions of the texts. I expand on her work to explore these descriptions of Shem as an intentionally disruptive response to critics, and I argue these descriptions are explicitly dysgenic.

My methodology for this chapter differs slightly from my later chapters. I analyze the neurodivergent aesthetic value of Shem as a character who exemplifies FW's structural expressive practices. As I mentioned earlier, considering disabled characters is a well-established practice in disability aesthetics (Siebers; Quayson; Fraser). However, because the construction of Shem and his actions is self-reflexively analogous to Joyce's construction and reconstruction of his *Work in Progress*, I argue that Joyce's writing process for *Finnegans Wakes* can be read as intentionally dysgenic.

Chapter 2: "No Sabbath for Nomads" continues with Joyce's mammoth text. I read disfluent language (portrayals, performances, and creative stuttering and lisping) in FW as an aesthetic that slows the reader down (Eagle), privileging divergent cognitive processing styles (Barber-Stetson) and interpretive modes over fast, conventional or neurotypical reading practices. I compare the "time book" (O'Brien) to Alison Kafer's conception of "crip time" ("Queer, Feminist, Crip" 26) that disrupts normative temporal models and instead promotes a desire for disability.

### 2.2b Stein:

As I have outlined, Natalia Cecire describes how readers ascribe similar accusations of unreadability to Stein's work: "Stein's is a different kind of unreadability: although she was indeed terribly prolific, it is not scale but rather something about her style that is an impediment to reading; not the how much but simply the how" (282). Marjorie Perloff echoes this sentiment in her chapter on Stein in *Poetic License*, asserting that Stein's poetry is usually divided into her "public, accessible, 'transparent'" writing, and her "opaque, private, experimental, 'difficult' writing" (145). Chapter 3 considers Stein's *Tender Buttons* (TB) which apparently belongs in the second category of "opaque" poetry (Perloff, *Poetic License* 145), like Joyce's.

In Chapter 3: "Any little thing is water" I examine Gertrude Stein and Leonard Solomons early work on hysteria, automatic writing, and attention. I analyze behaviourist B.F. Skinner's critique of *Tender Buttons* in which he diagnoses Stein as a hysteric in light of those experiments. I compare the language that Stein, Solomons, and Skinner describe in these writings to early framings of ADHD, and suggest that poetic choices in *Tender Buttons* can correlate with an ADHD cognitive style. I use Stein's own ideas of attention and interruption to perform my own ADHD reading/not reading/hyper-reading of the text.

### 2.2c Weiner:

Chapter 4 moves from modernism to postmodernism, with Hannah Weiner's 1969 *Code Poems*. I am aware that Weiner is more well known for her *Clairvoyant Journals*—their complexity, banality, and affective disruption leads readers to similar diagnoses of "unreadability" presented by critics of my first two authors. I understand Weiner's popular unreadability to be an example of her very specific cognitive style, "clair-style." "Clair-style," is the name that Weiner

gave to the writing style that produced the *Clairvoyant Journals* which were written by Weiner shortly after her schizophrenia diagnosis. The text is an involved journal, written after Weiner began to see words on objects around her and hear voices. These words and voices overwhelm the reader, interrupting each other and Weiner, clarifying, muddling, and filling the pages with personal details. Regrettably, I do not spend significant time on the *Clairvoyant Journals* in this project.

The focus of Chapter 4: “AI (I will not abandon you, I will remain by you)” is Hannah Weiner’s *Code Poems* (CP). There has not been as much scholarship on the *Code Poems*, and there has been very little written about them in reference to Weiner’s schizophrenia. Interestingly, the *Code Poems* retain an element of “semilegibility,” (Perelman, *Trouble with Genius*, 1) although they are meant to be excessively legible. The poems are written using the International Code of Signals for the use of all nations and Weiner commissioned the Coast Guard to perform them in Central Park in the late 60s and early 70s. I argue these poems should still be considered in light of Weiner’s diagnosis. Even though they were written and performed before she was officially diagnosed as schizophrenic, Weiner intends her writing around this time to explore “schizophrenic thinking” or “knight’s move thinking” (“Trans-Space Communication” 1). According to the DSM-V, “knight’s move thinking” is an example of “derailment,” and is a schizophrenic language marker.

Further, I explore Weiner’s opposition to her diagnosis of schizophrenia, which is referenced frequently by her friends and contemporaries, and her counter-diagnosis of herself as a “clairvoyant.” Due to the lack of expansive scholarship on the *Code Poems*, I suggest that my readings will be beneficial to the larger conversation. While these poems have not been widely

considered “genius,” they are unique in Weiner’s circle of poet friends, and in the American Language Poetry movement of the 1960s-1980s in general, as the only other writer working with encoded poetry was Jackson Mac Low. This avant-garde/conceptual leaning along with understandings of Weiner’s work as “unreadable” gives the *Code Poems* a place to fit in this dissertation, though not necessarily neatly. However, Miele Rodas suggests that not everything must be a “good diagnostic fit” (25); this is not how bodies or diagnoses work, and if there is anything I have learned from Weiner it is that mess and mistakes can be generative. While Weiner vehemently rejects a diagnosis of schizophrenia for her writing, she is the ideal poet for my last chapter. Like Joyce and Stein, she used neurodivergent language markers to ask her readers to embrace expansion, to evolve.

### 2.3 Conclusion:

Each of the authors I study in this dissertation worked criticisms of disability into generative and beautiful frameworks of neurodivergent aesthetics. My project will finally conclude by returning to the experiential process of writing this dissertation as an example of the necessity for more robust discussion between poetic scholarship and CDT in this section of the field. I think about the joys and difficulties I have had in writing this project as a neurodivergent-adjacent scholar attempting to bridge these disciplines, and I use my own “Slow Professing” (Barber-Stetson) to come back to questions of “access”: how might general understandings of intimidating, academically coded, impermeable literature change if students and faculty could recognize neurodivergent voice in such texts as valuable, or acknowledge neurodivergent interpretive modes as applicable critical methodologies? I think about the word “cleave” as a heuristic for this process.

Texts that exhibit neurodivergent aesthetics force the reader to bump around the edges of other folks' cognitive styles. Let me introduce mine. As I'm sitting here writing with the soft glow of the coffee shop around my edges, my table won't stop shaking. There's a quiet vibration as I type and it's driving me *crazy*

is it? and

would someone else tune it out?

and what is crazy for a maybe-ADHD brain?

and if i were Hannah Weiner

would i say that "it's driving me..."

or maybe just that: it's driving me.

Where do these poetic assemblages interconnect with my material(s)? Like an ADHD lover's constant tapping fingers, counting my ribs in the dark, again and again? What stars form the constellation of myself and its insistent connections? *Nosce te ipsum*: what rivers are carving through me?

## Chapter 1: Odds Without Ends

As I write this, COVID-19 has just been declared a pandemic. Contagion is always an event characterized by the temporal and with the experience of COVID-19 happening around me I try to make sense of the temporality of contagious movement, with an eye on the fin-de-siècle, and an eye on March, 2020:

wash your hands to the point of cracked and bleeding knuckles,  
only touch fruit you are supposed to buy.

i've been meeting your eyes as i give you a wide berth,  
as i avoid you like the plague.

people keep saying "like the plague"

we are assumed ill                    until                    i run down the sidewalk and  
i smile at your garden.

your tomatoes                    licked by salty march

we ask for accommodations, to slow down and breathe.

The loss of time, loss of sleep from stress, depression, anxiety, and the economy has been *crippled*, Canada is *crippled by*

incubation periods, symptomless transferences, recovery periods

we avoid the language of disability at all costs

we use it without thinking.

What a time to write about germ theory. What a time to write about the body unwieldy, the body immobile and exhausted and vulnerable. What a time to write about mass vaccination,

and public health. I have been thinking about the gaps in the body. The holes in our armour: our masks where particles wriggle through, bits of the virus exhaled through coughing, chatting, laughing, *being* human. The terror of “handtouch that is speech without words” (*FW* 173.10), the breath leaving your body and entering someone else’s to infect them with whatever you are carrying.

### 1.1 Introduction: the Odds

Chapter 1: “Odds Without Ends” and Chapter 2: “There’s No Sabbath for Nomads” will discuss disability aesthetics that intentionally disrupt normative reading practices in James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* (*FW*). In this chapter, I outline the form of *FW*, and discuss the text’s discomfiting structure and polyvalent syntax which position it within the category of inaccessible/impermeable poetry. *FW* is, as Charles Bernstein outlines, characteristic of an antiabsorptive poetic text: poetry that is intentionally difficult to absorb, or become absorbed by; poetry that may be, among other things, “interruptive, transgressive, undecorous, anticonventional, unintegrated, fractured, fragmented...repellent” (“Artifice of Absorption,” 29)

This chapter reviews reader responses to one of Joyce’s “repellent” characters: the physically and cognitively disabled writer Shem the Penman. Shem is often viewed as a “portrait of the artist”; a textual analogue for Joyce. Marion Quirici argues that Joyce wrote Shem to respond to criticisms that label early sections of *FW*, Joyce’s *Work in Progress* (*WIP*), symptomatic of Joyce’s perceived “disabilities” (ie., encephalitis, schizophrenia, madness). Early reviews of *WIP* frequently used overlapping categories of degeneration, disability, and contagion bolstered by contemporary germ and eugenic theories of the early 20th century to frame the text as a danger

to readers and to “public health” in general. Responses to *Ulysses* and *WIP* display these fears. *Ulysses* was banned in the U.S. following a court case in 1921 that deemed the “Nausicaa” chapter obscene and corrupting; as one of judges said, it read “like the work of a disordered mind” (as qtd in Gillers 262).

As a rejoinder to critics, Joyce performs a “defiant disability aesthetic” (Quirici 85) in *FW* by using these diagnoses to frame the character of Shem as a generative disabled artist. Shem is “a low sham” (*FW* 169.25); a riddler who is described by his twin brother as “weird... and middayevil down to his vegetable soul” (*FW* 422.28). Shem has everything from “two fifths of two buttocks” (*FW* 168.17-18) to the “whooping laugh” (*FW* 422.26). He is denigrated for his disabilities, denied marriage, institutionalized, and expected to die alone and in debt.

Because Joyce’s critics often correlated the language of degeneration and deviancy with disability, Quirici considers such reactions the product of early 20th century eugenic anxiety concealed as moral concerns for society. “Public health” and public morality were often connected, as I will outline. She proposes that Joyce’s descriptions of Shem parody reviews by lifting critics’ phrases (often directly quoting them) and using these phrases in the final version of *FW*. Dirk Van Hulle calls this process “Joyce’s vaccination technique” (“A James Joyce Digital Library” 238). Quirici asserts that these “radical disability aesthetics break with the very notion that art has an obligation to be beautiful” illustrating a “redress on behalf of deviant bodies” (104). She then briefly applies this logic to Joyce’s “divergent language” (104).

In this chapter I expand this argument by connecting Joyce’s divergent language to his dysgenic descriptions of Shem. I examine Joyce’s disability aesthetic for his impermeable poetry in light of the above “diagnoses.” I argue that beyond merely parodying, or vaccinating against



the eugenic concerns of his critics in the creation of Shem, as Quirici and Van Hulle respectively propose, Joyce frames his writing process for the *Wake* as an intentional dysgenic practice of linguistic “crossbreeding” (Parandowski 141). By “dysgenic” I mean opposed to 20th century eugenic principles that positioned certain bodies and minds as desirable and normal (physically, mentally, and morally) and other bodies as deviations that threaten societal flourishing. I argue that Shem is both a defiantly dysgenic character and a locus for recognizing the dysgenic disability value that underpins many of Joyce’s aesthetic choices throughout *FW*.

First, I establish Shem as a disabled character who is intended to prompt discomfort in readers; what Ato Quayson describes as aesthetic nervousness. For Quayson, when a reader encounters disability in a textual character or plot, etc., they may experience material feelings of fear, disgust, or anxiety which are similar to “social attitudes to disability that themselves often remain unexamined in their prejudices and biases” (15) and are context bound to specific societal moments. I include a reading of *The People vs. Anderson Heap* to explore overlaps between symbolic and material effects of disability aesthetics on the reader.

Next, I illustrate how Joyce’s descriptions of Shem exemplify Joyce’s commitment to abnormal linguistic practices in the polyvalent syntax of *FW*. I reference scholarship which frames Joyce’s sentences using the language of “germs” or “micro-organism” (Hayman; Van Hulle; Brion) to outline how Joyce’s “vaccination technique” is actually metaphorically “infectious.” I then read for dysgenic value possible in sections of the text that highlight autistic narrativity (Yergeau). I end this chapter by considering how these discussions of disability and deviance may colour responses to *FW* today.

This chapter differs in its methodology from the other chapters in my dissertation in two ways. I don't frame it using any specific psychological or neurobiological disorder; nor am I reading primarily for a particular set of "expressive practices" (Rodas), which I do in subsequent chapters. For example, Chapter 2 explores disfluency, I read for ADHD language markers in Chapter 3, and consider thought disorders associated with schizophrenia in Chapter 4. This chapter is more expansive. I describe many disabilities that fall under the larger umbrella of disability aesthetics because in eugenic and nosological history cognitive disabilities, moral "disabilities," and physical disabilities are often conflated and interconnected. I begin my dissertation with these overlapping categories. Since the critical "diagnoses" of Joyce ("madness," "disordered mind," "schizophrenia") are varied but coalesce around ideas of disability as connected to deviance or degeneracy, the multiplicity and creative variety of these diagnoses direct my readings for this chapter.

Secondly, I proposed in my introduction to focus on disability aesthetics in impermeable poetic devices and structures, rather than in characters, narrative, plot, etc. The attention I pay to Shem as a disabled character who pushes forward a (loose) plot may seem to deviate from this original goal. However, I connect the deviant Shem and the divergent poetic devices and structures used to describe him. Thus, I jointly argue for Joyce's dysgenic aesthetic both in descriptions of Shem, and in the language and structure of the text as a whole.

### 1.2 The End(s): Genre complications and loosely classifying *Finnegans Wake*:

The text that eventually became *FW* started as *Work in Progress*. After publishing *Ulysses* in 1922, Joyce began work on what would become the immense text of *FW*, publishing its

present iteration in 1939. Joyce wrote *the Wake* in sections, many of which were serially published in various magazines including the *Transatlantic Review*, *Criterion*, *Navire d'argent*, and *Transition*. Series of episodes were published as *Anna Livia Plurabelle*, *Tales Told by Shem and Shaun*, *Two Tales of Shem and Shaun*, and *Haveth Childers Everywhere* (*Oxford Companion to Irish literature*, "Finnegans Wake," 4).

There has been extensive research done on the composition of *FW*. Clive Hart's foundational text "Notes on the Text of 'Finnegans Wake,'" Fred Higginson's work, and Dirk Van Hulle's genetic analysis of the text rely on pieced together bits from Joyce's notebooks ("A James Joyce Digital Library). Often called "the unreadable book," scholars suggest that you don't read *Finnegans Wake*. You read *in it*, as it reads you. While the *Wake* is often categorized as a novel, it is not written as a traditional novel (though it does have a tenuous four-part narrative structure) sits at the confluence of several different genres including poetry, drama, and music.

David Hayman asserts that Joyce intentionally erases his investment in narrative after he's initially "mapped it out" (153). Hayman goes on to argue that because of Joyce's immense attention to detail, each sentence needs to be read at the level of the individual word and the assemblages of detail that each word evokes: "The sentence, therefore, tends to atomize *the* meaning in favour of the *many possible* meanings rendering an *impression* to which all *ideas* are secondary" (153). Hayman compares each Joycean sentence to a *minor organism* (an updated term might be "micro-organism") that has its own dynamic existence within the larger whole.

As I mentioned in my introduction, one might disagree with my strategy of reading *FW* as conceptual poetry, but scholars generally assert that the *Wake* is too complicated to belong to one genre. Due to the amount a reader of the *Wake* can invest in each individual word and the

lack of narration or character description present in Joyce's previous works, I approach *FW* as prose poetry, a move which is supported by the fact that when citing *FW* scholars give both the page number and line number. In this assessment I follow scholars like Marjorie Perloff, who in her book *The Dance of the Intellect* compares Poundian poetic language to Joyce's linguistic play in *Finnegans Wake*, and Charles Bernstein, who includes *FW* as one of his examples of 20th century poetry that leans towards the antiabsorptive end of the spectrum: poetry that intentionally refuses the audience access or absorption in it, specifically through innumerable, overwhelming references and possibilities (56). I assume then, that I can consider aspects of the text poetic without falling into strictly labelling the "unreadable book."

Often, authors highlight the unreadability of *FW* to the point that the text is considered a paradox: according to Joyce scholar Sebastian Knowles "*Finnegans Wake* cannot be read except by someone who has already read it" (100). As an introduction to the text, Knowles suggests his own *Wake* reading strategy, which takes the shape of a spiral. His beginning is the centre of the book: "The spiral is the clue: to get into *Finnegans Wake*, you have to start in the middle and work your way out" (100). To speak of the *Wake* beginning and ending is imprecise; as imprecise as suggesting that rivers really begin and end, instead of talking about mouths, tributaries, estuaries, and oceans. The "end" of the text is Anna Livia Plurabelle's "the," (*FW* 627.16) as she transforms into the river of the text (which is used as a stand-in for many rivers, but is primarily Dublin's Liffey) running to re-circulate the first word of *Wake*, the uncapitalized "riverrun" (*FW* 3.1). The image of the river carries the reader through the text, often bumping them up against banks, rushing them over rounded rocks and wet life caught in rafts of branches. In the river is

teeming life, ever-evolving or decomposing; the water both a source of possible contagion and abundance.

### 1.3 Reading *FW* in Public: Responses and a Song

The idea of the *FW* as an “unreadable book” persists in 2020, with readers vacillating between calling the book anathema, or a necessary induction into high art circles. I conducted a short experiment last year that I like to call “Reading *Finnegans Wake* in Public.” I read on the train, in coffee shops, and at the beach. In general, people were shocked, impressed, or (as the second last response might show) annoyed, but most viewed the book as worthy of lasting cultural regard.

Here is a short list of things people have said to me while reading *FW* in public:

- “I knew a shamanic voice performer who sang “Oh Superman” in 1989.”
- “Wow, congratulations!”
- “Have you read James Hillman’s book on archetypal psychology?”
- “Did you know that when he wrote *Ulysses* Joyce constructed a 12 part opera? Similar in quality to Wagner’s finest works?”
- “I’m not sure how you’re getting through that.”
- “Have you read any Henry Miller?”
- “Good for you!”
- “I lived in England for a time.”
- “Oh, fuck that book.”
- “I was promised a Volvo if I finished it. I do not have a Volvo.”

New media and neurodivergence scholar Aimee Morrison pointed out in a conversation with me that this book is often used as an intellectual cudgel. *FW* is an example of what Jay Dolmage refers to as academia's exceptionalism: "The ethic of higher education still encourages students and teachers alike to accentuate ability, valorize perfection, and stigmatize anything that hints at intellectual (or physical) weakness' (*Academic Ableism* 3). In its inaccessibility the text has come to represent a paradox of responses that don't differ too much from critics' initial reactions: it's either bunk or brilliance; insanity or the sanest thing anyone has ever read. Today however, the overwhelming reactions to the text no longer trend towards madness, but frequently position Joyce as genius. Perelman's *The Trouble With Genius* devotes an entire chapter to Joyce along with Stein, Pound, and Zukofsky and suggests that *FW* makes Joyce the "Modernist genius *par excellence*" (88). Of course, Perelman uses "genius" as a "charged compliment" (2) which also captures the "freedom, thrill, immediacy, [and] corn" of the term (*The Trouble With Genius* 2). Part of Perelman's definition of genius relies on the fact that these writers were intentional about writing "masterpieces, displays of absolute cultural value" (*The Trouble With Genius* 15).

Because of the impermeability of these "masterpieces" there's an elegance in failing to read it: you get to be in the club. Perelman notes that "central though *Finnegans Wake* might be, whatever knowledge the world has of it is mediated by the university... within the squared circle of its comprehenders, it has become an object of intense study" (*The Trouble With Genius* 89). This mediation is described by Knowles, who wrote a song about the difficulties of reading *The Wake* and how academic gatekeepers may characterize those who unabashedly love the text. His song features these notable lines from verse 1: "If you're anxious for to shine in the high Joycean line / As a man of tenure rare / You must get up all the germs of the neologic terms / And plant

them everywhere” (Knowles 97). I include this verse to highlight the repetitive use of the term “germ” in responses to *FW*; I interrogate this term later in this chapter. Knowles chorus asserts that if you succeed in reading *FW* then “everyone will say / As you walk your mystic way / If this young man can read *Finnegans Wake* / Which is much too deep for me / Why what a very singularly deep young man this deep young man / must be!” (98). Knowles also suggests that one shouldn’t “read the book, just quote it, mine for epigrams, footnote it / That’s by far the simplest way” (98).

The continued assessment is that one doesn’t really “read” *FW* the way one reads other works of literature, and, if one does, then they are very “deep” and deserve tenure. My experiences while reading the book in public confirm these reactions. The people who wanted to interact with me while I read this text either responded with shock and a bit of horror (Wow!), self-deprecation (“I’m not smart enough for that book”), or immediately tried to pull me into a discussion regarding Wagner, archetypal psychology, or other important High Art intellectual topics. I have wondered if my gender had anything to do with the shocked responses I received. I am not Knowles “deep young man” or a “man of tenure rare” nor do I frequently read *FW* out loud, drink in hand, in the presence of a woman I am wooing as suggested by Walter Rybert. He proposes reading to an “appreciative listener, preferably feminine” (732) after a pint or two.

what should i as a woman be doing at (in) the *Wake*?

a m i an appreciative listener?

am i also to read my favourite lines to a woman?

the heart(r)endingly queer possibilities of

looking a woman in the eye and saying  
“ we may come, touch and go,  
from atoms and ifs  
but we're presurely  
destined to be  
odd's without  
ends”

Regardless, many current responses to the *Wake* illustrate that Joyce's work did not end up as he feared, like a “temple without believers” (Parandowski 139).

#### 1.4 Reading Joyce's “Germs”: Resisting the normalizing impulse in favour of slippery signifiers:

The *Wake* is multilingual, written with words taken from over 60 languages. According to an essay by William Carlos Williams requested by Joyce to promote *WIP*, Joyce “maims words” in order to revive them. W.C. Williams states: “meanings have been dulled, then lost, then perverted by their connotations (which have grown over them) until their effect on the mind is no longer what it was when they were fresh....All words, all sense of being is gone out of them....Joyce is restoring them” (85).

Joyce's restorations come at a time when many modernist writers intended their writing to portray “actual social processes” (R.Williams 66). Raymond Williams warns against collapsing modernist or avant-garde writers into a single category. The breadth of writing styles from the late 19th to early 20th century included movements that built on and disagreed with each oth-



er: “the Symbolist poets of the 1800s are superannuated by the Imagists, Surrealists, Futurists, Formalists and others from 1910 on” (R. Williams 32-33).

Similarly, Joyce as a modernist genius does not fit discretely into one movement, though he inherited the Symbolist impulse to treat each word as a “signifier in its own material properties, which, by its poetic use, embodied, rather than expressed or represented, a value” (R. Williams 67-68). However, Joyce also enjoys the process of de-composition. From the first sentence of *FW* and continuing through the rest of the book, he rips apart and combines words to form new and old ones, drawing to mind various associations and often speaking self-referentially of the text. *Wake* words often embody more than one linguistic value. Here is an example: “Fillstup. So you need hardly spell me how every word will be bound over to carry three score and ten toptypical reading throughout the book of Doublends Jined...” (*FW* 20.16).

In “fillstup” one can read both “full stop” and “fills up,” phrases that could be read as contradictory—do we stop or continue? Do we stop when we’re full? Could we stop if we tried? The telegrammatic phrasing of “full stop,” a form of communication limited by brevity, is in contrast to the expansive possibilities of words with “three score and ten” potential meanings, none of which may be typical, or “typical”; some “tipping the scale” or leaving a reader tipsy (like Walter Reybert). In “Doublends Jined” one can read “double ends joined”—possibly referring to the circularity of *FW* as it returns to itself (*the to riverrun*). “Doublends Jined” also notoriously refers to “Dublin’s Giant”—the titular Finnegans of the first page, (*FW* 3.19) who Joyce revives and re-members throughout the text.

The above quote illustrates how Joyce uses what Gabriel Renggli calls the author’s “non-words” (1997) which hold such slippery significations that pinning them down totally is not an

option. This contributes to the *Wake's* inexhaustible (non)readability. These non-words are unable to be read without being “changed” into something comprehensible, while the text simultaneously requires us not to. Asking for a firm interpretation “partly invalidates any suggestion we make, as any proposed interpretation will also be a normalization and simplification that does violence to the text... it eliminates the possibility that any interpretation will produce the decisive answer” (Renggli 998).

For many readers (though not all) this indecisiveness without a firm interpretation is difficult and uncomfortable. As Hayman says, the many forms of meaning written into the *Wake* sentence by sentence make it impossible to ever *fully* read. Perelman asserts that “written in its high privatized ‘universal’ language, *Finnegans Wake* is unreadable in the conventional sense and, for Joyceans, inexhaustibly readable” (*The Trouble with Genius* 88). This difficulty for reading in the “conventional sense,” but being infinitely readable in other senses is how Boriana Alexandrova frames the *Wake*: as a reading experience through which “we encounter the outlines of our cultural norms, our patterns of reading or communicating” (90); outlines that *FW* reflects back to the reader.

I want to highlight the term “normalization” that Renggli uses as an example of one of these reflections. Readers and critics often attempt to “fix” this “abnormal” text to a certain interpretation instead of allowing many possible interpretations at once. This impulse tries to make *Finnegans Wake* more legible and less daunting. The attempt to change the uncomfortable process of reading the text into something more palatable or definite is an urge to restrain the *Wake's* overwhelming excess so the reader's experience is more normatively acceptable. Either *Finnegans Wake* is not enough: the syntax is muddled and inconsistent, the narrative is too loose

and spotty; or it is too much, with exhausting possibilities for meaning in every line with characters that change shape, skin, and name. These “abnormalities” or divergent language make it difficult for the reader to absorb and be absorbed by the text in the way Bernstein imagines accessible poetry captivates its reader. These criticisms are also intensely similar to how disability is often characterized: through lack, or excess.

Throughout this chapter I identify descriptions of both *Finnegans Wake* and Joyce that use the language of disability or disabling processes metaphorically to refer to the antiabsorptive or impermeable features of *FW*—ie., William Carlos Williams’ “maiming words” (85). These features generally refer to the unreadable, “deviant” language Joyce uses, and these diagnostic descriptions blur metaphor and materiality, aesthetic and clinical spheres, by situating *FW* as symptomatic of its author’s physical and cognitive disabilities. But such “deviant” language finds a counterpart in Joyce’s main representation of disability: the deviant character of Shem the Penman.

### 1.5 Shem the Penman: Joyce’s disabled artist

Shem is one of the main characters of *FW*. The loose plot of the text centres around the Earwicker family: father Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker (HCE) who is frequently referenced by various iterations of words beginning with H, C, and E; mother Anna Livia Plurabelle who similarly appears in series of ALP words (ALP); the twins Shem the Penman and Shaun the Postman, and Issy, the daughter. The Earwickers live above a pub in Dublin, near the river Liffey. Shem and Shaun are opposites from the beginning. While Shaun is a deliverer of letters, Shem is a writer. Shaun is “cleanly, fastidious, and shrivelled...a version of the Stephen Dedalus

of *Portrait* and *Ulysses*, attempting to disinfect himself of experiences that are both fundamental and humiliating” (Deane xxxvi). Shem instead is a “low sham”(FW 169.25) who is characterized as a “hybrid” (FW 168.9) with a plethora of disabilities including “the wrong shoulder higher than the right, all ears, an artificial tongue with a natural curl, not a foot to stand on, a handful of thumbs, a blind stomach, a deaf heart, a loose liver, two fifths of two buttocks... a manroot of all evil” (FW 168. 13-18). No other character in the text is described in such an exhaustive way. Joyce goes into great detail to ensure his readers know that Shem is a figure of intense and impossible disability, characterized through an excess of idiomatic language, as the above quote shows.

Opposed to the “fastidious” Shaun, who Seamus Deane asserts is a “commenter, a critic, someone who takes from the texts he represents the smell of desire and ordure out of which they arose” (xxxvi), Shem is Joyce’s prototypical artist. He is “so given to filth” (Deane xxxii) (and creativity) that when he is denied writing materials later in the text he uses a mixture of his own excrement to write on his body, alchemically turning the everyday detritus of life into art. Shaun is set up as a foil to Shem, who is positioned as Other. Shaun vilifies his twin by insisting that “he’s weird...and middayevil down to his vegetable soul” (FW 422.28). Joyce’s description of his impossible body uses disabled metaphors to illustrate this “evil.” Shem does not have “a foot to stand on,” his heart is deaf, and he is both “artificial” and “natural” (FW 168. 13-18). Shem is thus characterized as idiomatically disabled, and immoral.

Marion Quirici, in her article “Degeneration, Decadence, and Joyce’s Modernist Disability Aesthetics” examines how concerns about disability and the *fin de siècle* eugenic concepts of moral and societal degeneration are apparent in criticisms of Joyce that use disability metaphors

to denigrate the writer. This is similar to how Joyce describes Shem. Quirici begins her article by listing responses to *Ulysses*, and some for sections of *WIP* that diagnose Joyce's writing with madness, obscenity, immorality, and other symptoms of degeneration and disability. He has "water on the brain" according to Gerald Gould (Quirici 84). Quirici proposes that "Gould's technique...is dashed off with a lightness of touch that reveals the use of negative disability metaphors as a second-nature reflex during this stage of eugenics and social Darwinism. Indeed, by 1928, disability imagery was already a well-worn trope in Joyce's reception" (84). By "this stage of eugenics and social Darwinism," Quirici is referring to the popularization of Sir Francis Galton's eugenic theories at the beginning of the 20th century in Western Europe and North America. I will outline the relevance of such theories in the next few sections of this chapter.

As Quirici points out, Joyce is well aware of the flavour of this criticism, and accordingly makes *FW* into a text that uses "radical" disability aesthetics to parody "the intersections between different forms of prejudice" (102) that these metaphorical diagnoses display. Joyce incorporates the criticisms of *Ulysses* and sections of *WIP* into the content of the *Wake*. Specifically through the character of Shem, he "transformed hostile criticisms of his work into sites of literary exchange through which he negotiated the significance of disability to Modern art" (Quirici 85). This intent redistributes the language of his critics, while undoing the sense of their words, which normal for Joyce considering the language play of *FW*. This redistribution is significant for Quirici's text—on pages 98-100 she meticulously matches criticisms to Joyce's responses in the *Wake*. Recycling these reviews epitomizes Joyce's "vaccination technique" (Van Hulle "A James Joyce Digital Library" 238): using the reviews (harmful matter) to strengthen the body of the text. I explore this technique more thoroughly in the second half of this chapter, but I first want

to look more closely at this “harmful matter.”

#### 1.6 For example: 20th C Reviews and Water on the Brain:

I add to Quirici’s list some criticisms of Joyce that are specifically cognitive disability focussed: many contemporary reviewers of *WIP*, *Anna Livia Plurabelle*, *Shem and Shaun*, and finally the completed *Finnegans Wake* propose that Joyce is generally “insane” for writing such a text.

Apparently, Joyce has a “cretinism of speech, akin to finding exhilaration in the slobberings and mouthings of an idiot” (McCarthy 375); he either is or is “posing as, stark, staring mad” (“Unsigned Review” 507). *FW* is not “sane enough to be literature” (O’Faolain 397) or if it is literature, it “finds its involuntary parallel in the madhouse” (Eastman 489). It is the “language of a man...trying to speak...through an anaesthetic” (Gogarty 673) and “cannot be read by any individual normally constituted” (Bennet 494). *FW* may show the “language of the schizophrenic mind” (Stonier 679) and is most “effective when dealing with the extremely aged, with young children, half-wits, and animals” (W. Lewis “On Joyce” 552). Finally, reviewers suggest that Joyce’s biggest fans are probably Americans, in a country “where mental homes are numerous” because “a dislocated world demands a dislocated poetry to describe it” (Gogarty 765).

Jack Lindsay’s review, “On the Modern Consciousness” discusses the “Anna Livia Plurabelle” section of *WIP*, and combines physical and mental illness. Lindsay, calling Joyce a “depressed Irishman” suggests that the writer has been sick onto the page until his body and mind is empty. He says that Joyce, “in one vast neurotic upheaval...vomited up all the spattering material of an existence on earth” (453). He maintains that “Joyce, intellectually revolted by the necessi-

ties of life, pours out every little contact of horror, pain, and filth, as if he hopes to empty his life that way, to scrape the last touch of flesh from his contaminated mind” (Lindsay 453). Out of this pile of filth (which must be just as contaminated) emerges *FW*, where Joyce is employed in “laboriously chopping up the language, getting amusement out of tiny interrelations and divisions of the rudderless consciousness” (Lindsay 453). The complicated language of *FW* thus emerges directly from Joyce’s “contaminated” authorial mind, floating aimlessly on his stream of consciousness.

Alternately, there are also critics who vehemently deny madness and cite Joyce as a genius, although there are fewer of these reviews. Joyce is “miles farther from insanity than many other men, past or present, who have accomplished a masterpiece before reaching the age of fifty” (Paul 573); “not mad, as yet, just touched enough for genius in the James Jesus Joyce manner” (McAlmon 455) and a “brilliant genius” (Eastman 416) who expected his reader to “devote his whole life to reading [his] work” (Eastman 417) but with his death took the only person for whom this text will ever be truly accessible (Parandowski 141).

Regardless, reviews that see *Finnegans Wake* as symptomatic of the ills of its author are extreme. Significant emphasis is placed on frequently used embodied metaphors of disability. Now and then responses to *WIP*, *Wake* and *Ulysses* represent intensely physical as well as mental responses to the texts. Readers feel “disgust” (McCarthy 375) and *Ulysses* apparently evokes nausea (Quirici 92). Critics like Joyce’s contemporary Wyndham Lewis insist that *FW* is a deformed, chaotic, dislocated poetics, the kind of writing that works best for “half-wits” (“On Joyce” 552). These writers use language of deviance and disability to reduce Joyce’s books to a dangerous and disgusting contagion, an example of the moral and physical degradation of west-

ern society at the *fin de siècle* (Quirici 91). Joyce's works are pure "Rot" according to Oldmeadow (511): "morally unclean as well as aesthetically monstrous" (Oldmeadow 513).

I am indebted to Quirici's reading, but I also wish to extend and strengthen her critique. Firstly, as mentioned, she proposes that Joyce responds to his critics by creating Shem as a character with significant impossible disabilities and framing him as a parody of "degeneration paranoia" (103) that rejects the notion that art has to be normatively aesthetically beautiful. As O'Faolain says, *FW* "raises almost every possible kind of problem in the philosophy and psychology of aesthetics" (396). Secondly, she compares the "broken" character of Shem to *FW*'s "broken" or "malformed language" which early critics frequently asserted emerges directly from a deviant mind. The two are linked in the above reviews. McCarthy states that "The eye, of course, cannot follow for more than a line or two this manufactured language. When will it strike Mr. Joyce that to write what it is a *physical* impossibility to read is possibly even sillier than to write what is mentally impossible to follow?" (376).

Quirici proposes that these "broken pieces of 'normal' or 'real' language...are not less but more meaningful" (105) because they deviate from the norm. In constructing his text, Joyce both collapses the notion that there is such a thing as "normal" language, and encourages readers to "reassess the boundaries of normal language" (Eagle, "Introduction" 4). I will speak at length about this reassessment in Chapter 2.

Quirici makes the observation that "describing the author as disabled and his language as malformed is in many cases a way for reviewers to excuse their own failure to understand Joyce's texts" (104). This is where her analysis ends; she asserts that readers denigrate Joyce's text using language that disparages abnormal embodiment and that Joyce retorts by using disabil-



ity aesthetics that reject the idea that art must be conventionally beautiful.

I argue that Shem is not only a parody of eugenic concerns, but that Joyce constructs him as an eternally dysgenic character who will not ever meet the fate that eugenicists assign him. This is an essential aspect of Shem's character that Quirici does not explore. Joyce intimately connects Shem's disability to his temporal experiences. Shem begins "at the very dawn of proto-history" playing with "thistlewords" in a garden on Phig Streat (*FW* 168.22-23). Joyce writes that "from the first his day was a fortnight," (*FW* 169.5-6) and Shem will apparently exist "until the rending of the rocks," refusing to die (*FW* 169.22-23). Shem may live forever. However, this is not positive for a society that promoted eugenic ideas about race, class, gender, and ability.

Shem is a figure of resistance for the compulsory able-bodiedness that underlie eugenics. "Compulsory able-bodiedness" is the CDT (Critical Disability Theory) term that intersects with and borrows from queer-feminist writer Adrienne Rich's concept of compulsory heterosexuality. This idea delineates how social institutions and norms pressure individuals to fit into normatively accepted forms and perform in socially acceptable (heterosexual) ways. "Compulsory able-bodiedness" was coined by Robert McRuer in "Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence" and identifies the ableist societal ideology that anyone outside of the body of the wealthy, white, heterosexual, cis-gendered, able-bodied, male is "abnormal" and of lesser value. Disability scholars like Margaret Price extend this essential "able-bodiedness" to cognitive disabilities as well.

Lennard J. Davis outlines how these notions are predicated on the construction of "normalcy" that positions disabled people as socially and politically Other. The concept of the norm,

Davis explains, became part of European culture in the nineteenth century and was supported by multiple countries' eugenics movements and connected to a rise in interest in statistics. The norm insists that "the majority of the population must or should somehow be part of the norm" and therefore "when we think of bodies, in a society where the concept of the norm is operative, then people with disabilities will be thought of as deviants" (Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy* 3), who should be eliminated for the good of public health.

### 1.7 Eugenic Deviations in Joyce's Context: Ireland and France

Eugenic supporters for the "progress" of humanity insisted that these deviations be eliminated through various means. Programs intended to control the "feeble-minded" (a term which wound its way intersectionally through cognitive capacity, race, sexual orientation, and those experiencing poverty) included sterilization laws, incarceration in asylums, and strategies that culminated in Germany with Nazi eugenic practices. The pseudo-science of eugenics, developed by Sir Francis Galton in 1883, focused on supporting both positive eugenics, or pro-natalist eugenics, and negative eugenics, or dysgenics. Pro-natalist eugenics encouraged "fit" people to marry and reproduce to continue evolving the ideal human—white, straight, healthy and uniquely abled, with good social and monetary status (middle to upper class). Dysgenics, in contrast, was invested in preventing the wrong people from reproducing and passing along hereditary ills which would subsequently negatively affect the country's social fabric.

The wrong people included poor folk, Black people, Indigenous peoples and people of colour, queer people, and anyone with a hereditary disability, including folk with cognitive disabilities like epilepsy, hysteria, or neurasthenia (a precursor to generalized anxiety), and those

with communicable diseases like tuberculosis. The “insane” or “idiotic” were segregated and institutionalized, leading to horrific sterilizations and political support for governmental marriage laws. The intersectional nature of eugenics ties it tightly to colonialism and nationalism. The concern was that those labelled “feeble-minded” were blessed with fecund reproductive abilities and would flood countries with social problems like “crime, prostitution, and unemployment” (Grekul et al. 362). In this way, social, mental, and moral ills were often connected and conflated. Historian Greta Jones highlights that “part of the reason for the rapid spread of eugenics was due to its ability, or apparent ability, to turn social generalisations into scientific categories” (82) that could be dealt with by controlling heredity and reproduction.

In Ireland in the late 19th and early 20th centuries colonially motivated eugenics was further complicated by religion, rural and urban demographics, and British colonialism. While a Dublin branch of the Eugenics Society didn’t succeed, the Belfast Eugenics Society campaigned from its inception in 1911 to 1915 to have Britain’s Mental Deficiency Act (MDA) extended to Ireland (Jones 87). The act allowed segregation of those deemed mentally insufficient through institutionalization in asylums. Physicians and statisticians who supported the extension of the MDA argued that “the percentage of mental deficiency overall in Ireland” was 0.57%; higher than in England and Wales, and Scotland (Jones 86). They called for eugenic policies like “forbidding of consanguineous marriages and of the marriages of the mentally unfit, state regulation of prostitution, temperance, and registration of the mentally unsound” (Jones 87).

Further, the Catholic church considered eugenics an act of charity to future generations, as long as it was confined to promoting marriages of “fit” individuals or segregating mentally deficient individuals in institutions, but it didn’t support more aggressive methods like steriliza-

tion (Jones 92-93). While Britain's MDA never passed in Ireland the political and social climate, especially in the cities, was friendly to eugenic ideas. Jones relates that Belfast and Dublin were battlegrounds for this issue as "it was the urban poor who were most feared by the eugenicist" (95). Supporters from the upper and middle classes often joined the larger London Eugenics Education Society. Prominent Irish members included W.B. Yeats, the Guinness family, and George Bernard Shaw.

James Joyce was not part of this group of pro-eugenic Irish writers and businessmen. By the beginning of support for eugenics movements in Ireland, around 1906, the Joyces had already moved from the country. However, their adopted home of Paris, France where Joyce wrote *FW* between 1923 and its ultimate publication in 1939 was also gripped by eugenic concerns.

The French Eugenics Society, created in 1912, was focused on positive eugenics (pro-natalist eugenics) to boost their declining population (Jones 82). At the same time, quality of offspring as well as quantity was important. William Schneider outlines how eugenics in France was based in a belief in neo-Lamarckism which focussed heavily on how environmentally stimulated change in species would be inherited by the next generation (270-271). This included everything from alcoholism and TB to syphilis and "variations in diet" (Schneider 271).

In 1924 the National Social Hygiene Office was created to end alcoholism, venereal disease, etc. through social programs that would support a growing population: better drinking water, better housing, and more milk for children. After establishing this office, the French Eugenics Society turned towards dysgenic measures. Most notably they instituted pre-marital exams to determine spousal fitness (Schneider 284). This was framed as "a protection of the rights of newborn children to be free from defects that might be passed on to them from their

parents” (Schneider 285), similar to the Irish Catholic church’s belief in “eugenic charity.” The French Eugenics Society combatted these problems from its inception until its dissolution in the 30s. Their dissolution coincided with the papal encyclical that denounced eugenics in 1930, though French pre-marital examination laws remained in place until after WWII. Schneider asserts that “the French agreed with Galton’s general goal of improving the human species...disagreement arose in the definition of what ‘improvement’ was and the means to achieve it” (290).

While Joyce seems to have embraced some Darwinian concepts in his use of language evolution and variability (Bowers), social Darwinism was not something he advocated for politically. This differentiates him from many modernist poets. Joyce’s contemporaries like Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, and T.S. Eliot, among others, supported what disability scholar Michael Davidson calls “biofuturism”: “ideas of biological perfection and racial purity that promise a better life through an improved gene pool” (15). Raymond Williams says of the modernist time period that “what emerges in the arts is a ‘cultural Darwinism,’ in which the strong and daring radical spirits are the true *creativity* of the race” (50). While he is referencing the playwright August Strindberg and Frederick Nietzsche, he also includes Yeats and Wyndham Lewis in this assessment.

There are many possible reasons why Joyce was not interested in eugenics, when his colleagues seem to be supportive. Genevieve Sartor connects the time period that Joyce was writing *FW* to the events that precipitated his daughter Lucia’s “mental instability” and subsequent institutionalization for schizophrenia. She remained institutionalized until her death in the 1980s. I return to the “catch-all” nature of schizophrenia in Chapter 4. Joyce was also politically socialist

with anarchist leanings, unlike Pound and Lewis whose Fascist commitments would have allied them with eugenic ideas.

It's also possible that Joyce's own negative experiences with neurasthenia (an anxiety disorder which was thought to be a gateway to other mental disorders) influenced him away from a pro-eugenic viewpoint. As Quirici argues, it is likely that the criticism Joyce receives for his work which frequently frames it as the product of a "disordered mind" prodded him to retaliate by embracing what his critics despised. Regardless of the reason, Joyce's linguistic choices throughout the text are blatantly dysgenic. While Shem fits most characteristics of a "deviant," I explain throughout this chapter that he serves as a corporal metaphor (Mitchell and Snyder 233) that exposes and intentionally exacerbates eugenic fears of inherited and contagious disabilities. By corporeal metaphor, I mean a character in a text in which disability is located to reveal something about society. At the same time, while Shem functions as a locus for Joyce's disability aesthetic, this aesthetic expands beyond Shem as a specific character to the non-words and non-linear structure of the *Wake* itself.

#### 1.8 Joyce's Unknown Variants: Tobin Siebers and Disability Aesthetics in Modern Art:

I begin by quoting at length something that Joyce said to the Polish writer, translator, and essayist Jan Parandowski. Parandowski met Joyce in Paris in 1937, two years before *FW* was published, and retrospectively published his impromptu dinner conversation with Joyce. He quotes Joyce as saying:

Perhaps it is madness to grind up words in order to extract their substance, *or to graft one onto another, to create crossbreeds, and unknown variants, to open up unsus-*

*pected possibilities for these words, to marry sounds which were not usually joined before, although they were meant for one another; to allow water to speak like water, birds to chirp in the words of birds, to liberate all sounds of rustling, breaking, arguing, shouting, cracking, whistling, creaking, gurgling – from their servile, contemptible role and to attach them to the feelers of expressions which grope for definitions of the undefined (emphasis mine, 141).*

The tenor of these sentences suggests that *Finnegans Wake* is a text that engages with eugenics, especially in the assertion that Joyce is “creat[ing] crossbreeds, and unknown variants... marry[ing] sounds which were not usually joined before” (Parandowski 141). I expand on Quirici’s assessment of Joyce’s divergent language by proposing that not only does his polyvalent “maimed” (W.C. Williams 85) language deconstruct the idea of a “normal” (Quirici 104) language, but that it *necessitates* “deviant” or “dysgenic” language for expressing the “inexpressible” (Parandowski 141). I will return to Joycean language as a whole in *FW*, but first I will elaborate on how Joyce frames Shem as a dysgenic character.

Why do these visceral reactions to the unreadable text use such hyperbolic language that mirrors responses to “objectionable bodies” (Quirici 104)? What is it about *Finnegans Wake* that makes some readers react with diagnostic disgust to a book that artistically breaks linguistic convention? These intense reviews are prime displays of literary-aesthetic nervousness. Modernist art is dependent on disability as an aesthetic, often without acknowledging the real lived experiences of the bodies being represented, as described by Tobin Siebers’ *Disability Aesthetics* and Ato Quayson’s *Aesthetic Nervousness*.

Siebers discussion of disability aesthetics in modern art laid the groundwork for subsequent aesthetic theories. Siebers asserts that “aesthetics tracks the sensations that some bodies feel in the presence of other bodies” (1) be they literal or artistic bodies. These sensations pinpoint moments of affect; Siebers says that “the senses revolt against some bodies, while other bodies please them. These responses represent the corporeal substrata on which aesthetic effects are based” (1). Aesthetics connects the metaphorical and material in that it produces a value judgement about what is considered beautiful that extends from literary and visual art into the material world and vice versa. How living breathing bodies feel in the presence of textual or artistic bodies affects other breathing bodies. Siebers asserts that some pre-modernist forms of art tried to remove embodiment, creating an idealist non-material aesthetic. Modernist corporeal art puts the body back into the equation, specifically in visual art, but also in literature. In Siebers’ assessment the disabled body has greatly contributed to a modern aesthetic. Siebers’ notion of disability aesthetics “names a critical concept that seeks to emphasize the presence of disability in the tradition of aesthetic representation” (2). Modern art adopted the disabled body and mind to the point that representations of these bodies became significantly aligned with the movement.

Shem’s artistic body, for example. He is labelled a “mental and moral defective” (*FW* 177), and a “drug and drunkenness addict” (*FW* 179). This Dublin-born “sham” (*FW* 177) is exactly what Irish proponents for eugenics were afraid of—a character that ought never to have been born, should be institutionalized, and should never procreate. Indeed, were he a real person, Shem might have died at birth. Such cases were not unheard of: in the US, public health officials supported Dr. Harvey Haiselden of Chicago, who from 1915-1918 allowed “at least six infants with conditions such as spina bifida and hydrocephalus to die after diagnosing them as defec-



tives” (Allen 98).

Siebers asserts that the disability aesthetics adopted by modern art values “physical and mental difference as a significant value in itself. It does not embrace an aesthetic taste that defines harmony, bodily integrity, and health as standards of beauty” (19). Because of this, disability aesthetics are not limited to images of disabled subjects or work by disabled artists, though it certainly can encompass them. What it does accomplish, Siebers says, is a shift in how people have thought about bodies in art and literature: “disability does not express defect, degeneration, or deviancy in modern art. Rather, disability enlarges our vision of human variation and difference, and puts forward perspectives that test presuppositions dear to the history of aesthetics” (3). Artists, writers, or musicians who use this aesthetic approach are motivated by a desire for disability as an aesthetic value, and persuade the audience to recognize the beauty of different forms of ability, perhaps changing previously held understandings of “disability” and “normality” in everyday life.

### 1.9 Aesthetic Nervousness: Building on Disability Aesthetics

However, the eugenic desire to remove or fix certain bodies who exist as deviations from the constructed norm extends into the literary-aesthetic sphere as the study of disability rhetoric presents. Mitchell and Snyder in their book *Narrative Prosthesis* propose that disability in prose literature is all too often used to fulfill prosthetic functions for the non-disabled. For example, “disability lends a distinctive idiosyncrasy to any characters that differentiates the character from the anonymous background of the ‘norm’” and “disability also serves as a metaphorical signifier of social and individual collapse” (222). Symbolic socio-cultural ills are located metaphorically

in the body of the disabled character. At the end of their usefulness, the disabled figure is often killed or cured to rid society of their ills.<sup>1</sup> These textual bodies have little to do with the lived experiences of actual disabled people, but instead are “corporeal metaphors” that serve to contain an “otherwise ephemeral concept within a corporeal essence” (Mitchell and Snyder 233) and to connect the literary-aesthetic sphere with real life.

It seems initially like the character of Shem functions like a “signifier of social and individual collapse,” rather than as a character that forces readers to reconsider what is aesthetically valuable. Shem is denied the opportunity to mate or marry (*FW* 422.30) because the portrait of him as an artist is a degenerate one: “one generally...hoped or at any rate suspected among morticians that he would early turn out badly, develop hereditary pulmonary T.B.” (*FW* 171.13). Tuberculosis was a sticking point for eugenicists—an example of a contagious and hereditary illness that required dysgenic measures to be eradicated. Shem experiences cognitive disabilities as well as “hereditary” illnesses like TB; he is a “semidemented zany” (*FW* 178.25) who has “bats in his belfry” (*FW* 179.27) and “was hardset to memorize more than a word a week” (*FW* 179.29).

Shaun, ranting about his brother, says “You let me tell you, with the utmost politeness, were very ordinarily designed, your birthwrong was, to fall in with Plan, as our nationals should, as all nationalists must” (*FW* 189.12-13). The plan for Shem to be a good Irish citizen was apparently for him to join the church “in a certain holy office” (*FW* 189.14) but instead he rejects this and becomes, in Shaun’s opinion, a “unfrillfrocked quackfrier” (*FW* 190.1). Although initially of “respectable stemming,” (*FW* 168.3) by rejecting the plan for his life which would have rendered

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<sup>1</sup> Mitchell and Snyder mention for example the disabled Captain Ahab from Melville’s *Moby Dick*, or the Tin Soldier from the story *The Steadfast Tin Soldier*, among others.

him a celibate priest and removed him from the hereditary line, Shem becomes dangerous, and must be contained.

Ato Quayson takes disability aesthetics further into the realm of disability in literature when he talks specifically about “aesthetic nervousness.” He keeps the definition of aesthetics that Siebers works with (the sensations and feelings that bodies feel in the presence of other bodies) and chooses “nervousness” to describe the feelings and sensations that able-bodied and neurotypical people often have when encountering disability: moments of unease and discomfort that remind them of their own tenuous corporeal existence. For example, in his introduction Quayson highlights various anxieties associated with disability as metaphors for multiple social ills: “The disabled body has historically invited, compelled, and incited a variety of responses in spite of whatever specific impairments may be at issue” (4). Many of these anxieties connect moral and racial impurity to disability, as I have outlined in the previous section regarding eugenics.

The pun on Shem’s birthright (“birthwrong”) recalls the connection to the Biblical Jacob—especially since in the paragraph before this Shaun is disparaging Shem’s “Irish stew” (189.9) and Jacob swaps Esau the firstborn’s birthright for stew, ostensibly making Jacob’s new position his “birthwrong,” since he gains it through use of a trick; the younger son subverts the older, distorting primogeniture. The pun also works on a eugenic level— Shem is a fantastically disabled immortal artist that serves as an image of what early 20th c western Europe fears: he is “semi-semitic” (190.2-3), with numerous disabilities, and all of this comes together to suggest that his birth was wrong: under eugenic laws the figure of Shem should never be born, and if

he listened to polite society he would remove himself from the world since he is a poor city dweller who has so far “groped through life at the expense of the taxpayers” (*FW* 181.34).

#### 1.10 Tracking Aesthetic Nervousness: It’s hereditary

For Quayson, this nervousness presents both in the actual and symbolic spheres: material reality and literary-aesthetic reality (14). Quayson notes three dimensions of aesthetic nervousness in a text: firstly in character exchanges—generally between disabled and non-disabled characters. How Shaun, Shem’s non-disabled twin brother, treats Shem is an example of this first dimension of aesthetic nervousness. Shaun calls him a “freak” (*FW* 423.2) who is rife with “iniquity” and ought to be “placed in irons into some drapery institution” (*FW* 421.1). As Shaun explains to his audience, if Shem continues living he must be removed from the gene pool: “He was down with the whooping laugh at the age of the loss of reason the whopping first time he prediseased me....That’s why he was forbidden tomato and was warmed off the ricecourse of marrimoney, under the Helpless Corpses Enactment” (*FW* 422.27-30). The “Helpless Corpses Enactment” uses the letters that make up the name of Shem and Shaun’s father HCE (Humphrey Chimpenden Earwicker). The enactment also may recall to the reader the Mental Deficiency Act passed in Britain that the Belfast Eugenics Society was attempting to pass in Ireland as well. The evocation of HCE reinforces that Shem’s condition is hereditary and must not be passed on. The mob obliges Shaun’s request by trapping Shem in a pub called the Haunted Inkbotle.

Secondly, aesthetic nervousness is present in formal elements of the text like plot, narrative, symbols and motifs (15), often, as Quayson points out, in physical “deformation” that stands in for social deformation (20). The plot of Shem being segregated by his community is an exam-

ple of this as the mob attempts to contain both physical, moral, and social ills by quarantining Shem. Shem is restricted from marriage and children, based on his “weirdness” and contagion as he is “prediseased” (Shem is both the origin of disease, and “predeceased” and predecessor) and Shaun is also at risk of having this disease pass to him. Shem is even institutionalized through his imprisonment in the Haunted Inkbottle (*FW* 181.31) which is where he is refused writing materials; he must stay in his “inkbattle house...in afar for the life” (*FW* 175.31).

This quarantine (segregation of someone with an illness) protects the public both from Shem’s disabled body and his self-narration. Historian Martin Pernick describes the connection between eugenics and public health: “eugenic segregation directly echoed the centuries-old effort to stop the spread of infections through quarantine. The term segregation itself first was used medically in the mid-19th century to mean ‘selective isolation’ or ‘quarantine’” (1769).

Finally, the last “dimension of aesthetic nervousness is that between the reader and the text” (Quayson 15) as a whole. Aesthetic nervousness forces the reader to look at “social attitudes to disability that themselves often remain unexamined in their prejudices and biases” (Quayson 15). While reading, they are interacting not only with fictional characters, but may be responding to social values represented by such characters, or present in other aspects of the text.

Underneath these prejudices and biases often sits fear and unease. When a non-disabled person encounters a disabled person, they may experience them as an Other that troubles their unconscious understanding of their own temporary able-bodiedness and disturbs their understanding of the construction of a “normal” body. Quayson suggests that disability in (visual or literary) art brings attention back to the body and its variety of forms, and that disability aesthetics in a text can also “short-circuit” (Quayson 19) ableist literary protocols that suggest how the

text should be read (ie. disability as emblematic of social ills). This translates into the reader's everyday reality: "Ultimately, aesthetic nervousness has to be seen as coextensive with the nervousness regarding the disabled in the real world. The embarrassment, fear, and confusion that attend the disabled in their everyday reality is translated in literature and the aesthetic field" (Quayson 19).

Even though literary characters, narratives, symbols, or plot devices are linguistically constructed, readers still might *feel* or *sense* in their bodies emotions that illuminate how the reader feels about disability in the real world. Disability representation in a text has a foot in both the material and metaphorical spheres in this way, and is never solely just a literary value. Quayson explains that disability aesthetics help the reader understand how "processes" of framing disability occur in reality, and their subsequent "ethical implications" (24), since real world understandings of disability are often "refracted" (Quayson 14) by literature, making them easier to comprehend.

This isn't to say that these emotions or sensations experienced by immersion in the literary-aesthetic sphere are exactly equivalent to those produced by real life interactions; rather, they gesture towards or remind the reader of such sensations. Indeed, Davidson echoes both Siebers and Quayson by asserting that while "Modernist abstraction or atonality are not in any way equivalent to disability...they share a common root in embodied, sensory experience" (9). Davidson argues that like modern art, music, and writing, modernist disabled bodies in art disrupted what had been considered "normal" or "beautiful": "This defamiliarizing feature of disability is also the defamiliarizing quality that we identify with Modernist art—music that challenges traditional harmony, painting that disrupts single point perspective, narrative that refuses

chronological sequence” (9). Considering this similarity, reviews that use disability symbolically to describe *FW*, a text that challenges traditional ideas of narrative and linguistics, are unsurprising.

### 1.11 Shem refuses to throw himself into the Liffey:

As I have outlined in the above reviews, these sensory experiences can lead a reader to react to the defamiliarization of disability with fear for degenerate, deviant, bodies (both symbolic and material) and for the contagion that they pose to public health, especially in a context that is influenced by eugenics, and social hygiene like the period in which Joyce was composing *FW*. However, These defamiliarizing sensory experiences can also encourage readers to deconstruct and disrupt their unexamined biases and expand their understanding of what it means to be human. They can “encourage us to lift our eyes from the reading of literature to attend more closely to the implications of the social universe around us” (Quayson 31), since, as Quayson says, when disability is represented “it automatically restores an ethical core to the literary-aesthetic domain while also invoking the boundary between the real and the metaphysical or otherworldly” (22).

For example, while Shem exists as a corporeal metaphor in *FW*, I argue that Joyce uses the aesthetic nervousness his character causes to force his readers to confront ableist norms. Joyce does not follow convention by killing or curing Shem of his disabilities; the character refuses to die and though segregated retains his artistic generativity. Joyce states that the “fraid born fraud diddled even death” (*FW* 171.21) and that he “foiled to be killed” (*FW* 423.1) to the disappointment of his detractors. Shem stubbornly remains: “though he fell heavily and locally into debit, not even then could such an antinomian be true to type. He would not put fire to his

cerebrum; he would not throw himself in Liffey; he would not explaud himself with pneuman-tics; he refused to saffrocake himself with a sod” (*FW* 171.17-20).

Joyce refuses to allow the “societal ills” that Shem embodies to be “healed” by his re-moval. Instead they are exacerbated by his consistent joyous presence. The title of this chapter “Odds without Ends” comes from a line in the *Wake* that could equally apply to the text’s linguis-tical polyvalent construction, its unending circular narrative, or Shem himself: “We may come, touch and go, from atoms and ifs but we’re presurely destined to be odd’s without ends” (*FW* 454.16-18). Shem’s is the “odd” body that exists unendingly and as the previously mentioned reviews display, some readers aren’t comfortable with that. However, Shem has come down with the “whooping laugh” (*FW* 422.26) instead of the “whooping cough”—it is his joy that is dan-gerously contagious.

I argue that *Finnegans Wake* provokes aesthetic nervousness through a combination of the first and final dimensions that Quayson illustrates—the first dimension through in-text char-acter interactions with disabled characters like Shem, and the third through the discomfort of the non-normative words, sentences, and paragraphs that make up the *Wake*, as well as the lack of plot or narrative structure. Joyce’s contemporary readers and reviewers reacted to his dysgenic disability aesthetic, as I have described in the previous sections, by diagnosing Joyce with multi-ple symbolic disabilities and suggesting that *FW* is symptomatic of them in multiple ways.

One could argue that these reactions simply portray discomfort or confusion when con-fronted with impermeable poetry; they don’t necessarily have anything to do with sensations or feelings that come from representations of disability or deviance. However, I have displayed just a few of an overwhelming amount of passionate, visceral responses that denigrate Joyce diagnos-



tically using language that describes disabled, “deviant” bodies and minds to frame their confusion. These reviewers’ linguistic choices demonstrate that their sensations and feelings are attuned to negative depictions of disability; that as Quirici says “critics who bristle at Joyce’s unfamiliar textual forms write, instead, about objectionable *bodily* forms” (104). I suggest that “aesthetic nervousness” or discomfort can be just one possible reaction to impermeable techniques in poetry.

Indeed, as I noted at the beginning of this chapter, Bernstein lists many things that impermeable poetry is or does. Specifically relevant for *FW* might be: “interruptive, transgressive, undecorous, anticonventional, unintegrated, fractured, fragmented...repellent” (“A Poetics” 29). This list shifts between things that inaccessible poetry *is* (fragmented, fractured, undecorous) and how antiabsorptive poetry *acts* on the reader to induce different feelings and sensations (boredom, attention scattering, distraction). I suggest “aesthetic nervousness” is an acceptable addition to this list.

But I do acknowledge that it’s difficult to determine what aesthetic nervousness looks like in the life of a reader. What exactly are people reacting to and how are these reactions organized? How does this transference from the literary-symbolic to the actual realm occur? The above reviews suggest that many reactions are possible, and offer some examples. In the next half of this chapter I look more in depth at reactions to Joyce’s disability aesthetics in the real world, and outline some more ethically productive ways of “transaccidentat[ing]” (*FW* 185.2) aesthetic nervousness into real world change.

As I outlined previously, eugenics, interrelated concerns regarding racial and moral degeneration, and “social hygiene,” the ideological successor of eugenics is essential to notice in

such reviews. Quirici says that in criticisms of Joyce's earlier book, *Ulysses*, most readers are not even reacting to disability but to examples of bodies engaging in "low" acts like using the toilet, masturbation, etc. (91). Thus, Quirici posits that aesthetic nervousness can be prompted by many acts associated with the body. She highlights this in the reviews she's reported, saying that it "is clear that the logic of aesthetic nervousness applies even without the presence of disability" (91). What she means by "nervousness" in this case, is the fear or disgust that contemporary readers of Joyce felt in the presence of potential "corruption."

She argues that this is why audiences diagnose Joyce with varied physical, mental, and moral disabilities. She suggests that "There is a political dimension to disability aesthetics, and in Joyce's case it speaks back to the degeneration paranoia of his own reviewers" (103). Disability functioned as a metaphor that covered a multitude of ills. These metaphors "stood in for complaints that had little or nothing to do with the body" (Quirici 102) in actuality but were demonstrative of anything thought to cause societal corruption. As Quayson suggests there are moments where the literary-aesthetic sphere disturbs material reality, leaving historical residue (19). I offer a short reading of this disturbance in the *Ulysses* court case: *People vs. Anderson and Heap*.

Sections of *Ulysses* were serialized before publication in the United States. In 1920, the public brought publishers of the small literary magazine *The Little Review*, Margaret Caroline Anderson and Jane Heap, to court for publishing the "Nausicaa" section of *Ulysses* in which the main character Leopold Bloom ejaculates in his pants after watching a disabled young woman, Gerty. This section violated US "obscenity laws" set under the precedent of *R. v. Hicklin* which stated that no one could publish anything that had a "tendency . . . to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences, and into whose hands a publication of this

sort may fall” (*R v. Hicklin* as qtd in Gillers 218). Whose minds were in fact “open to such immoral influences” is murky; the original complaint came from the father of a young girl who had read the section and was shocked. Further, while the complaint was made regarding sexual depravity, there is also a question of how integral Gerty’s disability was to this disapproval. While this is beyond the scope of my paper, I refer the reader to Dominika Bednarska and Angela Lea Nemecek.

John Quinn, friend of Ezra Pound and the lawyer who defended Anderson and Heap, used a series of interesting tactics to support the text. First, he insisted that *Ulysses* is so obscure that the average reader wouldn’t understand it. When a judge refuted this, Quinn then said that if someone did understand the text, they would acknowledge it as art: not “‘filth’ that corrupts but the kind of ‘filth’ that “brace[s] and deter[s]” (Quinn as qtd in Gillers 255) the reader from lasciviousness. The implication here is that metaphorically exposing the reader to “filth” within the context of good art will increase their “moral” immune system. According to Quinn either the reader understands the text to be art, and is not corrupted, or the reader doesn’t understand anything and therefore still can’t be corrupted. However, Quinn argued that those vulnerable to such influences are not “the average man or woman”; he does allow room for the corruption of the “degenerate on one side, or a convent bred saphead on the other” (Quinn as qtd in Gillers 255). The suggestion is that such people are more susceptible to the obscenity in a text.

Further, the personhood of Joyce mattered in this argument. Quinn contrasted the “strong hard filth of a man like Joyce,” Swift, or Rabelais, with the beauty of the queer “flabby” Oscar Wilde (as qtd in Giller 255). Anderson herself asserted that the “only issue under consideration was the kind of person James Joyce was, that the determining factor in aesthetic and moral

judgment was always the personal element, that obscenity per se doesn't exist" (as qtd in Gillers 263).

This "personal element" was invoked in the final ruling which was not overturned until the 1930s. The presiding judge McInerney asserted that such writing was "the work of a disordered mind" (qtd. in Gillers 265) and therefore, *Ulysses* was obscene. In this way and in this context, Joyce's writing can be read as contagious—the filth that comes from a "disordered mind" could physically affect other vulnerable bodies and minds. While I am using this as a metaphor to describe these fears, proponents against *Ulysses* viewed this as a verifiable social and material process—this is an example of Quayson's third dimension of aesthetic nervousness: sensations or feelings of the reading body provoked by the text. The bodies symbolically constructed by both Quinn and Justice McInerney are ones that could be literally and literarily affected by Joyce's words.

Joyce takes advantage of this dis-ease. In the previously referenced interview with Parandowski I highlighted what I read as Joyce embracing and employing these criticisms to offer the reader new dysgenic possibilities. I return to this interview now. Joyce acknowledges that his creative process and the resulting text is "perhaps madness" as he is creating "crossbreeds" and "unknown variants" (Parandowski 141). Joyce is intentionally "marrying" sounds together that have never been put together before. The language of crossbreeding, marriage, and unknown variants acknowledges the presence of a pro-natalist eugenic preference that Joyce rejects. Shaun mirrors the discontent Joyce's critics have with his text when he describes Shem telling a crowd of listeners his history: "the whole lifelong swine story of his entire low cornaille existence" (*FW* 172.19-20). Shem is "unconsciously explaining, for inkstands, with a meticulosi-

ty bordering on the insane, the various meanings of all the different foreign parts of speech he misused” (*FW* 172.34-36). Joyce clearly illustrates this doctored language—Shem the “doctator” strikes again (*FW* 169.22)—in sections that show Shem’s “cerebrated” (*FW* 420.19) writing. Joyce uses Shem as a “radiating point” (Quayson 208) for Joyce’s own “misused” speech throughout *FW*. As I explained in my introduction, disability aesthetics “radiate” to permeate the entire text, making it difficult to analyze sections unaffected by disability. This is uniquely true in *FW* because of Joyce’s choice to establish Shem as his textual reflection: Shem’s “misused” speech that hits the inkstands serially can be read as Joyce’s *WIP*; the diagnoses heaped on Shem have been attributed to Joyce, who is now taking advantage of his audience’s aesthetic nervousness.

Shem begins to write while in exile at the House O’Shea / House O’Shame, also called “The Haunted Ink Bottle” (*FW* 181.30) the pub that he escapes to and is trapped in at gunpoint by the public in an effort to segregate him (*FW* 178). The reader follows Shem the artist, creating his “usylesly unreadable Blue Book of Eccles,” (*FW* 178.25-26) (which sounds suspiciously like “*Ulysses*”) and writing “septuncial lettertrumpets honorific, highpitched, erudite, neoclassical which he so loved as patricianly to manuscibe after his name” (*FW* 178. 21-22), recalling *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* to the reader, Joyce’s “neoclassical” semi-autobiographical novel.

A few pages later, Joyce meticulously lists the parts of speech he (and Shem) have misused. The floor of the “lair”(*FW* 182.9) that Shem is trapped in is “persianly literatured” (*FW* 182.10) with parts of speech: “burst loveletters, telltale stories...alphybetyformed verbage... ahems and ahas, imeffable tries at speech unsayllabled” (*FW* 182.12-13); idiomatic phrases:

“once current puns, quashed quotatoes...seedy ejaculations...spilt ink” (*FW* 182.20-22); and “war moans, special sighs”: “ahs ohs ous sis jas jos gias neys thaws sos yeses and yeses and yeses” (*FW* 183.1-2). Joyce says of these littered words that “if one has the stomach to add the breakages, upheavals, distortions, inversions...one stands...a fair chance of actually seeing the whirling dervish” (*FW* 183.3-6) that is Shem. By making idiomatic parts of speech part of the refuse on Shem’s floor and suggesting that interacting with such a text is only beneficial if the reader has the “stomach” for it, Shem’s language that he uses and plays with is a “pivotal point” (Quayson 208) of Joyce’s disability aesthetic for the text.

Shem is a plagiarist and Shaun does not consider him a proper artist. Shaun asks, “who can say how many pseudostylic shamanias, how few or how many of the most venerated public impostures, how very many piously forged palimpsests slipped in the first place by this morbid process from his pelagiarist pen?” (*FW* 181.36-182.1-3). To protect the public from Shem’s “shamania”—a word in which we find “sham,” “mania,” and “shaman”—Shaun denies his brother writing materials (*FW* 183-184), and since he can’t leave his den without facing a revolver (*FW* 178.2-7), Shem begins “writing the mystery of himself in furniture” (*FW* 183.9-10), and he needs to get creative. He creates “indelible ink” (*FW* 184.26): a mixture of his own shit and piss, and then “the first til last alchemist wrote over every square inch of the only foolscap available, his own body” (*FW* 184.35-36).

Shem’s creation emerges from an act of decomposition; both are intrinsically personal. The “squidself” (*FW* 185.6-7) of Shem, “inks” his story into being on his own body, although in time his excrement becomes “doriangrayer” (*FW* 185.8) and more revealing of his own moral degeneracy. For example, Shaun suggests that Shem finds sexual pleasure in his inky creation.

Shaun accuses Shem of: “shemming amid everyone’s repressed laughter to conceal your scatchophily by mating, like a thoroughpaste prosodite, masculine monosyllables of the same numerical mus” (*FW* 189.35-37). “Scatchophily” can be connected to “scatophile”—one who gets pleasure from contact with feces, and also “catch” (contagion), and “scratch”—the motion pen upon paper, or a person itching from the pox.

This dysgenic “mating” of “masculine monosyllables” together is similar to how Joyce frames his writing process to Parandowski—these matings, or word marriages are prohibited and betray a degenerate love of “filth” as Shem and Joyce both decompose, and reform words. The mad word marriages that Joyce officiates will not necessarily produce translatable or even acceptable offspring; he is offering the “madness” of his text to be something new: “feelers of expressions which grope for definitions of the undefined” (Parandowski 141), and something better, as Joyce intends to “liberate all sounds... from their servile, contemptible role” (141).

Far from marriages governed by eugenic tests of spousal fitness, Joyce’s practice of liberation speaks to the generativity of these word marriages, which I have been arguing can be read as linguistically deviant and aesthetically dysgenic. Parandowski describes *FW*’s “Tower of Babel” section using such language. The Polish writer refers to the section as “words entwined... in some kind of fantastic linguistic sodomy” (141), saying that until he spoke to Joyce face to face, he’d “almost decided that this work was the product of a mad-man” (140). Here insanity is connected to queerness: words engaging in conventionally “unnatural” carnality emerge from a disabled and degenerate mind. Prohibited from mating as a deviant, abnormal body, Shem (re)produces linguistically by combining masculine monosyllables: words that shouldn’t fit together,

double ends joined. Such word unions are queer events that deny pro-natalist eugenics as they can't produce good stock.

It is not surprising to encounter queerness as another sort of "corruption." Like Davidson points out, degeneracy as a modernist concept linguistically covers and conflates many "abnormalities," be they physical, moral, or social ills: "In each case, normative identity is produced through bodies deemed invalid according to some standard of physical and cognitive purity" (8). Queerness is among these invalidities. In the next few sections I use the shared histories of queerness and neurodivergence described by Remi Yergeau's concept of "neuroqueer" to consider Shem and his shitty narrative power.

#### 1.12 Shem's neuroqueering rhetorics:

Shem's (and by extension Joyce's) acts of creative decomposition introduce the idea of shit as a rhetorical device. Shem's "scatchophily" (*FW* 189.35), though presumably hidden inside the Haunted Ink Bottle, is presented to the reader to make sense of. Expansive critiques of Joyce locate social fears of degeneration or deviance in everything from schizophrenia to queerness to neuro-vomit and the list of abnormal bodies that eugenics sought to eradicate and control for the sake of public health is lengthy. The aesthetic nervousness prompted by the depiction of Shem's "low" acts (Quirici 91) may seem generalized, but reactions to autistic coprophagia (the smearing or eating of feces) are similar. Without offering a diagnosis of Shem's behaviour, I engage Autist, disability scholar, and rhetorician Remi Yergeau's waste rhetorics in their book *Authoring Autism: on rhetoric and neurological queerness*. I am not suggesting that Shem is an autistic character, but that Autistic scholarship has meaningful ways to theorize what rhetorical power



Shem's shit-writing might have for both 20th c and contemporary readers.

As a portmanteau denoting “the relationships between the neurodivergent and the queer” (Yergeau *Authoring Autism* 92) Yergeau's term “neuroqueer,” claims the battleground of rhetoric for autistic people and other neurodivergent folk who have been excluded from the practice of rhetoric. Recall that “neurodivergent” is opposed to “neurotypical” which denotes someone who does not have a cognitive disability. Any individual with a cognitive disability, from autism to depression, can be identified as neurodivergent. “Neuroqueer” draws on the shared histories of neurodivergent and queer folk at the hands of the medical industry. Yergeau explains that autism and queerness are so entangled in nosological history that they are webbed together: “madness and mental disability are inextricable from queer histories” (*Authoring Autism* 30).

Yergeau links neurodivergence and queerness to combat rhetorical theories that deny autistic people personhood. The stories told about autistic people often do not include room for meaning made by autists. Yergeau asks “how to be a persuading body when one's body has been storied as unpersuasive, as inhuman and deadly?” (*Authoring Autism* 6). While the rhetoric of compulsory able-bodiedness consistently attempts to erase neurodivergent voices, Yergeau pushes back against the othering of neurodivergent ways of being. They call for recognizing and valuing autistic self-narration and assert that this narration is unabashedly queer: “to author autistically is to author queerly and contrarily” (*Authoring Autism* 6). Neuroqueer can be an adjective and a verb, and it “fucks with rhetoric” (Yergeau *Authoring Autism* 92) by insisting that neurological queerness is a valuable rhetoric in itself.

Although neuroqueer doesn't have a complete definition, Yergeau sees it as an identity based on active disruption of normalcy, saying that “neuroqueer subjects are verbed forms, more

accurately and radically conceived as cunning movements, not neuronal states or prefigured genetic codes” (*Authoring Autism* 27). Neuroqueer subjects are active, and they practice neuroqueering the world around them: for example actively disrupting the privileging of normal embodied forms, linguistic or otherwise.

I read Shem as a character that practices neuroqueering by writing the “story of himself” (*FW* 183.9-10) in excrement, especially because the character sits at the intersection of queerness and neurodivergence in his writing. I highlight Shem’s riddle: “When is a man not a man?” (*FW* 169.5). The answer of “sham” (*FW* 169.24) echoes people who view autism as an overwhelming “body snatcher” (Yergeau *Authoring Autism* 16); autism is thought to irrevocably erase the personhood of a loved one upon diagnosis, leaving them a body but not a person. This denial of personhood (when is a person not a person?) is a rhetorically framed cyclical argument. Yergeau explains how positioning rhetoric as a marker of personhood and then denying that autistics have rhetorical aim and intention works to strip them of their narrative power: “For as many topoi as rhetoric proclaims to be central, there are as many deficits and symptoms that render the autistic as rhetorical antonym. In this way, the rhetorical degradation that attends autism is planar, multiple” (36).

Likewise, Shem is “not a man” (*FW* 169.5) but a “sham” (*FW* 169.24) with little rhetorical intention or *ethos*—his writing is “cerebrated” (*FW* 420.19) and must be “pelagiarist” (*FW* 181.3). The fact that Shem is writing with his own waste on the “foolscap” (*FW* 184.36) of his own body suggests that what emerges from Shem is not rhetoric, but abstract filth without intention. How could such waste be generative?

Why does Joyce choose excrement as Shem's ink? Since Joyce uses Shem as a parody of his own criticisms, one can read this choice as poking fun at the quality of his own writing, but it also extremely personal. As Yergeau asks: "what might autistic shit signify?" (*Authoring Autism* 15). Is there potential narrative or testimonial power in shit, and if so, who gets to shape the narrative surrounding such shitty experiences? The residue of autism (or autistic shit, as Yergeau points out) is normally humanized, narrated, and framed by parents and caregivers instead of the autistic person themselves. The experiences of the parent or caregiver who must control the autistic child's body is prioritized over the story of the child that smears waste on the walls, erasing the idea of autistic as rhetorician with an intention (Yergeau *Authoring Autism* 3-4).

In *FW*, Shaun is the character that is mediating Shem's narrative. Shaun diagnoses his twin as "weird," (*FW* 422.28) is responsible for Shem's segregation and his lack of other writing tools and is the impetus for Shem writing with his own "ink." Segregated and prevented from communicating, Shem in his body-writing aggressively combats this de-personing by making his writing as personal as possible. Shem uses his "ink" rhetorically as a last resort for communication and protection: "the first til last alshemist wrote over every square inch of the only foolscap available, his own body, still by its corrosive sublimation one continuous present tense integument slowly unfolded all...cyclewheeling history" (*FW* 184.35-36-185.1-2). "Integument" a word which Joyce leaves whole, denotes a covering, or a tough outer layer, like armour. The "sham" of his disabled body which renders him "impersonal" is also integral to an act of aggressive creation and self-defense. Shem thus actively engages in neuroqueer narrativity that reinforces his personhood, and highlights the other possibility that Quayson says disability in a text offers. Instead of viewing dysgenic rhetoric or processes in the text as anxiety inducing, certain

readers can find pleasure in the metaphorically contagious, disabled body of Shem that aggressively creates, and similarly the “disordered” language that creates him.

Yergeau suggests that readers must recognize the space for intention that shit might hold for an autistic communicator: “What if childhood shit-smearing were read as autistic communication instead of autistic behaviour?” (*Authoring Autism* 16). Shem’s use of his body to write on his body combatively asserts his narrative power. Joyce offers the reader the opportunity to read Shem’s writing as an act of self-defense which perpetuates his defiant dysgenic immortality.

After his unfolding of “cyclewheeling history” (*FW* 185.2) Shaun reiterates that Shem is “transaccidentated through the slow fires of consciousness” from “his own individual person life unlivable...into a dividual chaos, perilous, potent, common to allflesh, human only, mortal” through these words that will “not pass away” (*FW* 185.2-5) but continue to grow darker on Shem’s body. Shem’s insistent “unlivable” (*FW* 185.2) (according to eugenicists) life refutes the idea that the eradication of disability is possible or desirable. Shem is characterized as the “first and last alshemist” (*FW* 184.35) who transforms his waste into communication, and also “transaccidentated” (*FW* 185.2) (similar to “transubstantiates”) his body into something more. While “transaccidentated” implies that Shem’s transformation of the self into the “continuous present tense” is “accidental” or unintentional, I point out that this section is written in the voice of Shaun, who seeks to control Shem’s body and narrative.

Shem’s “alshemy” figures him as both an alchemist and a priest, and precipitates his eternality. This “cyclewheeling history” (*FW* 185.2) attunes to the cyclical nature of Joyce’s time book, inspired by Viconian cycles, but functions in a permanent present tense, at least for Shem’s disabled, generative body: “this exists that isits after having been said” (*FW* 185.8-9). The con-

tinuous present tense of Shem's immortal disabled body, refusing to die, places him in the unique position of generative creator, narrator, and rhetor until the "rending of the rocks" (*FW* 169.24), endlessly resistant to "acts of charity" for future generations that would segregate, sterilize, and remove disabled and deviant bodies from the present and the future. At the same time, through the insistently personal practice of shit-writing Shem becomes more than just his "own individual person life" (*FW* 185.2) until he is representative of a bigger, "potent," "allflesh," "chaos" (*FW* 185.5): the chaos of Joyce's divergent language.

### 1.13 Minor/Micro-Organisms: Affection/Infection:

The Joyce that excretes, that officiates and mates "masculine monosyllables," that vomits, that pours out "contaminated" chaotic matter is the Joyce of moral, psychological and physical degeneration. The reader who consumes the text of *FW* within such a context is at risk.

Many readers and scholars describe *FW* using biological or pathological language. Early Joyce supporter Marcel Brion proposes that Joyce's writing restores a biological rhythm and that "it sometimes seems that a page of Joyce is a strange vibration of cells, a swarming of the lowest Brownian movements under the lens of the microscope" (17). David Hayman asks the reader to consider that each of Joyce's sentences function as a minor organism that "in spite of total union with its context...has a life of its own" (153). He says that looking at these sentences is like looking at the vivisection of such an organism through a microscope. Finally, Dirk Van Hulle's genetic conception of Joyce's "vaccination technique" suggests that the process of writing the *Wake* for Joyce was through decomposition of various external material which then underwent "conscious recombination" ("A James Joyce Digital Library" 235). With many illustrations of Joyce's

work as microbe, virus, and strange vibrating cells, it's not surprising that many critics labelled his writing as contagious given advances in germ theory at the time. Quirici includes in her paper one review of *Ulysses* that frame the contents of the book as literally emetic: "The spectre of contagion underpins many responses to Joyce" (90).

Joyce wrote just after the Spanish Flu. Germ theory was still developing through the work of Louis Pasteur and Robert Koch. Martin Bock explains Joyce's use of germ theory in *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*. Disease was newly known to be spread through germs in human secretions, including dust, instead of through the air as previously thought. Bock discusses this in *Dubliners* and specifically considers dust in *Eveline* and consumption in *The Dead*. A number of references to both appear in *Ulysses*: "contagion and dust, sputum and phlegm...that specifically link dust and disease, appear throughout *Ulysses*" (33). Bock suggests that the "paradox of affection/infection...is an organizing motif in Joyce's work and typifies his vision of the whole Irish social organism, a constant intertwining of love and death, of human touch and contamination" (25).

Further, the human body with its various holes and orifices would have registered in Joyce's time as the holes through which contagion could exit and enter. Bock asserts that "Joyce was more interested in germ theory than in the disease itself; and this is corroborated by his metaphoric use of hemiplegia, paresis, and general paralysis of the insane (GPI) to diagnose the moral or spiritual paralysis of Dublin" (25). I extend this essential discussion to *Finnegans Wake*, which Bock does not get to in his essay.

The human body with holes in it is a vulnerable image. Joyce's interest in germ theory would likely have extended to all human secretions—we can extrapolate that the fear, disgust,

and subsequent institutionalization of Shem within *FW* has as much to do with his words as his material: both the shit and piss “ink” he’s writing with, and his disabled dysgenic body.

This is specifically because the text *is* his body, and he is writing it with his own excrement, which by this time period would have been seen as a contagious and dangerous material, beyond merely disgusting. This tangle of body and narrative in *FW* connects eugenic rhetoric and public health. For example, “blood, the age-old metaphor for heredity, became identified as a vehicle for infection as well. Having ‘bad blood’ meant you were contaminated and contaminating,” (Pernick 1769).

Shem is both contaminated and contaminating, which leads Shaun and the other characters to segregate him. This speaks to the aesthetic nervousness that Quayson describes as the “first dimension” anxiety on the part of the characters towards a disabled character. However, by making Shem a “portrait of the artist” Joyce intentionally compares himself to Shem, and Shem’s writing to Joyce’s writing. Recalling Quayson’s ideas about aesthetic nervousness in light of Shem’s filthy, contagious, body is important because like Shem, Joyce is writing “filth.” Because the reactions of Joyce’s contemporary readers intentionally materialize Joyce’s writing (ie., *Ulysses* as literally corrupting), the idea that this filth could be infectious and cause moral, physical, or mental degeneration is a real possibility for his readers.

Years later, sections of *Finnegans Wake* categorized as insanity—the mumblings of madmen, the language of the madhouse, or a schizophrenic mind—still echoed Judge McInerney’s accusations that they emerged from a “disordered mind” and could cause corruption, infection, or illness if not properly understood, or guarded against.

Joyce reworked contemporary criticisms into the text itself, specifically in Shem's character: the artist denigrated using eugenic language. In a context that took eugenics seriously, where the "mentally deficient" (including those suffering from neurasthenia, like Joyce) could be easily institutionalized, the various clinical symptoms his critics diagnose him with are important both metaphorically and materially. While it was unlikely that Joyce as an already famous author would have experienced anything more dire than censorious gossip, these critiques have real world consequences. For example, a lack of revenue from US publishers who were too frightened of fines or jail time to publish *Ulysses*. The aesthetic nervousness that many of Joyce's critics experience while reading *Finnegans Wake* exemplifies concerns for social and public health, which makes his recycling of these reviews into an anti-eugenic text so prescient.

Joyce's "vaccination technique" "incorporat[es] a bit of the harmful matter to strengthen the immune system of his 'Work in Progress'" (Van Hulle "A James Joyce Digital Library" 238). This "vaccine" tells Joyce's critics that not only he is aware of their criticisms, but is interested in using this response to further disorder his work. Quirici argues that the disabled body of Shem serves to actively and intentionally unnerve or disgust: "Shem, a proud degenerate, is a revisionary portrait of the artist that asserts the generativity of the deformed, disabled, degenerate body" (85). As Quirici invaluablely points out, Shem's dysfunctions are presented through a poetic structure that deviates from the norm by being simultaneously not-readable and infinitely readable. This is where Quirici's analysis ends, and where my discussion of aesthetic nervousness continues. As I have asserted, it is not just the character of Shem that Joyce uses to "vaccinate" his work.



This metaphor of vaccination intrigues because while logically sound when Van Hulle explains it, usually the vaccine teaches the body to recognize harmful matter and get rid of it. The earliest and most rudimentary inoculation techniques were established in the late 1700s (Allen 98). A vaccine is “a substance that introduces a whole or partial version of a pathogenic microorganism into the body in order to train the immune system to defend itself when the organism threatens to cause an infection through natural means” (Allen 14). At the turn of the century, vaccines were beginning to be more popular as a method to support public health.

But how do we get the move in public health and social hygiene from eugenics to vaccination, when a typical response to public health based social programs was that they were allowing too many “unfit” people to live and disrupting natural selection? Historian Martin Pernick asserts that eugenics supporters arguing for public health initiatives in early 1900s America made the case that childhood diseases often wiped out fit “stock” as often as unfit children. The “fit” children might not have hereditary resistance to such diseases, even if they had other genetically desirable traits (Pernick 1768) and these children needed to be protected.

Further, some eugenicists believed that contagious and infectious diseases could be inherited. Pernick suggests that this is partly due to etymological links between contagion and heredity: “infections were caused by germs; inheritance was governed by germ plasm...both types of germs enabled disease to propagate and grow, to spread contamination from the bodies of the diseased to the healthy” (1769), thereby infecting the body politic with more unfit stock.

The two disciplines also shared a preventative orientation that eventually hoped to eradicate disease, illness, and disability for good. For example, the US Supreme Court ruling in the 1905 *Jacobson v. Massachusetts* case which asserted that forced vaccination could prevent a

public epidemic was used to justify sterilization as a preventative public health measure in the *Buck v. Bell* case in 1927. The case argued for the sterilization of the “imbecile” Carrie Buck, who’d given birth to a daughter out of marriage. It was later discovered that she was raped. The judge in this case drew directly on the 1905 vaccination precedent, saying: “The principle that sustains compulsory vaccination is broad enough to cover cutting the Fallopian tubes” (Supreme Court of the US 1927). As historian Arthur Allen puts it “the collective well-being of society outweighed individual choice” (99).

To describe Joyce’s strategy of “recombining” his negative reviews into *FW* as vaccination doesn’t quite fit. While *FW* does become “stronger” for it, it is not in the direction of “public health” that his reviewers would have him move. Joyce did not just use his vaccination technique to redistribute degenerative criticism through the character of Shem, but intentionally created a text that uses techniques of disorder and de-composition to destabilize and discomfort his readers. Instead of a vaccination that produces immunity, Joyce intends to maximize the spread of his “germ.” The pathogenic organism that Joyce incorporates into *FW* is eugenic rhetoric that positions him as deviant. However, Joyce instead weaponizes the aesthetic nervousness of his readers by exposing them to the very thing that they are fearful of: a writer who employs contagious ideas to infect and change the reader.

#### 1.14 The Ideal Insomniac:

It is interesting to note that meeting the *person* of James Joyce had disabused Parandowski of the idea that Joyce is insane—it is only Joyce’s aesthetic, his art, that illustrates fantastic deviance. This defense of the person of Joyce follows a similar trajectory to Quinn’s defense tac-

tics in the *Ulysses* trials, although Anderson argues that he doesn't go far enough in defending either the "quality of Joyce's mind" (in Giller 263) or the psychology behind Joyce's methods. Frustrated by a judge who didn't want to hear about the author of the section in question but was focused on the writing itself, Anderson says: "I nearly rose from my seat to cry out that the only issue under consideration was the kind of person James Joyce was, that the determining factor in aesthetic and moral judgment was always the personal element, that obscenity *per se* doesn't exist" (in Giller 263).

These reactions, unlike many of the ones I previously shared, disconnect Joyce's authorial body from the "symptoms" of the text. In cases like this, disability and deviance in the text does not induce visceral sensations in the reader, but this is only because they understand Joyce's body to be "whole" or "normal"—the "quality of his mind" is one that produces "strong hard filth" (in Giller 255) instead of a writer like Oscar Wilde. The idea that art could be degenerate and corrupting is not questioned, but according to these writers, it is not Joyce that is writing such art.

In 1934, the *People vs Anderson-Heap* was overturned. *Ulysses* could be printed in the United States, because it was finally recognized as art. In a postmodern 21st c western context, literary obscenity laws do not exist. As I have explored in this chapter, critics reactions to the text that display aesthetic nervousness are contextually bound to fears of dysgenics leading to societal degeneration. At the same time—the reader is obviously context bound. Are readers that experience *FW* now still reacting to the dysgenic aesthetic that Joyce constructed for this antiabsorptive text? It seems unlikely, since most reader reactions today don't display the same aesthetic nervousness towards concerns of moral and social degeneration. Instead they more often lament the

opacity of Joyce's abnormal language. The impulse to normalize such language is still present while Joyce is against such neat word unions.

However, cultural notions of public health that inherited ideas of social hygiene linger in Europe and North America, and the presence of disability in texts still "disturbs" the ethical sphere. For example, while the idea that vaccines are protecting the wrong sorts of bodies is no longer prescient, the concern that vaccines produce disabled bodies is alive and well. While Andrew Wakefield's article claiming a link between vaccines and Autism has been debunked for many years, the concern still illustrates that disabled bodies and minds are not preferred.

Regardless, Joyce's dysgenic aesthetic has produced an antiabsorptive text that offers to still be infinitely readable for a reader that desires the effects of the text. William Carlos Williams suggests this in his defense of *WIP*. He announces that the "defects," the practice that Joyce has of "maiming words" (W.C. Williams 85) before marrying them to other "crossbreeds," tears down the established order and requires a certain kind of embodied change on the part of the reader to engage with them. W.C. Williams asks for "the sort of person who will spend time in the exercise of a new set of muscles such, for instance, as for ear wagging, might be interested in developing a new set of brain or receiving cells, always supposing such cells exist" (86). Critic L.A.G. Strong also asks for readers to investigate their mental muscles: "But, if one's mental muscles are not too stiff, one may envisage certain new possibilities. One may even unlearn, painfully and temporarily, a fixed habit" (638).

Suggesting that the audience might require an evolution, a "new set of receiving cells," or flexible mental muscles, asks for a reader to engage with the text non-normatively, perhaps a reader who themselves is a "crossbreed"; a deviant, possessed of divergent sensitivities. Joyce

scholar Tim Conley suggests that the *Wake* is a good example of a text that teaches scholars more about cognitive experiences through the very mechanisms that make it impossible to read. He suggests that “reading becomes—like consciousness—a work in progress. Perhaps the conception of consciousness as a series of recognitions should be retooled with this example of the experience of reading the *Wake*, so as to regard consciousness instead as a non-linear back-and-forth between contrary recognitions” (“Cog it out” 34). These contrary recognitions could be the reader acknowledging their aesthetic nervousness, but choosing to allow it to reshape their understanding of deviance and of beauty; of what bodies are desirable symbolically and in the real world.

Joyce himself preceded W.C. Williams’ and Conley’s suggestions when he asks for “the ideal reader suffering from an ideal insomnia” (*FW* 119.14). In this case, I suppose that he’s preferring a reader who will spend sleepless hours pouring over the text he sunk years of himself into. This text asks for the “defects,” and requests that some form of divergence from “normed” language be desired in its readers to engage with *FW* on its own terms; or at the very least it asks that such deviations are not denigrated. Whatever this work-in-progress of consciousness is, it’s an invitation to read non-normatively, to expand one’s cognitive style. Caution, readers may find themselves coming down with the whooping laugh!

## Chapter 2: There's no Sabbath for Nomads: Disfluency in *Finnegans Wake*

### Introduction: Nomads and Insomniacs:

If reading the *Wake* is itself a “work in progress” that teaches the reader more about cognitive variation, as Tim Conley suggests, then perhaps *FW*'s Shaun is correct and “there's no sabbath for nomads” (*FW* 409.32); a reader may wander back and forth through their readings of this inexhaustible experimental text that never really ends in the traditional sense. Joyce's text complicates the idea of “progressing” through a book for readers who are used to normative reading styles that privilege reading fast for optimal comprehension and quick completion.

In my previous chapter I considered some of the ways James Joyce responded to his critics' “diagnoses” of him. In response to their reviews, I argued that Joyce framed the disabled character of Shem the Penman as an anti-eugenic character. Joyce's disabled character and “maimed” words provoke discomfort in readers and critics, but also offer opportunities for readers to develop “a new set of brain or receiving cells” (W.C. Williams 86), or more empathetic ethical perspectives towards disabled people. This chapter will continue tracking disability aesthetics in *FW* by recognizing instances of disfluency in such “maimed” or “broken” language that contributes to the *Wake*'s classification as “impermeable” or “inaccessible” for the common reader. While not necessarily developing a new set of “receiving cells,” in this chapter I will explore how these disfluent aesthetics prompt the reader to slow down, to practice “penelopean patience” (*FW* 122.4-5), and to find pleasure in the “disordered” text.

“Disfluency” refers to communicative disorders that make up so called “broken” or “disordered” speech like stuttering and lispings. In Josh St. Pierre's essay “The Construction of the Disabled Speaker” he illustrates how stuttering has been medicalized as a speech pathology, “ex-

tracting stuttering from its social, cultural and economic contexts, the pervasive narratives of stuttering go unquestioned and unchecked” (5). This makes communicative disorders personal instead of (like all dialogue) co-constructed and the onus for change or improvement is placed on the stutterer, instead of the listener. St. Pierre reframes discourse around stuttering and other communicative disorders as a relational conversational negotiation, instead of a personal pathology or “an individual, biological defect to be coped with, managed, or cured” (2). He asserts that the classification of “‘broken speech’ is constructed by *both* a speaker and a hearer” (emphasis in original 2) and is shaped by social, cultural, and economic contexts. I use St. Pierre’s and Chris Eagle’s theories of disfluency to analyze the effects displays of stuttering and lisping in *FW* might have on a reader. I use the term “disordered” occasionally to refer to disfluency, but intend this term to capture how disfluent aesthetics generatively “disorder” speech norms.

My analysis for Chapter 2 begins by analyzing Joyce’s first retelling of the biblical Edenic Fall. The myth of the Fall is inextricably tied to the language of *FW*—language that often makes reading the *Wake* difficult. Gabriel Renggli says that “Because the fall is among the major motifs of *Finnegans Wake*, criticism has often remarked upon the relation between the book’s eccentric mode of expression and the concept of postlapsarian language” (999), a language that is “inherently flawed” (997). Andrew Mitchell asserts that this is Joyce’s interpretation of the *felix culpa*—the fortunate Fall, fortunate because it produces human language. The *Wake*’s polyvalent language includes non-words, portmanteaus, and many other forms of unintelligibility; so much so that Chris Eagle argues that “disordered speech forms the very linguistic ground of Wakeese and is therefore in a sense not disordered at all” (82), but merely the language of the text. This disordered language of the *Wake*, or Wakeese, is an example of an “antiabsorptive” strategy

that Charles Bernstein says is distinctive of “inaccessible” poetry (“Artifice of Absorption” 29). “Wakese,” Bernstein points out, is “interruptive” (“Artifice of Absorption” 29) and makes being absorbed in the text difficult for the reader.

In addition to producing linguistic disorder, Joyce’s use of the Edenic Fall as a conceit also creates a text that is circular instead of linear. The event of the Fall recurs throughout *FW*. It is tied to a disruption or disorientation of chronological or linear time (Brion; Conley; Van Hulle). One structural example of this disorientation occurs in the last and first lines of the text—*FW* ends with the word “the” (*FW* 627.16) and begins with the word “riverrun,” (*FW* 3.1) giving the impression that the text is one immense circle.

Interestingly, the “disordered” language of the text and the “disorienting” structure of *FW* are anchored in a disabling event for one of the main characters—one of the first “falls” of *Finnegans Wake* which I will describe in the first section of this chapter. Several of these falls happen directly before portrayals and performances of disfluency: specifically stuttering for the character of HCE, and lisping for ALP. The first part of this chapter will outline the symbolic Fall into disordered language and how it is connected to linear temporal disorientation. I will argue that the echo of this disabling event appears in these portrayals and performances of stuttering.

I consider the stuttering and lisping portrayed by the literary characters themselves, the aesthetic performance of disfluency, and the material experiences of that readers of the text have when interpreting Joycean non-words. Aesthetic disfluency prompts readers to read *FW* slowly, to begin sentences again and again, to re-read and re-interpret. Tim Conley suggests that “interpreting” *FW* is a process of constant revision. He asks, “is not interpretation but an act of annotation or remediation of a prior interpretation? I suggest that the continuousness of interpretation



represents a fluid series of anxious mis-takes that the waters of the *Wake* reflect back to us” (Conley “Performance Anxieties” 4).

While *FW*'s temporal disorientations and complicated language are well known and well-studied, there are few readings that consider these disfluencies from a disability perspective. This chapter is indebted to Chris Eagles “‘Stuttistics’: On Speech Disorders in *Finnegans Wake*” which introduces a critical disability angle to the conversation about stuttering and lisping in *FW*. This scholarship builds on David Spurr's work; he identifies disfluency as a symbolic return to embodied language. Boriana Alexandrova's in-depth study of phonological registers provides insight on Issy's lisping and my reading of ALP's lisp in Book I expands this analysis. St. Pierre argues that disfluent conversations are (or should be) temporally different from non-disfluent ones, with patience built in between listener and speaker as often stutters and lispers take longer to communicate.

Eagle explains that “today our technocratic society demands that we speak not only fluently but rapidly as well” (“Introduction” 4), but he also asks what is missed with such an emphasis on speed. This need for speed can be applied to reading as well; Barber-Stetson and St. Pierre both point out that often readers with disabilities that cause them to read slowly are considered lazy and the way they read is disparaged. Since the ways readers with cognitive disabilities decipher texts are often belittled, this chapter reflects on questions that Tim Conley asks in “Performance Anxieties”: who are the “ideal” readers of *Finnegans Wake*, or other experimental texts that use antiabsorptive strategies?

Generally, the ideal or common reader is not a neurodivergent person: someone who may be a slow reader, a reader who becomes too absorbed, or too distracted, a reader who persever-

ates or hyperfocuses, or a reader whose eyes scan the page but who must go over the information again. *FW* complicates the perception of this hypothetical reader, even though the general public may think that understanding *FW* is restricted to “[men] of tenure rare” (Knowles 97) as I discussed in my first chapter. Or as Perelman puts it: the “notorious difficulty” of Joyce’s texts “has led to their current status where their principal readers are writers, critics, and captive audiences of graduate students (with some sacrificial undergraduates thrown in)” (“The Trouble with Genius” 5). As a sacrificial undergrad myself, this chapter will discuss divergent reading styles and demonstrate my own interpretive absorption in my readings of HCE’s stutter and ALP’s lisp. I argue that disfluency in *FW* induces readers to read slowly and repetitively and to find pleasure in unhurried interpretations and reinterpretations.

Finally, I suggest that the *Wake*’s non-linear structure provides fertile ground for this slow, cyclical, reading style—a methodology that demonstrates aspects of what Alison Kafer calls “crip time” (*Feminist, Queer, Crip* 26). “Crip time” is an alternative orientation to time that is experienced by cognitively or physically disabled persons. Crip time refers to time in the lives and experiences of disabled people. It considers how people both categorize disabilities in time (ie. constant chronic pain, intermittent tremor, progressive ALS), and also tracks how time may pass differently for a disabled person (ie. taking longer to get somewhere because of a mobility issue, or the time it takes someone who stutters to repeat words for a listener). Crip time, Kafer argues, can be used as a valuable tool of resistance that emphasizes the benefits of slowing down and prioritizing an individual’s needs and pleasures above accomplishing things “on time.” The *Wake*’s antiabsorptive techniques can be read as invitations to upend the notion of speed as desirable; these techniques instead privilege the reader who takes time to read again (again). To mim-

ic the circular aesthetics of *FW* that encourage the reader to come back, to begin again, to return, review, reread, I move through this chapter in such cycles. I introduce and circle back to ideas, I put a pin in topics, I return, I begin, again.

### 2.1 Humpty Dumpty: The Fall and the Circular Structure of *FW*:

As illustrated, the *Wake*'s structure is non-linear. This form is generally accepted to be inspired by 1600s Italian philosopher Vico's cycles of human history: a shared and varied history belonging to all humans that repeats cyclically over different time periods. Stuart Gilbert asserts that the *Wake* is a "realization" (28) of Vico's philosophies. Because of the nature of these philosophies, which connect time from "the beginning" to the present, "the style was bound to reflect the kaleidoscopic permutations of the temporal, physical and spatial attributes of the hero" (Gilbert 28), varying from culture to culture. Similarly, the hero or antihero of *Finnegans Wake*, Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker appears throughout the text in different characterizations.

Dirk Van Hulle asserts that "The book's circular structure is only the most conspicuous of Joyce's techniques to disrupt traditional linear narrative. Joyce presents his history of the world as an enormous, always expanding network of hearsay" ("Manuscript Genetics" 56). *FW* is not told in a strict linear narrative with a forwards moving plot, but emerges bit by bit, employing circularity in its tropes, characters, and structure. Marcel Brion states that "Work in Progress is essentially a time work" (17). He continues to say that for *FW* "time appears to be its principal subject" (17); "It begins in the middle of a moment and of a sentence, as if to place in infinity the initial disturbance of its waves" (17) like the expanding ripples of a pebble thrown into a pond. Tim Conley agrees, saying *FW* "does away with linear time" and functions "as a book which

concurrently and paradoxically runs linear systems against nonlinear ones” (“Non Serviam non Sequiter” 117).

One such paradox occurs with Joyce’s incorporation of the Old Testament antecedent of the Edenic Fall. This story is represented in the Judeo-Christian tradition as both a beginning and a linguistically important severance—Adam and Eve are cut off from the presence of God in the Fall and fall into postlapsarian language (Renggli 999). This archetypal event is repeated throughout the *Wake* in a series of nonlinear “kaleidoscopic permutations” (Gilbert 28): Joyce’s characters have many “falls” that call back to this archetypal fall. The first of these falls (if I assume the reader of this chapter is also beginning *FW* on the first page, although recall that Sebastian Knowles suggests starting in the centre) would be the fall of the Dublin Giant, or Ted Finnegan, which I will discuss in a moment.

“Kaleidoscopic permutations” (Gilbert 28) is an equally helpful way to describe Joyce’s fluid main characters. For example, HCE (Henry Chimpden Earwicker) and ALP (Anna Livia Plurabelle) are the two parent characters of the *Wake*. Both demonstrate occasional speech pathologies—HCE stutters, and ALP lisps. They are a husband and wife who change shape, name, and signifier throughout the text. Susan Shaw Sailer illustrates how part of the textual recirculation attributed to Vico’s influence functions through the “logic of equivalence and interchangeability, which forms the basis for much of Joyce’s treatment of times, places, and characters in the *Wake*” (196). She lists the “protean forms” of ALP and HCE: “ALP is Anna Livia Plurabelle, the river Liffey, the Prankquen, the Hen, Granny, Eve; HCE is Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker, Tim Finnegan, Persse O’Reilly, Adam, Noah, St. Patrick, Daedalus, King Leary” (196-197). The characters are constantly regenerated: “the scene, refreshed, reroused, was

never to be forgotten, the hen and crusader ever-intermutuomergent” (*FW* 54.10-12). HCE and ALP are constantly “mutating” into other characters and constantly “merging”; converging and diverging as lovers throughout the text.

The basic “plot” of *FW* is that HCE commits a crime in Phoenix Park, likely sexual, possibly queer or incestuous, with two girls. The drama of *Finnegans Wake* is a story of crossed wires, party lines, radio “static babel” (*FW* 498.34), and uncertain communication. For example, the “fall” from grace of HCE that remains one of the recurring obsessions of *FW*’s plot is vague—none of the characters are certain what crime HCE committed. ALP writes a letter in his defense which is discovered later in pieces. According to the Oxford Companion to Irish Literature, the twins Shem and Shaun contend for the favour of their sister, Issy, “HCE grows old and impotent, is buried, and revives. Aged ALP prepares to return as her daughter Issy to catch his eye again; and... the book ends with an unfinished phrase ('...along the') flowing into the first words of the first paragraph ('riverrun ...') in an 'Endless Sentence' which imitates the mythic theme of resurrection” (Welch and Bruce 2).

Thus, *FW* begins by referencing the myth of Adam and Eve, prototypes of HCE and ALP who return as the “riverrun[s]” past them: “riverrun, past Eve and Adam’s, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs” (*FW* 3.1-3), located in Dublin, instead of Eden. Various “falls” repeat throughout the text, but the initial introduction of the Biblical fall situates the book as an intentionally postlapsarian tale with a non-linear structure.

One such fall is the fall of the titular Finnegan who appears in the first chapter of the text as the Dublin giant: “The great fall of the offwall entailed at such short notice the pftjschute of

Finnegan, erse solid man, that the hillhead of humself promptly sends an unquiring one well to the west in quest of his tumptytumtoes” (*FW* 3.18-21). The incident brings to mind the nursery rhyme of Humpty Dumpty (the “great fall of the offwall”; “humself”; “tumpty”). Similarly, in the Irish folk song “Finnegan’s Wake” the titular character Ted Finnegan falls off a ladder in a drunken stupor and cracks his head open. He is later revived accidentally when whiskey is splashed on him at his own wake. In *FW* the mythic Ted Finnegan’s cracked skull becomes the split and spilt body of the unfixable nursery rhyme character.

Immediately after, Joyce represents this fall in non-language. He places “the great fall of the offwall” directly before the first 100 letter thunderword on page 3: “the fall: (bababadal-gharaghtakamminarronkonnbronntonnerronntuonnthunddtrovarrhounawnskawntoohoooorde-nenthurnuk!)” (*FW* 3.15-16). This thunderword signals the falls of Adam and Eve, (“rivverrun past Eve and Adam’s”), Ted Finnegan, and HCE’s vague “crime.” The thunderword initiates the symbolic deaths, rebirths, and character permutations which the characters cycle through throughout the text, and ties these “falls” to examples of non-normative language.

I argue disability is implicitly present in the fall of Adam and Eve, and explicitly present in Tim Finnegan’s fall. Firstly, Adam and Eve fall from “perfection” into flesh in a world that will inevitably damage them, at the very least through the passage of time, decay, and decomposition. For these characters in the traditional Christian reading of the Genesis story, the Fall is a moment of existential ultimate disabling. Time is introduced and their bodies will degenerate until their “days shall be 120 years” (Genesis 6:3) instead of the ideal eternal youth. Often, critical disability scholars forecast disability as an inevitable aspect of humanity, saying that everyone will experience it if one lives long enough. Some scholars characterize people without disabili-

ties as “temporarily able-bodied” (TAB). Adam and Eve’s fall into sin is often metaphorically framed as disabling in Judeo-Christian morality; disability is used as evidence for the imperfect presence of sin in the world in much of the Old Testament and some of the New Testament. In a *History of Disability* Henri-Jacques Stiker asserts that “Defect is linked to sin—directly, for the Jewish religious conscience of the time” (27). In the Bible “disability serves to separate what is God’s from what is man’s, the sacred from the profane” (Stiker 29). As Alison Kafer explains, this fall makes “passing [as nondisabled] impossible” (*Feminist, Queer, Crip* 36).

Thus, the metaphor of the fall that Joyce returns to throughout *FW* is associated with implicit disability. I am not suggesting that disability is in any way “profane” or “sinful,” but such historical connotations are important to note, as are Joyce’s responses to such connotations. I will return to sin and guilt later in this chapter with my analysis of HCE’s stutter in Book I.

Joyce includes 10 “thunders” or thunderwords in the text—9 of which have 100 letters and the last which has 101 letters. David Spurr writes that Joyce’s thunderwords return language to its original state, which “correspond[s] to the renewal of a historical cycle in Vico’s science. It is at this point that language declines into babble in order to find its original poetic wisdom in spontaneous utterance....to the original unity of bodily joy and vocal utterance” (127). For Spurr, the thunderwords symbolize pure embodied language and are emblematic of the *Wake*’s circularity.

Similarly, Andrew Mitchell writes that “no error or mistake is so important in *Finnegans Wake* as humanity’s fall” (589). Thus, such thunderwords are examples of a “fall into text (becoming a word of the flesh)” (Mitchell 589). Mitchell maintains that Joyce constructs the fall as a “textual event” which enables humanity’s self-creation in their own image, as opposed to “the

creation of an unknown and unknowable God, a dead God for Joyce” (601).

This thunderword is the first egregious example of disordered language in *FW* and directly follows a fleshy injury. The mythic Finnegan, in his drunken fall off of his ladder, suffers a traumatic head injury ending in the “thurnuk!” (*FW* 3.16) of the thunderword’s final few syllables. His fall is both transcribed in language and ends in an excess of nearly indecipherable language. Disordered language thus begins in *FW* both with the characters’ metaphorical falls “into language,” and the reader’s material stumbling as they trip over these letters in an attempt to read these fall. This thunderword is both a description of a disabling event, and disrupts the audience’s ability to read it in any normative way.

After this fall, Finnegan is referred to as “Bygmaster Finnegan of the Stuttering Hand” (*FW* 3.42). Finnegan’s cracked head leads directly to a subsequent stutter and trembling hand—the body that this first stutter is grounded in is a character marked physically by disability, and this stutter continues through different permutations of this character. I read HCE’s stutter in Book I as an analogue to Finnegan’s “stuttering hand” (*FW* 3.42) using Susan Sailer’s “logic of equivalence and interchangeability” (196) in the next section of this chapter. Tim Finnegan is one of the “protean forms” of HCE; HCE throughout the text experiences the effects of events that happened to Finnegan, as a feature of their “interchangeability” (Sailer 196).

I argue it is important to identify that the chronological (assuming we are reading *FW* from the page beginning “rivverrun”) origin of disfluency, specifically stuttering, in *Finnegans Wake* is an intertextual injury. Both Renggli and Mitchell recognize that a biblical fall into language inherently means that Wakese is flawed, disordered, and imperfect, but do not connect this explicitly to a disabling event. Nicholas Miller argues that Finnegan’s cracked body, which the



characters attempt to recover after his fall, metaphorizes Joyce's depiction of history as fractured and impossible to fully recover, though the reader of *FW* tries. Miller argues that "Finnegan's own quest exactly mirrors that undertaken by the reader of Joyce's text" (174): to piece together the "body" of a book that defies coherent recollection. However, he does not address the disability that Finnegan is left with after he wakes, or the potential disabilities inherent in a "fractured" metaphorical body.

To my knowledge, my dissertation is the first to propose that the disabling intertextual event of Finnegan's fall appears in the text as a precondition for stuttering, an important feature of Wakeese. In the first thunderword, stuttering occurs in the sounds "bababa," and "oohoo" most obviously, but many letters are repeated. Specifically the letter "n" which appears in the word nineteen times. Here the fall into language is also a fall into disability, transcribing stuttering as one of the disfluent aesthetics of the text. Finnegan/Adam/HCE are marked by their stutter through their various iterations, just as Eve/ALP are identified by their lisp, which I will discuss in the second half of this chapter. Even though the characters are not fixed their initial falls into disordered language stay with them. These falls create disabled identities that follows them throughout the text and though their dysfluencies are not always directly transcribed, they appear in enough places that the reader cannot forget them.

Thus, disability aesthetics, specifically disfluent aesthetics, are integral to the archetypal "kaleidoscopic permutations" of the characters, and their disordered language. I use "disordered" as an umbrella term for Wakeese which, as I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, covers a plethora of linguistic wizardry including non-words, portmanteaus, onomatopoeia, symbols, and more. Stuttering and lisp are both abundantly present in many sections, but there are also

specific instances of stuttering and lisping that *FW* calls particular attention to, and that scholars consider particularly poignant. My analysis will focus on these sections.

## 2.2 Eagle's "Stuttistics": Disfluent portrayals, performances, and creative stuttering:

Chris Eagle describes how stuttering occurs on multiple levels within the text. *FW* aesthetically performs speech pathologies as “figure[s] for poetic language” and also clinically “portrays” dysfluencies in the speeches of different characters (Eagle “Stuttistics” 83). Eagle analyzes the different layers of speech pathology in *FW* by fitting them into Gilles Deleuze’s categories of textual stuttering: transcribing a stutter, describing a stutter without transcribing it, and finally “creative stuttering” (“Stuttistics” 84) which he interprets as “a metaphorical kind of stuttering on the level of language itself” (“Stuttistics” 95) that “violates” linguistic semiotic principles that suggest readers need to choose between words. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, *Wake* words frequently hold more than one linguistic value.

For example, “Bygmaster Finnegan of the Stuttering Hand” (*FW* 3.42) becomes H.C. Earwicker who is defending himself from his supposed crime against the Cad in Book 1, Chapter II.<sup>2</sup> Here, Joyce directly transcribes HCE’s stutter for the reader. HCE begins his Sayings with “Shsh shake, co-comeraid,” (*FW* 35.20) and continues with “mewmew mutual daughters...credit me, I am woo-woo willing to take my stand...that sign of our ruru redemption...there is not one tittle of truth, allow me to tell you, in that purest of fibfib fabrications” (*FW* 35.23-25, 33-34). HCE stutters as he stands accused, which is read by David Spurr and Alexandrova within the

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<sup>2</sup> While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to fully discuss the crime and all its familial and societal ramifications, Boriana Alexandrova’s analysis of HCE and Issy’s phonological signatures undertakes this task in her essay “Bababablin’ Drolleries and Multilingual Phonologies: Developing a Multilingual Ethics of Embodiment through *Finnegans Wake*.”

narrative of the story as an attempt to hide guilt. Spurr insists that though the reader and the audience don't know what crime HCE has actually committed, the text expects that they view the stutter as a symptom of HCE's attempt to hide his unnamed guilt (Spurr 129). Alexandrova confirms this assumption by calling HCE's stutter his "guilt-ridden stammer" (94).

Eagle suggests that this portrayal of clinical stuttering is also a performance of aesthetic wordplay; "an intention on Joyce's part to exploit...the condition's potential for acoustic effects as well as puns" ("Stuttistics" 86). This exploitation is evident in the above section with the emphasis on "fibfib fabrications" (*FW* 35.34)—while being portrayed as a stutter, the performative aspect of "fibfib" puns on "fabrication." What is a fabrication but a fib?

This broader aesthetic choice is not unique to Joyce—indeed, as Eagle points out, such linguistic play frequently used in Modernist avant-garde writing. He lists the Dadaists and Russian Trans-Sense movement ("Stuttistics" 83) and as I will address later, Gertrude Stein also worked with similar disfluent aesthetics. Critic Wyndham Lewis actually grouped Joyce and Stein together to denigrate their literature, saying it performed a "mental stutter" (in Van Hulle "Manuscript Genetics" 61). Eagle illustrates that "the fact that so much Modernist writing was self-consciously modeled after pathological forms of speech did not escape critics at the time" ("Stuttistics" 83). As I mentioned in my first chapter, Siebers and Davidson see such self-conscious modelling as emblematic of Modernist aesthetics in both literature and visual art.

Finally, not only does Joyce use speech pathologies to create the "broader aesthetic...of Joycean wordplay" (Eagle "Stuttistics" 83), but Joyce's language itself fits into and expands Deleuze's third category: *Wakese* forces the reader to read many different words in the same signifier, "through its many portmanteau words" (Eagle "Stuttistics" 96). Eagle proposes that the

*Wake* does something new and expands the category of creative stuttering: “with the unprecedented amount of attention Joyce forces us to pay to his ‘fermented words’ (184.26) as independent semantic units, an altogether different model for creative stuttering emerges in the *Wake*, a readerly stuttering where we are forced to hesitate, to ‘stotter from the latter,’ word by word, letter by letter” (“Stuttistics” 96).

While this understanding ends Eagle’s chapter, I see it as an area for further productive study that overlaps with the final type of aesthetic nervousness outlined by Ato Quayson that I discussed in my first chapter. Quayson’s final dimension of aesthetic nervousness describes how readerly bodies are affected by the aesthetics of a text that contains disability (15). This dimension “short-circuits” ableist literary protocols that generally suggest how the text should be read. This creative disfluent aesthetic produces a direct effect on the reader, changing how they will read *FW*.

In my first chapter I considered how Joyce’s intentionally anti-eugenic character of Shem prompts this element of aesthetic nervousness by generating feelings of paranoia consistent with concerns about degeneration (Quirici 103). In this chapter, I suggest that this aesthetic dimension is still at play short-circuiting ableist literary protocols. Eagle’s new categorization of creative stuttering forces the reader to slow down and absorb Joyce’s creative textual deviances, rewarding the reader with a fuller, more robust reading experience. However, instead of prompting disgust or “nervousness” in the reader, the text encourages the reader to embody the structural elements of this disfluent aesthetic as an “interpretive mode” (Barber-Stetson 148) that helps the reader navigate *FW* anti-absorptive strategies. In doing so it dispels the notion that those who

read or speak slowly, re-read (or say again), or stumble over cunning letters should be denigrated.

While disfluency studies may not fit neatly into the categories of neurodivergent aesthetics that I have purported to study so far in this dissertation, Wyndham's above quote (and many of the criticisms I referenced in Chapter 1) shows how difficult distinguishing between purely "mental" or "physical" disabilities can be—it's a distinction that relies on a material dualism, "the mind" being separate from "the body," when often disabilities have entwined physical and mental effects or causes. In addition, as I demonstrated extensively in Chapter 1, critics who wanted to degrade Joyce's work used mental and physical disabilities interchangeably as metaphors for depravity.

Further, clinically and socially, stuttering occupies a liminal space. In some cases it is potentially caused by a genetic neurological mutation, regardless it is a disability that is displayed physically and constructed socially between speaker and hearer (or unhearer) (St. Pierre 4). While lisping is often viewed as a physical disability that affects articulation, cognitive-linguistic disabilities affecting phonological learning can also contribute to the disorder (Dodd 191). Lisping functions similarly to stuttering in a social setting and is medicalized to the point where speech pathology is often used to "cure" it. While stuttering and lisping have not so far been included in lists of cognitive disabilities, and are sometimes not categorized as disabilities at all, such categories are not exclusive, but permeable. For example, Fraser points out that depression was previously not considered a cognitive disability, but scholars have begun to incorporate it (32). Eagle proposes that disfluency studies, though its own area, can build productively off of Critical Disability Studies (CDS) established scholarship and that disfluent speakers as still gov-

erned by bodily “norms” (“Introduction” 4). I include disfluency, or “abnormal speech or writing” in this dissertation because stuttering and lisping in *FW* both stimulate the reader into certain interpretive modes—they affect how the reader interacts with the body of the text by encouraging the reader to examine their processing styles which can prompt real ethical change.

Forcing readers to slow down, “to hesitate” (Eagle “Stuttistics” 96) is thus a material effect of disfluent aesthetics in *Finnegans Wake*, and I consider this hesitation with both HCE’s stammer and ALP’s lisp.

### 2.3 Finnegans and HCE of the Stuttering Hand(s):

HCE’s defense asks the reader and HCE’s audience to decipher the content of his transcribed stutter, and draws attention to the punning nature of the section, persuading the reader that their attention to detail, to Wakeese portmanteaus, is important to determine HCE’s meaning. As I illustrated, many scholars understand this meaning as guilt-ridden; an assessment which Eagle calls “an overdetermined Freudian reading” (“Stuttistics” 89).

David Spurr in “Stuttering Joyce” proposes that disfluency in *FW* is essential to the poetics of the text, and that in this sort of disfluency “language calls attention to its own materiality, as well as to its source in the body as the physical origin of the spoken utterance” (121-122). Spurr reads stuttering in the text as a symptom of overwhelming emotion that forces the character’s body to react involuntarily from either repressed trauma or desire. He calls a stutter: “the involuntary disruption of the voluntary utterance” which is “an intermediate phenomenon between bodily and mental activity, in which spasmodic physical reflexes intervene in normal linguistic expression” (124). He argues that this reflex is a “dislocating force” (125) used by Joyce

to form poetic language that attempts to free itself from language laws and return it to pure bodily utterance. HCE's stutter might give him away as guilt-ridden, making his protestation that "there is not one tittle of truth, allow me to tell you, in that purest of fibfib fabrications" (*FW* 35.34) contradictory to the content of his speech. While defending himself in language, the body tells the truth: HCE's stutter gives away his "repressed trauma or desire" (Spurr 124). Spurr thus diagnoses HCE's stutter as repressed desire or guilt instead of reading it as the result of a traumatic event: Finnegans' fall off of the ladder and his injury.

Either way, Spurr suggests that "in the stutter the body expresses its power over the mind in the matter of language. The symbolic order of language is submitted to the uncontrollable force of the body, where it is broken up, disfigured, amputated, interrupted, and perforated under the pressures of bodily experience in space and time" (124). Spurr's analysis proposes that when Joyce plays with both portrayal and performance of the stutter, the stuttering body of his character *disables* language so the true meaning of the stutterer emerges whether or not this meaning is preferred by the speaker. The bodily stutter makes the "fib" a transparent "fabrication," as well as performing the word "fibrillation": an unmanageable twitching of muscle fibres, the muscular equivalent of the vocal stutter. While he does not specifically say "disables," Spurr's syntax suggests this meaning. He uses words like "dislocating," "disfigured," "amputated," and "perforated" to emphasize what happens to language when a stutterer speaks (Spurr 124). Yet he insists that this disfigured or deformed language, while disabled, is not destroyed but is instead *essential* to poetic language. Spurr's emphasis on the body appears to separate it from the mind; this embodied but not enminded response wreaks havoc, flailing around to *dis/able* language, beyond HCE's control.

Spurr touches only briefly on HCE's defense, comparing the section to Bloom's guilty stammer in the Circe episode of *Ulysses*. I suggest HCE's defense requires more study; specifically because right before HCE begins to speak, the reader is told that his sayings are framed by an editor. If the clinical portrayal of HCE's stutter results in his body disabling language and allowing his "true" meaning to emerge, then how should the reader understand this framing?

The reader is told that the "Sayings Attributive of H.C. Earwicker" (*FW* 35.12) as he addresses his audience have been "reconstructed out of oral style into the verbal" (*FW* 35.9) with "ritual rhythmic" (*FW* 35.10) and that some information has been "toosammenstucked from successive accounts by Noah Webster in the redaction" (*FW* 35.10-12). The change from "reconstructed" to "reconstructed" and the associational echo of "struck" from the record in "toosammenstucked" implies that the sayings of HCE were actually much longer, perhaps "too" much, and have been pared down. Before the reader even gets to HCE's Sayings, they have been cut off, edited and redacted. The audience is asked to "read" the content of HCE's sayings through the performed aesthetic of his clinical stammer, with the glossing of this editorial voice.

The "language laws" and norms that Spurr suggests the stuttering body "dislocates" (124) are visibly at play in the controlling voice in the above quotation which asserts that HCE's text has been "reconstructed" (*FW* 35.9). His speech has been pieced back together, but the reconstruction has restrictions for the audience. Something is missing, and the reader is made aware of this absence. The speech has been "redact[ed]" by Noah Webster (*FW* 35.11), renowned editor who emphasized teaching proper English grammar to American schoolchildren and lent his name to the Merriam-Webster dictionary. The figure of Webster stands in for these normative language laws, affirming the necessity of proper speech. Further, the "reconstructor"



insists that the address has been edited from “oral” to “verbal” (*FW* 35.9). While the two terms could be used interchangeably, the emphasis on this transition highlights that “oral” specifically has to do with the mouth and with sound signs; with “Sayings” (*FW* 35.12). “Verbal” signals a move towards written language.

What has been redacted, if not the “improper” stutter? Theoretically, these verbal redactions might “constrict” Earwicker’s stuttering speech, but these editors keep HCE’s stutter. It remains through redactions, editing, and Joyce therefore *insists* that the audience “read” it, highlighting his stammer as an intentional aesthetic choice. Why then, does Joyce alert the audience to forces controlling what they can read of HCE’s Sayings? What’s the use?

While one could argue, like Spurr suggests, that the stubborn presence of the stutter in this section is HCE’s trauma or desire breaking through linguistic barriers, I suggest instead that HCE’s stutter can be read as an example of a stutter co-created by speaker and listener instead of HCE’s body unwittingly betraying a hidden truth. St. Pierre exposes frustration at “broken speech” as a product of ableism; as a refusal to take time to listen or a rejection of speech that might not at first be clear (4). Eagle similarly advocates this view, saying that scholars in the field of Disfluency Studies must “investigate the socially constructed status of the ‘normal’ or ‘able’ speaker and counter the variety of assumptions made about people who stutter, lisp, etc” (“Introduction” 6).

I read HCE’s Sayings in this section through this lens of editorial “reconstric[tion]” (*FW* 35.9) or construction. The portrayed and performed stutter is constructed in-text by multiple forces: the speaker (HCE), the editor(s), and finally the reader who must choose how to read this section, “hesitating” on the level of creative stuttering that Eagle has outlined. Joyce emphasizes

HCE's stammer intentionally; he wants the reader to focus on it. I suggest that this emphasis deconstructs the notion that the reader should identify his stutter as indicative of guilt.

The language that HCE uses to swear his innocence under the "Deity" (*FW* 35.28) and "the Open Bible" (*FW* 35.29) is steeped in eugenics. He says that he's "woo willing to take my stand...any hygienic day" (*FW* 35.24-26) and calls the accusations levelled against him "the purest" of fabrications (*FW* 35.34). HCE uses this eugenic language to assert and legitimate his moral blamelessness. As I argued in Chapter 1, Joyce frequently pushed back against his critics' use of dysgenic metaphors to denigrate him and his writing; he deliberately used this dysgenic language to describe his vision for the *Wake* and for his character, Shem. In 1926 critic Wyndham Lewis had just published *The Art of Being Ruled* which Dirk Van Hulle explains characterized both Gertrude Stein and Joyce's work as "mental stutter" ("James Joyce's 'Work in Progress'" 61). Around this time, Van Hulle points out that Joyce likely adds HCE's stammer to Book I, Chapter II as symptomatic of HCE's "overcompensation" in defense of his innocence against the Cad ("James Joyce's 'Work in Progress'" 61).

Van Hulle interprets Joyce's addition of the stutter as a direct response to Lewis's criticism. He chose to emphasize the so called "the mental stuttering by worsening HCE's physical stutter, performatively enacting the interaction within a critical environment" ("James Joyce's 'Work in Progress'" 62). Joyce's textual performance of his critics' "clinical" diagnoses is an example, as I outlined in my last chapter, of what Marion Quirici calls Joyce's "defiant disability aesthetic" (85): Joyce responding to reviewer's criticisms of his work as deviant or deficient by working them humorously into the material of *Finnegans Wake*.

In this section, the reader is tempted to assign moral blame to HCE by the editors who purposefully leave the stutter in the Sayings. The unnamed editors insist the reader diagnose the emphasized stutter as symptomatic of HCE's guilt and as ultimately pathological both physically and morally. HCE's use of eugenic language shows that Joyce is aware of this, and has his character hold up a mirror to the reader's own assumptions regarding disabled morality. Why would the reader assume a stammer is evidence of guilt?

While Spurr's assessment that a stutter perforates, dislocates, and deforms language doesn't have to be read negatively—indeed saying that it is essential to poetic language sounds positive, and he illustrates this positivity in readings of other sections of *FW*—his lack of analysis of HCE's stutter beyond “guilt ridden” reinforces conceptions of disability as “other,” and as indicative of “sin.” This opens space for dysgenic ideas like the sort I explored in my first chapter: disability or any deviation from the norm is morally inferior, and needs to be contained. I submit that reading the stutter as accentuated by the editors to incriminate HCE can encourage the reader to identify such ableism in the text and in their own initial assumptions about disfluency.

#### 2.4 Cripistemologies: Meaning making that points to disability as generative:

Spurr, likely unwittingly, objectifies the stutterer by calling the stutter an “involuntary disruption” (124) portraying the stutter as an “it” which breaks out of the enminded body. This is why I find it essential to bring St. Pierre's and Eagle's understandings of disability aesthetics to discussions of the stutter in *FW*. This as an example of the important connecting work of this dissertation. While many scholars work with metaphors of the disabled body and subsequently

“broken language” in texts that use antiabsorptive strategies like *Finnegans Wake*, they often (though not always) omit critical work that links these theoretical ideas to the material experiences of disabled people. As Eagle says, “these works force us to reassess the boundaries of normal language....this is a tradition that has been lying in plain sight for quite some time” (“Introduction” 4-5).

My intention in this dissertation is to ensure that literary and linguistic theories are in conversation with scholars who write about disability. These scholars have material knowledge of “cripistemologies” (Johnson and McRuer 128)—ways of knowing and making meaning that are structured by disability. The writers who have coined this term, Merri Lisa Johnson and Robert McRuer, borrow from Eve Sedgwick’s epistemology of the closet and insist that “an understanding of virtually any aspect of contemporary Western culture must be not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of able-bodied/disabled definition” (131). The writers continue to say that the best positions from which to enact this analysis are anti-ableist.

I include these analyses in critical interpretations of Modernist poetic texts for several reasons. Firstly, because Modernist aesthetics, techniques and expressive practices already use disability in creative ways, but lack the positive discourse that emerges out of the lived experiences of people who identify their disabilities as valuable as well as difficult. There is a value problem that has been pointed out by Julie Miele Rodas and Remi Yergeau: techniques used by poets are creative, while the same expressive practices outside of poetic contexts are diagnosed as cognitive disorders.

For example, when Joyce scholar Kimberly Devlin teaches the *Wake* to graduate students, she begins by offering them a “few basic technical terms” such as “klang association” (Devlin 160) to aid interpretation. Klang association comes from the psychiatric term “clanging,” or glossomania, which is a description of sonic word association, or compulsive rhyming. This is an example of a formal thought disorder often found in schizophrenia (Covington et al., 86). The Wikipedia entry for “clanging” says that “Clanging refers specifically to behaviour that is situationally inappropriate. While a poet rhyming is not evidence of mental illness, disorganized speech that impedes the patient's ability to communicate is a disorder in itself, often seen in schizophrenia” (n.p.). Disability scholars argue for a more nuanced engagement with such terms, which are often lifted from clinical situations into literary theory without regard for the material experiences of those diagnosed with them.

Secondly, because texts like *Finnegans Wake* implicitly ask: who is the ideal reader? When a writer or critic thinks about the hypothetical “reader” what types of bodies/minds have a monopoly in literary scholarship? All minds aren’t the same, and neither are readers. I want to highlight disabled readings by disabled scholars to assert that interpreting texts with disability aesthetics using disabled ways of meaning making are essential ways of reading literature because “ideal” readers are neurodiverse. I will circle back to this idea later in the chapter, with ideas of how neurodivergent and neurotypical readers can approach such disability-dependent interpretations.

Finally, disability, even in Modernist texts, is often still represented primarily through negative stereotypes or tropes, as Jay Dolmage delineates in *Disability Rhetoric* (31). HCE’s stutter is accepted as “guilt-ridden” (Alexandrova 94) implying wrongdoing. Shari Benstock’s

“Apostrophizing the feminine in ‘Finnegans Wake’” addresses Issy’s lisping in connection to her assertive feminine sexuality, and suggests similarly to Van Hulle, and Spurr that speech disfluencies are evidence of sin within *FW*: “we discover signs of flawed speech and failed communication as the *Wake* traces the alliance of sin and speech, the slur or hesitation in speech that announces sin” (602). She argues Issy’s lisp and HCE’s stuttering are tied to the alleged incestuous crimes between the father and daughter figures.

St. Pierre’s work applied to *FW* offers a needed disability perspective to Spurr’s conception of stuttering in the text. At the level of portrayal, both the textual editors and HCE can be read as co-constructing (constricting) his stutter. Even if HCE’s body is “disabling” language through his stutter, the meaning of his utterances is still being collectively decided. While both Spurr and St. Pierre advocate for poetic language disrupting received linguistic norms, St. Pierre’s divergent practices of listening (or reading, in this case) implicate the listener as well as the speaker in a conversation. This idea means that an individual body is not exclusively responsible for clear communication and asserts the CDT idea that disability is constructed by a community’s denigration of and lack of support for impairments.

Further, since it is conditioned communicative normalcy that identifies disfluency as “broken” speech, St. Pierre suggests the audience of a disfluent speaker should acknowledge their responsibility as an equal part of conversation; this moment of space-time is uniquely a moment of shared disability that calls for “divergent” or non-normative hearing.

This involves a desire to hear—figured by a lean forward, a turning towards the speaker, a wish to comprehend. This desire combats ideas of disability as un-generative. I again echo Alison Kafer who says, “I use this language of desire deliberately...I know how my body shifts,

leans forward, when I hear someone speak with atypical pauses or phrasing...part of what I am describing is a lust born of recognition” (*Feminist, Queer, Crip* 45). It is implied by Kafer’s use of the word “recognition” that the desire for disability is usually felt by another disabled person, but this desire is not limited to such familiarity. I am reminded of the essays of Eli Clare, who has cerebral palsy, and his lover, written about by Kafer. Clare’s lover “writes about Clare’s hand tremors... not as something to be overlooked or passively accepted, but as something to be desired...each of Clare’s tremors is a gift across his skin....In this language of desire, a dramatic reimagining of cerebral palsy, tremors become touch, each ‘bounce’ a source of pleasure and delight” (Kafer “Desire and Disgust” 347).

To clarify, I understand that St. Pierre’s assessment has to do with spoken language, which is governed by verbal conversational norms. I don’t pretend that reading, silently or aloud, is identical to a physical dialogue. Yet, Eagle states in the introduction to his book “Talking Normal: Literature, Speech Disorders and Disability” that while “the normalcy being enforced here is one of the *speaking* body...norms of speech ...can be no less powerful and punitive than those that regulate the body” (4). He and the other authors in this book apply these norms of speech to written language as well, arguing for a canon of literature that would include “works that portray or perform clinically disordered speech as well as aesthetically defamiliarized works that force us to reassess the boundaries of normal language” (“Introduction” 4). In a text that performs stuttering in the ways that *FW* does—intentionally making the reader hesitate, and read again portmanteaus and phrases rich with many meanings—there can be effects similar to that of a physical conversation; one in which a reader who pauses, who accepts a slower pace, practices reading against normative or ableist ideas.

## 2.5 Getting a Glympse: Graphology in the Book of Kells:

One such place in the text where Joyce offers the reader the opportunity to pause, return, rethink, read again (again) out of a desire to grasp what is perhaps a difficult meaning is in the Book of Kells section, which comes just after “the interpretation of the letter” in Part I, Chapter V. This section echoes HCE’s Sayings because in the “interpretation of the letter,” the reader is primed for the process of reading, and is given clues about how to read the section by the section itself. The letter is found in a rubbish heap and theoretically incriminates HCE and calls “unnecessary attention to errors, omissions, repetitions, and misalignments” (*FW* 119.15-16). Joyce scholars have often interpreted this letter as an analogue to *FW* itself, since *FW* is often self-reflexive and the strategies for interpretation that the letter teaches can be used to read *Wake*. The “interpretation of the letter” section proposes that pleasure and desire is essential for this interpretive process.

Kimberly Devlin outlines this pleasure by suggesting that these are the “challenges—and pleasures—of experiencing the *Wake*: on the one hand, hearing or locating the original ‘normal’ words, but on the other hand, attempting to account for or to interpret the endless deviances from the normal or ordinary” (168). The desires I argue for in my readings of disfluency in *FW* are ones born of a desire for disability in all its messy generativity: the reader can observe both the “normal” and the deviations from the normal with equal joy. Clare Barber-Stetson asserts that readers of challenging texts like *FW* “become receptive to unusual stimuli and thus locate unusual connections. New and unusual pleasures may exist in an environment that looks uninhabitable” (160).



Who wrote the letter is a subject of debate within the text, the letter is unsigned and “must be interpreted despite the many difficulties that it contains” (Deane xxxi). However, as Deane points out later, there is no author, but an amalgam of authors. The attempt to read the letter recurs throughout the text, requiring the reader to constantly reconsider their interpretation, which mirrors the reader’s process, or lack of process, through *FW* itself. There is no one answer.

In the “interpretation of the letter” (and by comparison in *FW*) the reader is told to look for errors. The reader is meant to get a “glypse” (*FW* 121.1) at the writer themself through these errors: to identify the physical and mental state of the reader by the writing, so that we “feel for ourselves across all those rushyears the warm soft short pants of; the quickscribbler: the vocative lapse from which it begins and the accusative hole in which it ends itself; the aphasia of that heroic agony of recalling a once loved number leading slip by slipper to a general amnesia of misnaming one’s own” (*FW* 121.2-6). We can read both “glimpse” and “glyph” from “glypse” which provides further confirmation that the reader is to know the writer intimately through the physical appearance of the letters.

The letter and the words within the letter, as well as the “errors, omissions, repetitions and misalignments” (*FW* 119.15-16) are linked directly to “aphasia” and “amnesia”—respectively the loss of words, and the loss of memory, both associated with traumatic head injuries—of the writer (*FW* 121.4-5). The reader is asked to grasp (meaning both understand and touch) and identify the writer through their letters, while also constantly experiencing the inability to retain either words or memory. Thus, the experience of interpreting both the letter and *FW* is one of a desire for understanding, and a frustration of this desire. A similar frustration of desire occurs in connection to ALP’s lisp, which I will address in a following section. Unfortunately, a thor-

ough analysis of aphasia/amnesia, disabilities which also fall under the umbrella of Disfluency Studies, is beyond the scope of this chapter; I acknowledge that further study is needed to flesh out these metaphorical disabilities.

This “interpretation of the letter” is followed directly by the Book of Kells section. Similarly, the text also suggests the reader interpret “the fatal droopadwindle slope of the blamed scrawl, a sure sign of imperfectible moral blindness; the toomuchness, the fartoomanyness of all those fourlegged ems: and why spell dear god with a big thick dhee (why, O why, O why)” (*FW* 121.35-37-122.1-2). The excess of the language, the shakiness of the “droopadwindle” calls back to both “Bygmaster Finnegan of the Stuttering Hand” (*FW* 3.42) and the “oral/verbal” (*FW* 35.9) stutterer HCE. This “blamed scrawl” (*FW* 121.35) is, undoubtedly the narrator says, a “sure sign of imperfectible moral blindness” (*FW* 121.36). The narrator prompts the reader to essentially perform graphology on this handwriting which portrays and performs a written stutter, connecting this “droopadwindle” handwriting with its four legged ems to the excess or the “too muchness,” of the stuttering hand of the writer.

The pseudoscience of graphology, or handwriting analysis, began before Galton’s eugenics movements of the late 19th century, but eventually became associated with phrenology, physiognomy, and eugenics. The term was first used by Abbé Jean-Hippolyte Michon in 1871 (Trubek n.p.) to describe the practice of identifying a person’s character from their handwriting. It evolved into a practice used in courts to identify criminals and served also to determine the mental fitness of the writer. The graphological reading that the narrator of this section asks for from the reader pushes for the reader to acknowledge the disability and moral blame of the

writer. This instance echoes the first time the reader is asked to perform such a reading: at HCE's hearing with his constricted stutter.

Joyce intentionally plays with the idea that writing/speaking can be used to determine the physical, psychological, and moral state of a person, just as he defies eugenic notions of perfection. He echoes the accusations of his readers (like Wyndham Lewis) towards *Work in Progress* back to them. This intentionality also forces the reader to reflect on their role as audience for *Finnegans Wake*. Instead of assigning individual responsibility to the stutterer and locating "moral blindness" (*FW* 121.36) in their writing (whether the author is Finnegan, HCE or Joyce) the reader must choose *how* to read the writing: should they rely on ableist constructions and assumptions that categorize disfluency as "broken" language, or acknowledge that the text asks for their self-conscious presence as co-creator while using disfluent aesthetics to prompt self-reflection? Instead of identifying the writer as someone with a "blamed scrawl" (*FW* 121.35), the "toomuchness" of the letters suggests pleasure in practice of deciphering this excess writing. The reader has the opportunity to use graphology not to identify an unfit specimen, but to engage the writer intimately.

*FW* teaches the reader new reading practices that are meant to bring pleasure. On page 120 of *FW* the speaker says that "the words which follow may be taken in any order desired" (13) instructing them to "(here keen again and begin again to make soundsense and sensesound kin again)" (15-16). Perhaps it takes the audience a moment, perhaps the speaker will need to repeat themselves. Taking this time disrupts the notion that getting it right on the first go is necessary or preferred. The phrase "keen again and begin again" (*FW* 120.15) establishes interpreting the text as something repetitive, cyclical, and tips on its head the notion that fast communication is good

communication; the reader should hesitate to gather meaning, and that in this hesitation, in a listening or reading practice that is learned, there are new challenges and pleasures. These moments of producing communication collectively are not linear, but chronologically disoriented; acts of “annotation” and “remediation” (Conley “Performance Anxieties” 4).

The possibilities for reading *Finnegans Wake* for unusual pleasures are immense, ongoing, and they take some time. Such pleasure in the act of deciphering is present as the reader attempts to read the stuttering hand of the writer in the Book of Kells section. As mentioned above, the reader is asked to intimately “know” the letter-writer of the previous section, in addition to analyzing their handwriting, which introduces an eroticism to the practice of interpretation. Joyce says the reader is “sensationseeking an idea” (*FW* 120.3). He refers to the “innocent exhibitionism of those frank yet capricious underlinings” (*FW* 120.19-20), and emphasizes the product of the (stuttering) hands of the writer, the sensuality of the letters themselves, as something to be desired.

The penmanship is “serpentine” (*FW* 120.20) which “seems to uncoil spirally and swell lacertinelazily before our eyes under pressure of the writer’s hand” (*FW* 120.24-25). The narrator asks: “why spell dear god with a big thick dhee,” followed by the letter “O” twice time (*FW* 122.1-2). While a swelling serpent reminds the reader of male genitalia, the narrator acknowledges that the letter writer could be female, and says “that last labiolingual *basium* might be read as a *suavium* if whoever the embracer then was wrote with a tongue in his (or perhaps her) cheek” (*FW* 121.33-34). Here, the narrator also plays with the difference between *basium* as a romantic kiss and *suavium* as a sexualized kiss, though “labiolingual” gives little doubt as to the kiss’ location. Regardless of the gender of the reader or writer, the act of interpretation, of appre-

hending the writer, is erotically charged.

“Sensationseeking” (*FW* 120.3) is an appropriate term for these acts of rumination and remediation, of finding pleasure in continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of a text that engages in so much “erubescence (repetition!)” (*FW* 54.29). This repetition also slows a reader down. St. Pierre explains that “stuttering intersects with the theoretical re-working of time insofar as stuttering interferes with established and codified rhythms of communication” (15). This interference can be seen in the hesitation of the readerly stutter from word to word filled with juxtaposing meaning or in the time it takes to determine what individual words a lisp has collapsed the boundaries between.

These “codified rhythms” (St. Pierre 15) are disrupted in *Finnegans Wake* both by the circularity of the text (the recurring and regenerating characters, kaleidoscopic narrative permutations, and the refusal to end) and by Joyce’s creative disfluent aesthetic. Spurr says that stuttering in *FW* “has the effect of arresting the smooth and unimpeded movement of syntactic combination, as if Joyce wanted to slow language down, if possible to arrest its discursive movement” (130). Joyce’s “arresting” of language prompts the reader into interpretive modes that slow them down as they read.

For example, at the end of the Book of Kells section, the reader has “penelopean patience,” (*FW* 122.4-5) referring to the wife of Ulysses who waited years for him to return home, cleverly driving off potential suitors by weaving and unweaving the same tapestry. The mythic Penelope’s process of making and un-making mirrors the reader of the *Wake* who attempts to interpret while struggling with the amnesia or aphasia that the text induces.

Further, “the vaulting feminine libido of those interbranching ogham sex up-andinsweeps

sternly controlled and easily repersuaded by the uniform matteroffactness of a meandering male fist” (*FW* 122.7-10). The feminized ancient Irish language of ogham is controlled by new language norms; the same norms that would find “moral blindness” in the stuttering hand, the same Websterian language norms that edit HCE’s defense of himself. Erotic desire is still present in this interpretive practice, but a climax is frustrated by strict “uniform matteroffactness” (*FW* 122.10). There is no completion of the reader’s tapestry. Desire in this case is for a hand that has penned “fourlegged ems” (*FW* 123), instead of the controlling male fist—for a stutter which likely emerged from Finnegans traumatic fall, instead of for “uniform” writing. It is such desire for the disabled writer or speaker that makes slow interpretation possible; the idea that at the most basic level of conversation listening and reading involve want.

#### 2.6 Penelopean Patience: Slowing down the process of interpretation:

This reorientation to time or disruption of codified rhythms for the benefit of slow reading can be productively theorized through disability lenses. Slowing the speed that it takes to read or listen can reorient reading towards how time is experienced by some disabled bodies. “Crip time” (*Feminist, Queer, Crip* 26) as described by Alison Kafer, considers how discussions of temporality are located and employed in various aspects of CDT. Essentially, crip time is an orientation of time that is experienced by some folk with disabilities, and is distinguished from “normative” time. Kafer suggests that “operating on crip time, then, might be not only about a slower speed of movement but also about ableist barriers over which one has little to no control; in any case, crip time involves an awareness that disabled people might need more time to accomplish something or to arrive somewhere” (*Feminist, Queer, Crip* 26).

For instance, crip time includes the extra time it takes someone with a mobility aid to navigate a space that is not wheelchair accessible. Hagey Hall on the University of Waterloo campus, for example, used to only have one elevator, a freight elevator, so, for decades it took much longer for someone using this elevator to get to offices, classrooms, and washrooms than someone who can use one of the many stairwells. Crip time is the amount of time it takes someone with ADHD to leave their house and arrive at their office to host office hours.

Add 4 extra minutes

because my time-blindness

or time optimism (a

neurodivergent trait that tells me I can accomplish much more than physically possible in a period of time)

prompted me to read another “short”

chapter of my book

a process which includes

- getting distracted by my thoughts,
- forgetting I am reading,
- back to the top of the page
- [twice] to process re-process

Add 3 minutes

because

I didn't put my keys on the key-hook                      put them somewhere "for safe keeping"

immediately forgot where.

+ 10 extra minutes because

+ I walked out of the house and realized halfway

to school that my laptop charger is still plugged into the wall at home.

The desire that Joyce outlines in deciphering the "stuttering hand," as well as the frustration when interpretation is difficult is represented in the experiences of many disabled writers who have been told that desire and disability do not interact. How might a stuttering hand enact pleasure? How might an uncontrollable body part frustrate, or bring pleasure? The recognition of delight and desire as well as difficulty in disabled practice and identity is present in Eliza Chandler's ideas about "falling." I consider Joyce's metaphor of the fall—an event that in *FW* plunges readers into language that disorients or destabilizes—through Chandler's disabled perspective.

Chandler writes about "falling" into a disabled identity in her essay "Sidewalk Stories: the Troubling Task of Identification." For Chandler, who has a mobility disability, the "fall" is not just metaphorical, but a literal tumble. At the same time, she interprets this material fall symbolically. Chandler "falls" out of a liminal space where she is not seen by passersby as



disabled, and into disabled identification. She writes about physical cracks in sidewalks, dangerous moments to navigate as she must take her time walking over paving stones, lest she trip and people recognize her as disabled. Cracks, for her, are spaces of conjoining where falling plunges her into different internal and external identifications and emotions: “Painfully I fall into disability as I am introduced to and recognized as disabled, again and for the first time, in the midst of others... moving-others.... This process of identification hurts. It fulfills the public's expectancy of and for disabled bodies as stumbling... unpredictable” (1).

The “fall” identifies the disabled body both as unpredictable and as a body that requires more time to navigate the same space as someone who doesn’t experience difficulties with mobility. The “fall” identifies the disabled body as a normatively inefficient body. Kafer suggests thinking instead about how disability changes our conception of time. She says that crip time is a “challenge to normative and normalizing expectations of pace and scheduling” (*Feminist, Queer, Crip* 27).

Disfluent speakers fall under this category since they often do not meet such expectations in conversations. St. Pierre connects these expectations of pace to industrialization. Since industrialization increasing speed and constant productivity has been “taken for granted and assumed as the norm” (13). Joyce addresses industrialization and urbanization in *Ulysses* and in the *Dubliners* as an important aspect of Modernism.

One way *Finnegans Wake* reflects this increase in pace and productivity in a phrase uttered by Shaun the Postman, who proclaims that “there’s no sabbath for nomads” (*FW* 409.32), which I used as the title for this chapter. Shaun’s work is walking—delivering post, and his body pays for it with his “hobos hornknees and the corveeture of [his] spine” (*FW* 408.16-17)—and

his body is bent under the weight of walking many miles. Eventually however, his walking exhausts him. He is “now becoming about fed up be going circulating about them new hikler’s highways like them nameless souls, ercked and skorned and grizzild all over, till it’s rusty October in this bleak forest” (*FW* 409.7-9). Shaun is going in circles, much like the reader of *Finnegans Wake*, the inexhaustible, endless, text, and longs to rest his tired body, sore and disabled by the demands of productivity.

The idea that such a reader does not earn a sabbath, a rest, however, is complicated by Shaun’s line: “after suns and moons, dewes and wettings, thunders and fires, comes sabotag” (*FW* 408.28-29). “Sabotag” could be read as both “sabbath” and “sabotage,” offering the possibility of a “sabbath” or rest, as a form of sabotage to constant requirements for efficiency. After the first “thunder” (*FW* 408.28) of *FW*, disfluency emerges to reorient the reader to a slower temporal orientation. “Sabotag” also carries the implicit pleasure of a game: “tag,” you’re it. By considering the way that disfluency sabotages normative speed, the reader is allowed rest, and pleasure.

Similarly, while the metaphor of the fall into disordered, creative language might be painful, Chandler proposes a dual understanding of these moments of disabling or the cracks that one might fall into as spaces both for pain and for growth and beauty: “Cracks can also be wondrous, conjoining two parts separated. So I say...let us resist the imperative to move swiftly from one paving stone to the next; let us trip up in the cracks and dwell in the liminal spaces of disability” (6). The cracks that make the walker trip into disabled identification also allow this identification to serve as a liminal place of recognition and connection, to find shared beauty in a slowed down process. Hesitating in the “liminal spaces” of Joyce’s linguistic machinations instead of moving “swiftly” from touchstone to touchstone offer the reader the possibility of rare,

slow, interpretive pleasure. I propose that one potential pleasure in interpreting a difficult text is the pleasure of taking the time to be an audience that practices divergent instead of normative reading.

### 2.7 Challenges and Pleasures: Boundary Breaking and the Ideal Reader:

In thinking about reading and listening practices as reactions to oral and written disfluency, I have been implicitly constructing a reader and they are not necessarily able-bodied (a person who is not currently disabled or neurodivergent), but this hypothetical reader likely uses normative reading practices, whether neurodivergent, disabled, or not.

By normative reading practices I mean strategies of processing information that uphold accepted notions of compulsory able-bodiedness. These strategies are oriented towards a neurotypical majority and often do not take into consideration, or indeed actively denigrate, the way other neurotypes read. This primarily considers how disability is framed and valued in a certain socio-political context; disability as a category is often considered a difficulty that must be overcome. Taught reading strategies reflect socio-political values through the tools a reader has available to access the literary-aesthetic sphere.

The tools, methods, strategies, and lenses that are made available and taught to readers do not frequently highlight strategies of textual apprehension that include disabled ideas and expressive practices. They are generally intended to reproduce normative reading practices. For example, Barber-Stetson points out how ASD/ADHDers are described as having “deficient” reading styles because of slower reading speeds (161). N. Katherine Hayles also outlines how pedagogy is navigating the differences between hyper or deep attention and how the different cognitive

styles affect reading practices. This discussion has come to literary pedagogy because of new media, and ADHD and Autism are at the centre of it. Neurodivergent reading strategies are rarely considered valuable, and because of this they are not frequently explicitly taught as productive ways of reading literature.

Readers have likely been utilizing neurotypical reading strategies to access texts and correspondingly privileging these strategies as the “right” way to read a text, instead of embracing strategies of reading that correspond to different neurotypes’ cognitive experiences even when the text itself suggests it: “the words which follow may be taken in any order desired” (*FW* 120.13). In Chapter 1 I explained how aesthetic nervousness affects disabled as well as able-bodied readers “since it is the construction of a universe of apparent corporeal normativity both within the literary text and outside it whose basis requires examination and challenge” (Quayson 15).

Recognizing neurotypical reading strategies and searching for a way to privilege neurodivergent practices also does not mean there is a “one size fits all” model based on neurodivergence, but that neurodivergence offers many different ways to encounter literature. This also doesn’t mean that all examples of normative reading dismiss non-normative texts; that would be blatantly inaccurate given the popularity of many Modernist and post-Modernist writers, and the numerous critics who engage such texts.

I do however join critics like Eagle, Quayson, Miele Rodas, and Barber-Stetson in arguing that disabled practices and experiences add essential perspectives to ways of reading and interpreting that are already being practiced in Modernist criticism. For instance, when Devlin outlines the “challenges—and pleasures—of experiencing the *Wake*” (168) she suggests that both

challenges and pleasures emerge from trying to distinguish between normal and deviant language and categorizing endless deviances. Methodologies that employ CDS can go a step further by challenging the reader to be aware of the intentional constructions and societal maintenance of labels like “normal” and “ordinary,” even as they are finding pleasure in “deviances.”

For example, while Benstock and Devlin do write about Issy’s (and to a lesser extent ALP’s) lisping, Borianna Alexandrova in her essay “Babababblin’ Drolleries and Multilingual Phonologies: Developing a Multilingual Ethics of Embodiment through *Finnegans Wake*” uses CDS theories of embodiment to develop her ethics of reading *Wake*. Alexandrova specifically discusses Issy’s (HCE and ALP’s daughter) lisping. She asserts that disability theories offer a way to talk about the options a reader has when they are frustrated by the embodied reading that the *Wake*’s multilingual polyglot text insists on (93). This reading is “embodied” because, as she proposes, the act of reading occurs in the “material singularity” (Alexandrova 91) of the body, especially when the reader performs the *Wake* by reading out loud. This act of reading embodies the characters of *Finnegans Wake* through the practices of the reader.

When a reader experiences frustration at the language, finding themselves “shocked, disturbed, or even disappointed” (Alexandrova 90), this process allows them to “encounter the outlines of our cultural norms, our patterns of reading or communicating, and our consciously or unconsciously conceived habits of relating in the space where we meet with difference” (Alexandrova 90). In encountering the boundaries of cultural norms like those that uphold neurotypical status, readers have the opportunity to examine and potentially deconstruct them. Employing CDS as a methodology expands the conversation about lisping or stuttering in *FW* from one that accepts clinical portrayals and textual performances of disfluency as evidence

of sin or guilt, to one that includes positive and creative ways to experience disability and deviance in a text.

Thus, the *Wake* teaches the reader that in reading a difficult text “when we run into the boundaries between ourselves and the text-as-other, we have the choice to succumb to disappointed expectations and abandon the conversation altogether” (Alexandrova 94) or the choice to expand our understanding of what readings are possible and even generative beyond normative interpretations, an ethical move which reverberates in lived reality. *FW* can teach the reader to find pleasure in identifying boundaries or limits for the reader to break and many moments of disfluency in the text play with disrupting inherited patterns of (normative) reading and communicating. To describe how the text stimulates the reader into these modes, I return in depth to Clare Barber-Stetson’s description of cognitive processing styles, which I presented in my introduction to this dissertation.

In her article, “Slow Processing,” Barber-Stetson compares the writing of various Modernist poets with the writing of contemporary autistic poets. Like Chris Eagle, she illustrates that much Modernist writing was “self-consciously modeled after pathological forms of speech” (Eagle 83) or thought patterns. She calls this sharing a “cognitive style” (148). Barber-Stetson explains that “cognitive styles” are “way[s] of sorting information” for readers (148). Although Barber-Stetson doesn’t make this distinction, I distinguish cognitive processing styles from pedagogical learning styles like auditory, visual, kinaesthetic, etc. While “cognitive processing styles” *could* be used to talk about pedagogical practices that identify the various ways people learn, I use it specifically to indicate processes of literary interpretation that can be adopted by all readers: a tool or practice, an “interpretive mode” (Barber-Stetson 148). However, there are con-

versations where both would likely overlap—for example, N. Katherine Hayles’ concerns over how a higher prevalence of ADHD reading styles in literature classes might affect the ways students approach complicated texts.

For example, “slow processing” as a cognitive style corresponds both to literary techniques used by Modernist poets like Virginia Woolf and T.S. Eliot to intentionally estrange readers, and strategies intentionally used by contemporary autistic writers to encourage a neurotypical reader to notice a cognitive style perhaps foreign for them. Barber-Stetson uses the contemporary autistic poet Craig Romkema as an example. Romkema’s poems focus on overwhelming stimuli similar to Woolf’s stream of consciousness style; such a style may slow the reader down. However, the intent of the author is to specifically draw the reader’s attention to how different minds function. To “urge readers to adopt a similar mode of processing, one that will bring them closer to overload but also give them access to particular pleasures” (Barber-Stetson 159).

Barber-Stetson argues that this writing intentionally utilizes experiences of difficult or disabled cognitive processing styles to encourage the reader to become more “active” in their processing (160). Ultimately, she proposes that “[slow processing] makes new cognitive spaces accessible to the reader by making certain literary spaces less accessible....By using aesthetics and poetics to thwart readers’ cognitive tendencies, this literature makes readers aware of their cognitive capacities” (161). I read the spaces she refers to as “less accessible” as texts that make readers uncomfortable through many antiabsorptive strategies. Barber-Stetson proposes that poetic practices that overlap with thought or speech patterns associated with cognitive disabilities describe both a style of writing that intentionally *stimulates* the reader into different “cognitive spaces” (Barber-Stetson 161), and also provides an interpretive mode for readers.

How does this interpretive mode relate to disability aesthetics? I suggest that Barber-Stetson's conception of a cognitive style as a writing modality corresponds to Miele Rodas' notion of "expressive practices" (29)—the ways in which people with disabilities express how their brains work through neurodivergent language markers. I will consider Miele Rodas' conceptions of expressive practices further in Chapter 3. Both of these terms track how bodies feel in the presence of disability. Cognitive styles are most noticeable when the reader is encountering neurodivergent aesthetics, challenged by writing strategies that are potentially frustrating, disruptive, or as Spurr implies, linguistically disabling. She asserts that "those who employ Slow Processing never quite fit in. However, this cognitive style gives them access to many aspects of their environment (which includes language) that others do not see" (148).

For example, I analyze ALP's lisp in Part I, Chapter I. ALP is HCE's wife and both of them experience speech pathologies that begin directly after thunderwords, or Joycean "falls" into disordered language. ALP's character performs a lisp after the episode of The Prankquean, who Sailer points out is a "protean form" of Anna Livia Plurabelle and thus equivalent to the character (196). The Prankquean brings rain in her wake: "into the shandy westernness she rain, rain, rain" (*FW* 20.17-18) prefiguring Anna Livia Plurabelle of all rivers on page 23.

Since ALP's "mamafesta" occurs on p. 103 and she has not yet been officially introduced as ALP, her lisp in this earlier section is not often studied. Benstock, Devlin, and Alexandrova focus primarily on Issy's lisp throughout the *Wake*, however Alexandrova does write extensively on how ALP's "register" or "phenological signature" indicated by her lisp (94)—is connected with watery, windy, whisper sounds "echoing the soundscapes of the lands through which the river flows" (95). She illustrates how "Often, ALP's register is also woven of phoneme clus-



ters dense in approximant, or ‘liquid,’ consonants such as *l* and *r*, as well as onomatopoeic renderings of water, which symbolise her bodily and connotative fluidity” (94). Alexandrova argues that this signature or register “embodies” ALP and allows “her” to be present in the language of the *Wake* without being explicitly introduced in all sections of text. This is the extent of her analysis on transcriptions of lispings that are directly portrayed by and attributed to ALP.

Eagle’s description of how the *Wake* performs creative stuttering which induces a “read-erly stuttering” (96) is an example of the text stimulating the reader into a particular cognitive style or interpretive mode that changes the way they read and opens up new avenues for divergent, non-normative reading practices. By closing off certain avenues of processing which occurs for the reader who approaches the “creative stuttering” of *Wake*, this “thwart[ing] of cognitive tendencies” (Barber-Stetson 161) allows the reader space to begin being self-reflexive, to experience their personal “coming-to-know” (Yergeau 160) as they examine their own “cognitive capacities” (Barber-Stetson 161). Alexandrova suggests that “The experience of this multilingual text compels the reader to become hospitable to otherness – that is, the otherness of the text and the holistic otherness that every body negotiates across personal boundaries – and bear the mental, emotional, and physical consequences of that empathetic act” (103).

Unfortunately, there is not a robust amount of disfluency studies scholarship to draw from concerning lispings. As Jessica A. Holmes points out, “Stuttering has dominated discourse on communicative disabilities...with little sustained analysis of lispings .... This is due, I argue, to the lisp’s ambiguous social status relative to the stutter, which more readily disrupts so-called normative speech” (131). Jay Dolmage explicates lispings in classical Greek rhetors like Demosthenes and Alcibiades. One may recognize Demosthenes as a rhetorician with a stutter and a

limp, who famously overcame his stutter by speaking with pebbles in his mouth. Dolmage highlights this narrative of a disabled person “overcoming” their disability as a stereotypical burden that normates place on disabled people to manage their own fear of disability. In *FW*, ALP’s lisp appears somewhat inconsistently, but is never resolved: it remains an essential aspect of Wakeese.

Both Dolmage and Holmes illustrate that lispings is more clearly gender coded—often queered, feminized, sexualized, and infantilized (Dolmage “Disability Rhetoric” 122; Holmes 132.)<sup>3</sup> The portrayal and performance of lispings in *FW*, similar to HCE’s stutter, is an experience that has the potential to effect readers ethically, as well as prompting readers to notice what new enjoyment neurodivergent texts offer. Anna Livia Plurabelle’s lispings functions similarly, engaging the reader on multiple levels: the lisp is clinically portrayed and creatively performed, and pushes the reader into an interpretive mode that again forces them to re-evaluate their current practices of reading. Readers that are more aware of the limits of their “processing biases” (Barber-Stetson 161) are ideally able to accommodate other’s limits as well, leading to a more inclusive community.

### 2.8 ALP’s Lispings: Listen when I speak:

The episode of Jarl van Hootheer in *FW* Book I ends with the second thunderword (possibly a gift of the Prankquean’s rain) which again affects HCE’s ability. Joyce explains in a letter to Harriet Weaver that after this thunderword, HCE is unable to hear his wife and instead attempts to physically grasp ALP: “his ear having failed, he clutches with his hands & misses & turns away hopeless & unhearing” (in Milesi 88). Similar to the first thunderword, which pre-

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of how ALP and HCE’s daughter Issy’s lisp is feminized, sexualized, and infantilized see Benstock, and Alexandrova.

empties Finnegans fall, this thunderword performs linguistic disorder: “(Perkodhuskurunbarggru-  
auyagokgorlayorgromgremmitghundhurthrumathunaradidillifaitillibumullunukkunun!)” (*FW*  
22.5-7) and also prompts linguistic disorder (ALP’s lisp) which HCE’s ear fails to comprehend:  
“With lipth she lithpeth to him all to time of thuch on thuch and thow on thow. She he she ho she  
ha to la” (*FW* 22.23-25). Disordered language thus emerges in *FW* both from Finnegan’s  
metaphorical fall into language and ALP’s thunderstorm, resulting in HCE’s temporary unhear-  
ing. HCE is temporarily “unhearing” which introduces ambiguity: is ALP really lisping? Or does  
this speech “error” emphasize that it takes both listener and speaker to create disfluency. The  
language that Joyce chooses to describe this episode puts the failure of communication on the  
audience instead of the speaker, similar to HCE’s defense against the Cad.

Since this performance of ALP’s lisp has “landloughed” (*FW* 22.30) HCE, surrounding  
him liquidly as her “l” register surrounds the reader, he attempts to “clutch” her (Joyce in Milesi  
88); a move which belies desire, both to understand and to hold close. The narrator emphasizes  
that it is Anna Livia’s “lipth,” or lips, that form the lisp and this portrayal of a lisp then shapes the  
word. It is her “lipth” (*FW* 22.23) that both tempt and disappoint her husband. I read both “land-  
locked” and “landlaughed” from “landloughed” (*FW* 22.30). “She he she ho she ha to la” (*FW*  
22.25-26) is written out like laughter, suggesting the joy present in ALP’s lisp, as if she is  
pleased to have confounded HCE.

However, it is not just HCE who is confused. While the section begins by talking only  
about HCE, it continues using “we.” The reader takes part in this “unhearing”; the failure of the  
ear, the inability to grasp by any means. This is particularly true because readers often read the

*Wake* silently. We are literally unhearing unless we choose to perform this lisp and embrace the opportunity to let the lisping speech surround us without separating “normal words” from deviance (Devlin 168), because the words themselves begin to lose distinction. “Lipth” and “lithpeth” have only a few letters of difference, and if read aloud can sound nearly the same.

If the reader hesitates over stuttering portmanteaus, as Eagle proposes, I suggest that the “creative” lisp in the Deleuzean sense refuses to firmly delineate words and ideas, softening them and allowing them to meld into each other like the *Wake* merges time periods, characters, and narratives. Stimulated into this interpretive mode, the reader is reminded of the process the *Wake* teaches for interpreting *FW*'s anonymous letter: the juxtaposing practice of attempting to grasp or understand, while simultaneously losing the words, knowledge, memories, or images, in this case, to the waves or the “whispering grassies” (*FW* 23.10).

This cognitive style reminds the reader that close reading the *Wake* is “sensationseeking” (*FW* 120.3); cyclical ideas slipping like water past each other with no firmly defined boundaries. Indeed, ALP appears as “Livia Noanswa” to the “foenix culprit” (23.20) who is HCE, the constantly renewing Doublends Jined of Phoenix Park (*FW* 20.16): there are no permanent answers here, or none that the reader can fully keep. Instead, this cognitive style immerses the reader in a mode where meaning is made as distinctions disappear. Where, as Alexandrova says, readers may “reach for the other by analysing the constitution and functionality of our boundaries, re-evaluating their placement and texture” (93). Dolmage’s reading of Alcibiades’ speech in Plato’s *Symposium* similarly points out that the rhetorician’s lisping was extraordinarily rhetorically effective, likely *because* it disrupted normative communication (“Disability Rhetoric” 122.) As I

highlighted earlier, the texture of such porous boundaries has the power to slow the reader down, which can be a political act for a reader who chooses to push against reading norms.

Thus, disfluency can change the act of reading by prompting the reader to reflect on their speed and their processing power. However, reading strategies are not just about cognitive capacities, or how a person's brain naturally functions, but about how readers are taught normativity as they learn to read: both in the physical practice of reading, and in cognitively comprehending content. Joyce's disfluent aesthetics may encourage the reader towards a slower speed of reading (like Barber-Stetson's description of cognitive styles that prompt "slow processing") and upend the notion that slow reading, pausing to read again, hesitating over unfamiliar words, forgetting what was read and returning, is undesirable. Such reading is not "lazy" (Barber-Stetson 161) but ideal for Joyce's readership—it offers an alternative to the pressure of efficiency. The reader is not just attempting to "get to the end" of *Finnegans Wake*, because there is no end. Reading *FW* becomes an experience of pleasure; not a race to a destination, but of the readerly body engaging with the text.

Indeed, slow reading can function as an example of crip time; a "resistant orientation" (Kafer *Feminist, Queer, Crip* 26) which is constructed for the *needs* of an individual. Instead of fulfilling the requirements of socio-cultural pressures for efficiency or productivity, crip time "is flex time not just expanded but exploded; it requires reimagining our notions of what can and should happen in time, or recognizing how expectations of 'how long things take' are based on very particular minds and bodies" (Kafer *Feminist, Queer, Crip* 27). To illustrate further what reading *against* normativity might look like, I turn to "queer reading" by Ann Wein-

stone and Lee Ronald, reiterating the productive bonds between queer and disability scholarly communities.

Ann Weinstone in her essay “The Queerness of Lucy Snowe” establishes “reading queer” as opposed to “straight” reading practices. Reading queer, she asserts, is “reading outside of established concepts and categories” and critiques categorization that maintains normativity and the “reading practices that assist readers to establish these categories” (368). Similarly, Lee Ronald identifies that reading does not occur with freedom of imagination, but that “we are coerced to read and process information in a particular way that serves dominant ideologies and that queer strategies for reading instead open us up to new frameworks for understanding those ideologies” (55).

Since “straight reading” can be understood in this case as reading that reinforces compulsory heteronormativity, I argue that ableist or normative reading reinforces compulsory able-bodiedness. Normative reading then, would insist on: 1) reading in ways that materially re-enact how students are generally taught (specifically in English): linearly, quickly, word by word, from left to right down the page, with total attention—no skipping words, no jumping around, but also no hyperfixation; and 2) reading that conceptually reinforces dominant normative ideologies.

In *FW*, such “new frameworks” (Ronald 55) could look like cognitive styles that materially stimulate the reader through portrayals and performances of disfluency. For example, ALP is described as “the louthly one whose loab we are devorers of,” (*FW* 22.32) and “the lipalip one whose libe we drink at” (*FW* 22.34). When read aloud, these phrases perform lispings especially on the words “louthly,” “loab,” “lipalip,” and “libe.” The ambiguity for an “unhearing” audience

makes these words difficult to nail down to a firm interpretation and prompts the reader to spend more time with each one, as each word contains many possibilities, thus physically reading slower and returning to re-process the regeneration of different words.

“Louthly” (*FW* 22.32) could be “loudly,” or “lovely”; “loab” could serve as “love,” or “lobe” (*FW* 22.32)—either “we are devourers” (*FW* 22.32) of ALP’s love, or nibbling on her lobe; “lipalip” (*FW* 22.34) sounds like the dripping of water, but is sonically very similar to “liph,” and “lithpeth” (*FW* 22.23). Like Barber-Stetson’s descriptions of Slow Processing, the reader is introduced to a space of overwhelm that makes reading “normally”—quickly, unambiguously, word by word—very difficult.

Next, Ronald suggests deconstructing hegemonic *ideas* by reading and processing queerly, but doesn’t propose a concrete formula or methodology. Instead he suggests that since reading is about various interactions between the self and the text, that “reconceptualizing the interaction between reader and text is likely to involve us in a realignment of the possibilities of self/other that stretch beyond the text” (55). In this way, Ronald echoes both Alexandrova and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick who identifies queer reading as an intensely personal experience of discovery.

Sedgwick imagines the “interpretive absorption” (2) of a reader who is not settled in their identity; a person whose “personal queerness may or may not (*yet?*) have resolved into a sexual specificity of proscribed object choice, aim, site, or identification” (2). This person is unsure of the boundaries or limits of the self that interacts with the text, and is reading for “important news” (E.K. Sedgwick 2) about this self. Sedgwick makes the distinction between a reader who knows the processes of reading or who knows how to make meaning out of words and the model of reading that is a “much more speculative, superstitious, and methodologically adventurous

state where recognitions, pleasures, and discoveries seep in only from the most stretched and ragged edges of one's competence" (3).

The speculative and adventurous model of reading that Sedgwick describes as "interpretive absorption" (2) details an intersection of material reading and aesthetic processing that is active and challenging. I argue that various "cognitive processing styles" (Barber-Stetson 161) like disfluency in *FW* push readers to the limits of their normative reading styles both materially and conceptually. In the act of reading a text that tests the limits of one's capacities, the reader discovers news about where they might fit or not fit as material reader, and what ideologies or ethical models they might value as a conceptualizing body.

## 2.9 Livia Noanswa: Disfluency as (re)generative:

"Interpretive absorption" (E.K. Sedgwick 2) is not a new idea to Modernist poetic criticism. As I outlined in my introduction to this dissertation, Charles Bernstein's poetic essay "Artifice of Absorption" outlines inaccessible poetry as writing that often uses antiabsorptive "devices" (44) or "modalities" (51) for "absorptive ends" (51). Absorptive modalities can be, among other things, "engrossing, engulfing completely, engaging, arresting attention, reverie, attention intensification" (Bernstein "Artifice of Absorption" 29). He proposes that the intersection of impermeable techniques that disrupt ways readers are used to making meaning, like those used in *Finnegans Wake* (Bernstein "Artifice of Absorption" 56), and strategies meant to absorb the reader in a text (like the inexhaustible readability that *Wake* devotees claim the text has) can push readers into "attunement" (Bernstein "Artifice of Absorption" 85) to the text, with the self, and with others "(of all sexes) / & of the earth & sky" (Bernstein "Artifice of Absorption" 86).



While this encompassing classification of “others” becomes broad, a more particular rendering of this idea is that “the resistance to absorption is a political act” (Bernstein “Artifice of Absorption” 35-36) that affects both the self, and others. I propose the opposite is also true. Sedgwick’s conception of absorption is a political act of discovery which asks how the reader’s self may or may not fit materially and socially into ableist heteronormative reading practices as they discover the edges of their “competence[s]” (E.K. Sedgwick 3) or “capacities” (Barber-Stetson 161).

For example, with the lisp transcribed and attributed to ALP, “Livia Noanswa” (*FW* 22.20-21) can be read as Lake Victoria or Victoria Nyanza (Milesi 86), the source of the river Nile, (and the source of life as it was thought at the time), and also implies that ALP hasn’t given HCE the response that he wanted, or perhaps any response that he can hear. Her lisping speech to him is abrasive: “the soundwaves are his buffeteers” (*FW* 22.26) Joyce writes, and then in the next few lines these soundwaves transform into watery waves which buffet him “hawhawhawrd” (*FW* 22.28), linking ALP to the force of water, but again phonetically to laughter: “She he she ho she ha to la” (*FW* 22.26).

I want to return for a moment to Barber-Stetson’s description of interpretive modes. There are a few things I want to notice—firstly, there are several instances in this article entitled “slow processing” where Barber-Stetson actually calls her minor literature “slow professing” (160). She doesn’t address or delineate this difference, and I am not sure if it was intentional or not. With my fingers on the keyboard, I trace the beauty of this “mistake” if you like to call it that, though I consider it an expansive accident. My index finger slides diagonally between the c/f that gives us “pro(c/f)essing” and I think about Barber-Stetson typing quickly,

gaining momentum, feeling the ecstasy of the last page of writing, perhaps in the current of her stream of consciousness, and I wonder if she left it there on purpose, or forgot to signal a shift in her argument, or whether her motivation matters at all.

Did she want me to slow down? To take a breath as I speed read, to sit for a second with professing and processing? To feel in my fingers the material existence of this typo? Slow *processing* encourages us to put work into our consumption, pulls our attention to the temporal, the multiple rewritings and re-re-readings and re-re-reiterations that are encapsulated in the process of becoming. This is a very personal process. Tim Conley says that the “Wake plays upon the neuroses of any reader, no matter what wide reading experience is under his or her belt” (Conley “Performance Anxieties” 3).

For a neurotypical reader, this process may be unpleasant. Their “attunement” (Bernstein “Artifice of Absorption” 85) to such a text may be more difficult to reach. This is useful, according to Barber-Stetson, because it introduces readerly empathy for the writer. However, for some neurodivergent readers (or neurodivergent adjacent), reading this impermeable poetry might encompass a feeling of familiarity—the recognition or joy, for a “stretched and ragged competence” (E.K. Sedgwick 3). For me, there’s a moment that I’ve identified while reading the texts studied in this dissertation that feels like an exhale; like letting out breath I did not know I had been holding.

This exhale first occurred when I was a sacrificial undergrad reading one section of *Finnegans Wake* (the washerwomen at the river in Book I, Chapter VIII who are discussing the marriage of ALP and HCE) during my Modern Irish Literature class. As a class, making our way through the section that begins “Well, you know or don’t you kennet or haven’t I told you every

telling has a taling and that's the he and the she of it" (*FW* 212.11), I listened to my professor read and was overcome with how much stimulation I was receiving.

Each word  
moving or stilling in many different  
directions  
lit me up. I almost  
tasted neurons snapping firing felt like  
rush(es) losing breath  
of a river  
or silent surrounding undertow.

This experience set me on a journey towards CDS and Modernist poetry as my areas of study. Why did I fall in love with *Finnegans Wake*? Why did I become immediately so absorbed in and by the text? Why did what I experience feel familiar at the same time as it greatly disturbed the way I was used to reading? For me, this exemplified how neurodivergent aesthetics can disrupt normative reading practices. *Finnegans Wake* created an opportunity for me to notice not only the "ragged edges of my competences" (E.K. Sedgwick 3) which at this point were familiar and unforgiving limits, but also the pleasure of dropping the mask that hides neurodivergence in an academic setting. I didn't know I was wearing one, and I recognized the joy that being pushed into such active processing gave me. While still mediated by an academic context, this familiarity and desire prompted me to begin to deconstruct what a hypothetical reader of a difficult text might be like; instead of an "ideal" reader, perhaps a non-standard one like me.

Slow *professing*, then, instead of *processing*, implies that we are speaking of something

we believe to be true, that we cannot help but express, that bursts out beautifully, impulsively, certainly, as I have just shared. Professing implies witness; testimony to certain ideologies and ways of being. Professing also invokes the gravity of instruction, and for those of us in academia, (wearing neurotypical masks or not) the insistence that some voices are given a platform while others are pushed to the corners. The literal existence of Barber-Stetson's error echoes a privileging of disorder that grounds the reader materially and brings us back to an awareness of our own cognitive competencies and limits. The divergent term "professing" provides as much if not more meaning as the intended "processing." The presence of this error is an example of becoming entangled in and creating new material pleasures (the surprisingly sensuous slide of my finger on smooth keys between c/f/c/f, the noticing of mouth and teeth and hand in HCE's stuttering, in the way a reader's mouth brings to life ALP's lisp.)

This joy in disfluency is present on page 22 of *Finnegans Wake*. The repetition of "hawhawhawrd" (*FW* 22.28) could be read as a precursor to HCE's stuttering with wave-like consistency. This performative joining of HCE's stuttering and ALP's watery, lispy, laughter puts the two characters together linguistically (as do the pronouns "she" and "he" which make up the earlier chuckle) (*FW* 22.26). They are coupled in their dysfluencies, their abilities and disabilities, even as they are narratively separated, as HCE "turns away hopeless & unhearing" (Joyce in Milesi 88). The reader of *Finnegans Wake* knows also that HCE and ALP reunite and separate in constant regeneration through the text and that their lisp and stutter are always part of their characters. ALP's lisping speech is described as "all to time" (*FW* 22.24), illustrating her continual resurrection and regeneration alongside HCE, whose stutter continues with him from *Finnegan of the Stuttering Hand*. ALP's lisp and phonological register may even be responsible for HCE's

resurrection: “and would again could whispering grassies wake him and may again” (*FW* 23.10); Alexandrova labels ALP’s phonological presence as water and wind, whispering across river lands. Indeed, this section goes further, suggesting that the joining of the two produces the “avowels...yew and eye” (*FW* 22.36). Joyce puns on the vowels “u” and “i,” as well as the vowels that “you” and “I” might make to each other.

A reader who is practicing adventurous reading, who is absorbed in the text with a desire for disability, might understand this performance of disfluency as a form of connection instead of miscommunication. Literature that uses alternative cognitive styles allows readers to acknowledge that one is used to accessing work that makes meaning in conventional ways. Like Alexandrova says, alternative interpretive modes offer readers space to be hospitable to the “otherness” of a complicated text that uses disabled aesthetics instead. While I argue that some neurodivergent readers likely come to different cognitive styles like Slow Processing more naturally because their brains are already oriented towards these styles, they can push both neurotypical and neurodivergent readers out of their comfort zones.

Consistently difficult texts offer the reader a discomfort that can lead to pleasure. Eagle asks what we might miss with an emphasis on rapid fluency. Disfluency in *FW* suggests that reading slowly, for pleasure, “sensationseeking” (*FW* 120.3), is a necessary part of scholarship. It supports anticipatory self-care, and knowledge of the limits and stretch of body and mind for the reader and for other minds and bodies. Reading *Finnegans Wake* can be an antithesis to productivity; instead of “preserving one’s body for productive work,” the reader is “refusing such regimes in order to make room for pleasure” (Kafer *Feminist, Queer, Crip* 39). Instead of no sabbath for nomads, the idea of sabbath, of rest, of slowness, is essential: a constant sabotage of

the “work” of progress in order to discover slow, cyclical, pleasures. As Alexandrova asserts, the *Wake* “has the capacity to engage us in a mutually transformative conversation that ultimately reminds us that all literary experience is singular and has the potential to be extraordinary, if only we approach it with a willingness to allow the other to reach out to us through our inherent boundedness” (90).

In a sense it’s realistic to say that any scholarship that is interested in expanding the reader’s notion of who they are relation to the world and the ideas they have about how humans function does the work of deconstructing compulsory able-bodiedness in normative reading practices. However, I want to specifically identify that such deconstructions are often prompted by processing styles which make absorption into some texts a slower process. Quayson says as much in the conclusion to *Aesthetic Nervousness*: “the ethical core that disability implies within literary representation is rarely if ever clearly evident on casual reading. It is only a rigorous set of reading practices alive to the implications of disability that would help to give space to that ethical core” (208). There is no change or recognition in ethical practices that “attune” (Bernstein, “Artifice of Absorption” 85) us to others without careful reading, without becoming “absorbed” in the text.

I suggest “interpretive absorption” (E.K. Sedgwick 3) is a personal and political act that can deconstruct compulsory able-bodiedness. It is both rigorous and adventurous, filled with lust for disability, attendant to pleasures. The readings I offer in this chapter are not directive, but are examples of my own absorption in *FW* (“every telling has a taling”) (*FW* 212.11). As an undiagnosed neurodivergent writer and reader butting up against challenging texts, these practices have allowed me to expand beyond what I thought were the limits of my reading/writing style. As I

assert consistently, this is my own interpretation of one way of reading divergently; my own “coming-to-know” (Yergeau 160) the limits of my own cognitive tendencies. This is my witness, my testimony, my process, my profession that can serve as one example of disrupting normative reading processes. This chapter is just one reading in a host of possibilities; one star in a constellation of options.

### Chapter 3: Any Little Thing is Water: ADHD Voice in *Tender Buttons*

#### Introduction: No Epigraph:

This chapter should begin with an epigraph, like the first two, but it won't.

This chapter begins

sitting between                      two fires  
a log arrhythmic                      in the woodstove

“campfire” white noise option on the app

that helps me                      focus (my attention)                      on the keys and the page

instead of: umbrellas, keurig pods that can't be recycled, dust on yellow paprika

bags, umbrellas, the steady drip of water from the ceiling mimicking my mother's clock, umbrellas, eternal questions like: where did i put my keys?

This chapter focuses on Gertrude Stein's “repetition, variations, and permutations” (*Poetic Licence* Perloff 152) in *Tender Buttons* (*TB*). This “inaccessible text” is historically more difficult to read than her more approachable pieces. Bob Perelman says of Stein's early work that she “concerns herself with the same problem that confronted Pound and Zukofsky, that of addressing the public in language more real than it could read” (*Trouble with Genius* 23). Readers' unwillingness or inability to read Stein is described by Natalia Cecire as “not-reading” or “compromised reading” (283): either readers choose not to perform close readings of the text, or they use clinical language to disregard *TB*.

In my previous two chapters, I considered similar disrupted reading strategies by looking at how critics' diagnoses of James Joyce pointed to “symptoms” of neurodivergent aesthetics in *Finnegans Wake*. Chapter 1 investigated Joyce's characterization of Shem the Penman as an anti-



eugenic character, and his anti-eugenic writing strategies that may induce “aesthetic nervousness” in the reader (Quayson 15). In Chapter 2, Joyce’s use of disfluency as a poetic device prompts the reader to lean in to difficult conversations; to slow down and to read from a place of desire.

In Chapter 3, I also think about readers’ diagnostic impulses towards inaccessible antiabsorptive texts like *Tender Buttons*. While Stein is not charged with having “water on the brain” like Joyce, she does receive a diagnosis of hysteria. I examine how Stein’s experiments on motor automatism with her fellow student Leon Solomons may inform her early writings. I connect these experiments and *TB* by drawing similar conclusions as American behaviourist and psychiatrist BF Skinner, though Skinner and I end up at different “diagnoses.” Skinner diagnoses Stein as a hysteric, while I consider the potential ADHD (Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) value in both Stein and Solomons’ experiments, and in Stein’s difficult poetry. These early experiments outline an interest in attention and I argue that when discussing attention in literary criticism, scholarship must take into account both readers with ADHD, and texts written with ADHD language markers or expressive practices (Miele Rodas 29).

Throughout the paper I will be taking the term “disorder” as a heuristic, since most publications of Stein’s text are, in fact, published out of order to what she intended. First I discuss the historical development of ADHD as a disorder, and then I perform readings of *TB* that analyze ADHD aesthetics in the text. I connect these aesthetics which stimulate the reader into cognitive processing styles like “continuous partial attention” (Stephens 50), to Stein’s own descriptions of her writing process.

In Chapter 3, I will also be practicing less academic masking in my writing. “Masking” refers to how neurodivergent people hide their divergent “symptoms” in order to appear more neurotypical. In the spirit of the creative benefits that ADHD offers and to continue exploring my own personal expressive practices, I will be allowing my voice to align more with a “stream of consciousness” writing style. But not like a stream which is more of a manicured brook (brook? not creek? definitely brook, not creek, not river, and stream is pushing it) which in its way is a delightful kind of writing, but more like the exhausting sentences Stein (I just wrote Stain) unlocks in her “Rooms” section of *Tender Buttons*; something wild that you might find in the woods, running over moss green rocks. Not necessarily necessarily necessarily sentences full of emphasis, or insistence, but phrases that give the reader the opportunity to witness my looping, tilting, repetitive processing in “real time.”

### 3.1 What Comes First, Objects, Food, or Rooms? Or: why you should never buy an umbrella:

*Tender Buttons*, published by Gertrude Stein in 1914, is a book of prose poetry that reads through different domestic spaces. *TB* has no discernible narrative. The reader begins with “Objects” and is introduced to carafes (Stein *TB* 9), a long dress (Stein *TB* 17), umbrellas that return like boomerangs (Stein *TB* 13, 20, 22), and yellow (Stein *TB* 12, 15, 17, 20, 22, 23) among other items. “Food” is next, and the reader receives a list of foods that progress chronologically throughout the day with breaks for end of summer (not breakfast), lunch, and dinner. The form of “Objects” through to the end of “Food” is short, emotionally charged paragraphs—“sentences are not emotional but paragraphs are” says Stein (“Poetry and Grammar” 134). Beginning with “Ob-

jects,” the text expands chronologically through “Food,” and then spatially into “Rooms,” moving the reader from discrete items to a section of the text that is very differently organized.

“Rooms,” the third section of *TB*, has a more sprawling poetic form: long paragraphs and pages of uninterrupted text with little white space, as if the reader is moving from one room to the next the way that one wanders through a place they know well, picking up various objects. Beginning reading *TB* in “Rooms” feels like getting out of a chair by the fire and striding somewhere with significant intent, only to open the door to the next space and completely forget what one was about. There is little room in this section of the text to collect one’s thoughts—Stein’s writing powers forward, shifting topics without pause for breath and providing overwhelming stimuli for observation. By contrast, “Objects” and “Food” contain shorter sections of poetry. The writing is consumable, bite-sized, easy to pick up or replace, or lose. This may be one reason there are three umbrellas in *TB* (Stein 13, 20, 22).

a list of places i have lost and bought umbrellas:

- shoppers drugmart for \$30—in a storm without my raincoat which allows me to move unhindered over sidewalks or down mountains with free damp hands—i hate the curve of the handle, i must keep switching hands to hold my coffee
- a juice bar/health food store
- an academic conference in toronto, makeup streaking my face my hair short not long enough to tuck behind my ears though i try every 7 and a half minutes and i am wearing, instead of a raincoat, a purple rug that i bought be-

cause it said it was made of mohair it shed leaving short purple hair every-  
where i was a lavender husky

- a borrowed golf umbrella behind the door of the english lounge at the uni-  
versity of windsor where sometimes i poured coffee grounds from the french  
press down the kitchen sink and i returned once to find the counter flooded i  
think Stein and i have similar opinions on umbrellas.

In *Tender Buttons*, I notice moments of shared experiences that while not unique to people with ADHD, are frequently experienced by people with ADHD (also called “ADHDers”). For example, consistently losing or leaving home without essential objects. Putting said objects out of sight and having them simply cease to exist for the ADHD brain. While most readers of the text begin with “Objects,” if the reader began in “Rooms” and moved to “Food” and then “Objects” this alternative reading might have the effect of picking up multiple things while moving through a space, putting them down, and ending at the concreteness of a discrete object at the end of the day (or the summer). Instead, the way readers traditionally experience *TB* produces a more expansive effect. The reader starts small, zoomed in on specific objects themselves, and moves outward to encompassing containers and winding sentences.

However, according to Joshua Schuster, the average Dover classic reader reads *TB* out of order. He says that when Stein sent her manuscript to the publisher initially “there is enough archival evidence that ‘Objects’ was almost certainly the last section written and never intended by Stein to be the first in order. In the bound volumes that Toklas later typed up to record Stein’s work in the event that it was lost, she begins with ‘Rooms’” (“The making of *Tender Buttons*” n.p.). In a letter to her publisher in 1914, Stein lists the sections beginning with “Food,” then

“Rooms,” and finally “Objects” (Schuster “The making of *Tender Buttons*” n.p.). However, she does not appear to correct the publisher Donald Evans when he publishes her three sections “Objects,” “Food,” “Rooms.” The dis-ordering of *TB* in published versions since then, Schuster argues, offers the reader a way to interpret the first sentence of “Rooms”: “act so that there is no use in a centre” (Stein *TB* 43), or the last sentence in the first “object”: “the difference is spreading” (Stein *TB* 3)—no section of *TB* holds more importance than another.

Theoretically, one could read the text beginning with “Rooms.” I’m not trapped by the linearity of this bound book, so why do I read from the “beginning” instead of beginning at the end? Normative reading practices insist that one reads the text “in order”; that we minimize “disorder.” Recognizing that Stein intended *Tender Buttons* to be read with many possible beginnings deconstructs the importance of this normative order. Structurally, *Tender Buttons*, like Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, offers readers alternatives to “normative” reading practices. This is true for its content as well, as *TB* undermines conventional strategies of reading and understanding in English.

In my last chapter I defined normative reading as: 1) reading in ways that materially reenact how students are generally taught: linearly, quickly, word by word, from left to right down the page, with total attention, but not too much attention—no skipping words, no jumping around, no rereading; and 2) reading that conceptually reinforces dominant normative ideologies. I illustrated how these practices often uphold compulsory norms, yet texts that disrupt such practices are also often valued as excellent examples of modernist literature. *TB* is one example.

Like *Finnegans Wake*, Charles Bernstein lists Stein’s *Tender Buttons* as an antiabsorptive, or notoriously difficult avant-garde text. Critical modernist receptions to the book of poetry label

it: “the torment of an egg-beaten brain,” “nonsense,” and “unintelligible” (Diepeveen 199). The common theme is that the text is unusual; hard to read and hard to understand. *TB* introduces ordinary objects which are juxtaposed nonsensically, it repeats phrases and words, and contradicts itself. It leads readers to expect certain conclusions, and then subverts these expectations. In the poem “Glazed Glitter” Stein begins: “Nickel, what is nickel” (Stein *TB* 3). While the reader naturally expects an answer to this question, Stein proceeds: “it is originally rid of a cover” (Stein *TB* 3), which appears to disregard nickel altogether, prompting the reader to try to understand how nickel might have lost its cover.

In the poem, “A Carafe, that is a Blind Glass” Stein says “A kind in glass and a cousin, a spectacle and nothing / strange a single hurt color and an arrangement / in a system to pointing. All this and not ordinary, not / unordered in not resembling” (Stein *TB* 3). Schuster asserts that each Steinian “sentence is both doing and undoing, attaching and detaching. Each sentence sensitizes, but sense quickly recedes as the next sentence comes in. . . . Words scatter at the same time as they gather, and the poem is what emerges in the attempt to convey the movements of these differences” (“100 years of reading” n.p.). Like waves that overlap while receding and flooding, these movements outline Stein’s “system” (*TB* 3)—a system that confuses the reader as objects, paragraphs, and sentences are “not unordered” (*TB* 3), but also do not conform to normative order or function as expected.

As “the difference” of *TB* grammar “spreads” (Stein 3) throughout the text, readers of *Tender Buttons* struggle to absorb or be absorbed in the poetry. Bernstein references the “denser sections of *Tender Buttons*” (“Artifice of Absorption” 56) as examples of twentieth-century antiabsorptive poetic techniques that make it difficult for readers to engage with the text. In my last

chapter, I outlined how this absorption depends partially on the reader's personal investment in or desire to comprehend a given text. Bernstein suggests that where a text falls on a continuum of absorption and impermeability may depend also on the attention of a reader.

Bernstein asserts that "Absorption & its many converses, re-verses, is at heart a measure of the relationship between a reader and a work" ("Artifice of Absorption" 88). Absorption or antiabsorption depends on how captivated or engaged by a text the reader becomes. Bernstein labels this a spectrum of absorption and says that different texts use both absorptive and antiabsorptive modalities to engage audiences. For example, he says that "To speak of a radically impervious text is to speak oxymoronically—absorbancy and repellency are relative, contextual, & interpenetrating terms, not new critical analytic categories" ("Artifice of Absorption" 65).

Because these categories are contextual and work on a spectrum most authors will offer the reader a way to engage, even if this is by making their text intriguingly difficult to understand. While theoretically inaccessible to many readers, Bernstein argues that "in practical terms, the complete shutout of the reader's attention is subverted by most ostensibly antiabsorptive texts, partly by some readers' paradoxically keen interest in impermeability, and partly by the writer's need to be readable, even if only by herself or himself" ("Artifice of Absorption" 65). Therefore, an author will try to maintain the reader's attention. Particularly, modernist texts like *Tender Buttons* use antiabsorptive modalities to prompt "a shift in attentional focus" (Bernstein "Artifice of Absorption" 76).

For example, Bernstein says that "the re-/di-/rection of at-/ten-/tion-/al/focus/can/ as use-/ful-/ly be/ located/ in the/shift/ of at-/tention/ from the / rhet-/orical/ effect...to the / rhetoricity. For instance / the way / Stein...makes / possible an / attention / to each / word, / one word—/ or

even syllable—/ at / a / time” (“Artifice of Absorption” 79). Bernstein’s writing embodies these attentional shifts for the reader as he explains the concept, illustrated by the line breaks in the above quote. On the page, each line is broken into one or two words, asking the reader to attend specifically to words that are normally overlooked (ie. “at,” “a,” “the”) or prompting the reader to linger on a word that has been cut into sections (ie. “at-/ten-/tion-/al”). By deliberately using strategies to shift what the reader is engaging with, the text targets the reader’s attention.

Bernstein’s emphasis on attention again constructs a hypothetical reader; in this case, one with an interest in impervious or opaque texts that make some literary spaces inaccessible to readers using particular processing styles. Last chapter, I suggested that often the construction of a hypothetical reader is able-bodied and neurotypical. This chapter asks how the absorptive or antiabsorptive potential of a text might change with a neurodivergent reader whose capacity for attention is different. How does the oscillation of attention between absorption and impermeability change if the reader has ADHD, a disorder that affects attention? What value can be gained from practices that explicitly make visible the potential differences in reading according to the attention span of a mind with different cognitive limits? I argue that ADHDers and ADHD scholars can add important insight to understanding texts with aesthetics like *Tender Buttons* that push readers into non-normative attentional shifts, or vacillating states of focus. I also argue that the concept of attention has been historically relevant in discussions of Stein’s work: one of *Tender Buttons*’ most famous criticisms is from BF Skinner who propose that Stein has a deficit of consciousness. This chapter recognizes how early clinical iterations of ADHD were relevant to modernist discussions of *Tender Buttons*, and I recognize aspects of the disorder in Stein’s cognitive style.



### 3.2 Stein's Stream of Consciousness and Skinner's Critique:

One of the most interesting reviews of *TB* comes from Harvard psychologist and behaviourist Burrhus Frederic Skinner in his 1934 article entitled "Has Gertrude Stein a secret?" published by *The Atlantic Monthly*. According to Skinner, Stein has a secondary personality that emerges when she sits down to write, and it's responsible for some of her most "experimental work," like *TB* and *Three Lives*. The psychologist analyzes Stein's writing and finds words "tacked upon" a sentence "in odd company" (Skinner 53). He proposes that Stein experiences the hysteric's "second personality,"; however, he says "it is a very flimsy sort of personality indeed. It is intellectually unopinionated, it is emotionally cold and has no past. It is unread and unlearned beyond grammar school...Its literary materials are the sensory things nearest at hand—objects, sounds, tastes, smells, and so on" (Skinner 53). This review is especially scathing because he's calling her an ineffective hysteric. He's saying that she's developed a boring secondary personality. If you're going to suggest someone suffers from hysteria, at least say that their secondary personality is interesting. This leaves *Tender Buttons*, as he says, "very probably unintelligible in any ordinary sense, not only to other readers but to Stein herself" (Skinner 55). This is a scathing attack on both her agency and her authority.

Skinner quotes from "A Chair" in "Objects," saying that "her sentences are often cast as definitions ('What is a spectacle a spectacle is a resemblance...'" (52), although this definition doesn't "define" anything in a normative sense. What he leaves out in this quotation is the beginning of the sentence: "Hope, what is a spectacle, a spectacle is the resem / blance between the circular side place and nothing / else, nothing else" (Stein *TB* 9). "Hope" is not an object or sen-

sory word and complicates Skinner's analysis. Is "hope" a spectacle? If so, what kind? A performance? Or a "blind glass" (Stein *TB* 3), an eyeglass? The vague definition leaves the audience options— is hope a performance, or a lens through which to see the world? "Hope" appears first in the poem "Glazed Glitter" in which the definition of "Nickel" is framed similarly: "what is nickel, it is originally rid of a cover" (Stein *TB* 3). Stein says "There is no search. But there / is, there is that hope and that interpretation and / sometime, surely any is unwelcome, sometime there / is breath" (*TB* 3). The audience is offered further "interpretations" of "hope" on p. 37: "Hope in gates, hope in spoons, hope in doors, hope / in tables, no hope in daintiness and determination. / Hope in dates" (Stein *TB*). The list of possible places to find hope that comes in the "Food" section of *Tender Buttons* implies that perhaps there is a search for it as "Glazed Glitter" anticipates, but that there are unwelcome interpretations. In neglecting "Hope" in his quotation, Skinner misses the opportunity to track how Stein uses the word throughout her collection of interconnected poems; the differences in the word that spread through the book each time it appears.

Regardless, Skinner proposes that Stein, in writing *TB*, the *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, and *Three Lives* draws heavily on experiments that Stein and her colleague Leon Solomons performed initially on each other and then on other students at Harvard under the influence of the famed psychologist and philosopher William James. These experiments had to do with what Solomons and Stein called "normal motor automatism" and they published their article under this title as co-authors in 1896 in the *Harvard Psychological Review*. Stein published her further experiments and studies on this topic in 1898 under the title "Cultivated motor automatism: a study of character in its relation to attention."

These studies intended to disprove that an automatic or secondary personality was unique to people suffering from hysteria, which was the current conception, and that “normal” or healthy people could also exhibit automatic somatic movements when their attention was distracted. Solomons and Stein begin by saying that “it is well known that many hysterical subjects exhibit a remarkable development of the subconscious life, amounting, in many cases, to that interesting phenomenon known as double personality . . . we underestimate the automatic powers of the normal subject” (493). Modernist scholar Mark Niemeyer explains further that Stein and Solomons were interested in studying how traits associated with hysteria appeared in ordinary people. They intended to produce an environment through which “subconscious movement or thought (as manifested in a movement)” appeared (Niemeyer 79) and could be studied.

Their professor, William James, suggested that Stein and Solomons try performing these experiments for themselves, on themselves. James has been credited as the father of American psychology. He established the first American psychology lab at Harvard in 1874 (“William James” n.p) and his textbook *The Principles of Psychology*, which was published in 1890 after twelve years of work, was hugely influential. James was the first to introduce the psychological idea of “Stream of consciousness,” and much of *The Principles* dealt with habits of attention, which Stein and Solomons considered in their experiments. They hung a planchette (a board suspended by rope) from the ceiling, placed their arms on it, and practiced allowing themselves to follow whatever movements their hand and arm made while being spoken or read to; this would ensure their attention was sufficiently distracted. Stein and Solomons called this practicing “automatic writing and reading”—whatever emerged during their practice they considered to be

subconsciously constructed (Solomons and Stein 496). At first, it was just repetitive movements, but eventually the process evolved into letters.

Both experimenters began to train themselves to produce sentences with suitable grammatical structure, though nonsensical. Solomons and Stein highlight that these perseverations were repetitive and though “the words and phrases fitted together all right...there was not much connected thought” (506). Any connected thought that did appear the authors attribute to what they call “flashes of consciousness” (Solomons and Stein 500) that would occur briefly for the writers. However, “the ability to write stuff that sounds all right, without consciousness, was fairly well demonstrated” (Solomons and Stein 506). This “connected thought” occurred when they were distracted; when the subject’s attention was focussed on what was being read to them.

This “stuff” went something like: ““This long time when he did this best time, and he could thus have been bound, and in this long time when he could be this to first use of this long time...”” (Solomons and Stein 506). The subjects also apparently pulled writing from their subconscious memory—“the subject while his attention was distracted by listening to reading wrote some bit of poetry well known to him....the things written were bits of poetry that the subject had often repeated to himself, but never written” (Solomons and Stein 507).

Skinner, who knew about these experiments, begins by comparing *TB*’s form to Stein and Solomons’s automatic writing. He proposes that “No one who has read *Tender Buttons* or the later work in the same vein can fail to recognize a familiar note in these examples of automatic writing” (Skinner 52). Skinner concludes that, stylistically speaking, the writing seems to have a “a common origin” which confirms for him that “the work of Gertrude Stein in the *Tender Buttons* manner is written automatically and unconsciously in some such way as that described in

this early paper” (52); or, written with a deficit of attention.

He goes on to describe the style of *TB* as having no “consistent point of view” (Skinner 52) or intellectual content, moving on to what is one of my favourite pieces of criticism: “*Tender Buttons* is the stream of consciousness of a woman without a past. The writing springs from no literary sources. In contrast with the work of Joyce, to whom a superficial resemblance may be found, the borrowed phrase is practically lacking.” (Skinner 52). The “borrowed phrase” comes from William James’ Vol. 1 of *The Principles of Psychology*, published in 1891. “Stream of consciousness” or “stream of thought,” (James 526) refers to the continuity of subjective experience, and was adapted as a literary device used by modernist writers who narratively mimicked the inner psychological workings of characters. May Sinclair notably used “stream of consciousness” to describe writing in Dorothy Richardson’s novels, *Pointed Roofs*, in 1918.

Essentially, Skinner is saying that Stein’s stream is dry. Stein’s wellspring, which should be filled to overflowing with literary references and allusions, is instead coughing up dust. Instead of experiencing an excess of stream of consciousness, like Joyce’s “water on the brain” from time spent excessively imbibing from the font of literary sources (a condition which critics accused Joyce of exhibiting) Stein’s stream of consciousness is a sandy river bed. She is lacking—this “lack” is often imposed on disabled people and women. Stein responds to this criticism by shooting back that she is possessed of an “xcess of consciousness” (in Meyer 141); her cup, in fact, overfloweth, and so then does her ability to focus her attention on her work.

Interestingly enough, encephalitis, or “water on the brain” (the reader will remember that Joyce was “diagnosed” with encephalitis by Gould), has a moment in the history of contemporary ADHD understandings. Beginning in 1908 and continuing through the encephalitis lethargi-

ca epidemic of 1917-1928, researchers began to study the aftereffects of encephalitis on children. This included “children often [becoming] ‘hyperactive, distractible, irritable, antisocial, destructive, unruly, and unmanageable in school. They frequently disturbed the whole class and were regarded as quarrelsome and impulsive, often leaving the school building during class time without permission’” (Ross and Ross in Lange et. al 246). While Lange et al. go on to say that this description doesn’t match perfectly with contemporary diagnoses of ADHDers, they propose that “The postencephalitic behavior disorder aroused, nevertheless, a broad interest in hyperactivity in children, and the findings were influential for the further scientific development of the concept of ADHD” (246-247). A stepping stone across the stream to the next rock.

Skinner doesn’t assume that Stein’s dry secondary personality is constructed by an innate disability, he suggests it is a habit leftover from the motor automatism experiments. While Skinner says there are some intelligible moments in *TB*, he adopts Solomons’s experimental language to categorize them as “flashes of consciousness” (Solomons and Stein 500) that make the rest of the text more dull in contrast (Skinner 54). He justifies his view by listing Stein’s writing habits as supporting evidence.

For example: 1: Stein wrote *TB* on scrap pieces of paper. Writing on scraps of paper instead of the typewriter appears to support the connection that Skinner makes to the experiments, as Solomons and Stein wrote on scrap pieces of paper. 2: Stein likes to “write in the presence of distracting noises” (54); during the automatic writing experiment, the experimenter would speak or read to the subject in order to sufficiently distract their attention and allow their body to begin moving of its own accord. Once the body did begin moving, the subjects couldn’t predict what they were going to write, and were only aware that they had written anything after it had hap-

pened (Solomons and Stein 498). 3: her writing is illegible to her after having written it. Skinner refers to Stein's handwriting as cold; he argues that there is no recognizable emotion or connection to the writer herself (54). And finally, 4: she writes the letter "m" frequently in *Tender Buttons*, "with which," Skinner asserts, "the reader will recall, the automatic procedure often began" (54). And why wouldn't she be fond of writing "m," scrawling small mountains across the range of the page? Similar to David Spurr's understanding of stuttering, which I looked at in Chapter 2, Skinner conceived that Stein's body overtook her mind—that the habit of hysteria leftover from Stein's automatic writing experiments caused her to write and then publish such "nonsense" (55).

### 3.3 Stein's Rebuttal: Her stream overflows the banks:

Understandably, Stein refuted Skinner's accusation that a thin, semi-hysterical secondary personality was responsible for her more experimental texts. Stein was adamant that her writing "be recognized as conscious and the product of a rational mind; that it not be taken, as Skinner had, as a simulacrum of the unconscious writing of an hysterical woman—as little more, and perhaps much less, than the work of female hysteria" (Meyer 141). Stein immediately connects this critique to her identity as a female writer. She exaggerates her refutation: 'No it is not so automatic as he thinks...if there is anything secret it is the other way....I think I achieve by xtra consciousness, excess' (in Meyer 141).

"Xtra consciousness" and "excess" is, interestingly, another denigrative description of disabled people—if they don't experience a lack, they are saddled with excess. Feminist-disability scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson writes that connecting disability theories and feminist theories transforms the two areas for mutual benefits in ways that help explain how an "aggre-

gate of systems operate together, yet distinctly, to support an imaginary norm and structure the relations that grant power, privilege, and status to that norm” (335). For example, she highlights a set of “interrelated characterizations” (338) that are applied to the representation of both disabled people and women as identity categories (this is obviously not to dismiss the intersectional lived experiences of disabled women, whose experience compounds layers of appellations). These characterizations have to do with “representing subjugated people as being pure body, unredeemed by mind or spirit. This sentence of embodiment is conceived of as either a lack or an excess” (338).

This is shared by both women and disabled people generally. Garland-Thomson summarizes that “Women, for example, are considered castrated. . . . they are thought to be hysterical or to have overactive hormones” (338) because the lack of a penis or an excess of hormones leads to hysteria. Disabled people, similarly, are either victims or perpetrators of “degeneration” or “enlargement” (Garland-Thomson 338) lacking limbs or over-functioning, presenting with too many chromosomes, receptors, or heightened senses.

Ableism and misogyny are both present in Skinner’s article and Stein’s response, and highlight the atmosphere of eugenics that permeated the time period. Stein’s rebuttal, that she is possessed of an “excess” of consciousness supports her assertion of her genius—in “Portraits and Repetition” Stein labels herself a genius, aligning her work with Picasso and Matisse (296). In *The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas* Stein writes as Alice that “The three geniuses of whom I wish to speak are Gertrude Stein, Pablo Picasso and Alfred Whitehead” (3). This was likely not the defense she intended it to be.

As I described in my first chapter, organized eugenics in France (where Stein was writing



and living) from 1912 to the beginning of WWII was largely pro-natalist and focussed on producing healthy, plentiful progeny to repopulate the country after the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71) and a declining French birthrate (Schneider 269). However, supporters of eugenics at the time in western Europe and the US drew a thin line between the mentally ill and geniuses. Cesare Lombroso's psychiatric lecture series to the University of Pavia in 1863 entitled "The Man of Genius" is summarized by his daughter, Gina Lombroso-Ferrero in her appendix to Lombroso's *Criminal Man* (1911). She describes the "spice of insanity in the genius and flashes of genius in the insane" and says that "geniuses are subject to a special form of insanity" (Lombroso-Ferrero 287).

Lombroso-Ferrero highlights that often this "special form of insanity" is found in artists who do their best work in a state of "unconsciousness" (287). This state could be a result of epilepsy, which Lombroso defined as a mental illness responsible for criminality. Further, Lombroso classifies hysteria as a "disease allied to epilepsy, of which it appears to be a milder form, and is much more common among women than men in the ratio of twenty to one" (in Lombroso-Ferrero 93). At the fin de siècle, hysteria was seen as affecting a person in various ways, and the treatments included hypnosis and Freud's new psychotherapy. By the time Stein was finished writing *TB* in 1914, "the first recorded eugenically motivated sterilization" had already been enacted "by the Swiss psychiatrist Auguste Forel on a fourteen-year-old 'hysterical' girl" (Gerodetti 69). Historian Fae Brauer lists hysteria among a series of recognized disorders that "seemingly confirmed increasing degeneration and waning biopower" (43) for France.

This tenuous line between genius and insanity, virtue and moral vice, is implicit in Skinner's critique. While he maintains that Stein has a "sound intelligence" and a "very fine

mind” (Skinner 55), his suggestion that Stein’s hysterical subconscious is responsible for *TB* situates her poetry within a history of insanity and criminality. Indeed, Skinner wonders whether it was “right” for Stein to have published the sort of nonsense that *TB* exemplifies, asking the “ethical question of whether she is doing right by Oxford and the King’s English” (56). This “ethical question” reflects on ableist and nationalistic eugenic values—should the work of a “fine mind” (Skinner 55) be published, and valued by institutions if it promotes degeneration, deviates from the norm, or is “unintelligible” nonsense (Skinner 56)?

Several critics who take Stein’s refusal of Skinner’s diagnosis seriously suggest that though the psychologist is mistaken about her secondary personality, he does have a point about the style of writing that *TB* embodies. They insist, however, that this is a style that Stein has intentionally cultivated instead of merely fallen into the habit of performing. In 1941, Ronald Levinson writes that “most if not all of Miss Stein’s writing which resembles in form and content the early automatic writing, is the attempt to put into practice some notions of the ideal function of language” (125). Michael Hoffman proposes this even more plainly, saying that “Quite aware of the characteristics of ‘automatic writing,’ Gertrude Stein developed some of its surface attributes into a conscious aesthetic. Only by writing consciously could Gertrude Stein consistently maintain a style that excluded so many elements of ‘human nature’” (129). These critiques shift the perception of Stein from a victim of her unconscious, to a writer who knowingly produced an aesthetic from what was at the time considered a severe mental pathology.

Whether or not Stein intended it, several critics agree that the experimental automatic style is similar to the writing in *TB*, and that the aesthetic prompts either a lack or an excess of attention. Skinner himself asserts that “It is quite true that *something happens* to the conscien-

tious reader of *Tender Buttons*. Part of the effect is certainly due either to repetition or to surprise..." (emphasis mine, 56). He argues that while stimulating a response to repetition or surprise in the reader isn't a rare literary achievement he acknowledges an effect on the "conscientious reader" (Skinner 56)—something happens when a reader begins to actively tackle Stein's experimental work. But what is it that happens? What work is this aesthetic doing?

Stein's extreme juxtaposition manufactures objects from abstract words that do not appear to connect with each other: "a canoe is orderly. A period is solemn. A cow is accepted. / A nice old chain is widening, it is absent, it is laid by" (*TB* 29). There are moments when Stein seems to talk directly to the reader. In the poem "Sugar" she says: "The teasing is tender and trying and thoughtful," (Stein *TB* 29) as if acknowledging that the following sentences will be "trying" for the reader, as if she is in on the joke. Stein's purpose for *Tender Buttons*, as she says in "Poetry and Grammar," is to create and recreate "things" without naming them (142). Stein believed that her task was to set the reader up against an object in language as much as she possibly could, making language something encounter-able, instead of readable: an experience. She asserts that "language as a real thing is not imitation either of sounds or colours or emotions it is an intellectual recreation" (Stein "Poetry and Grammar" 142). Bernstein asserts that "Stein was engaged in making a dialogic poetic of non-resemblance: words not dominating the world with their order but allowing the world to inhabit the words" ("The Revolution" n.p).

Stein insists that the reader experience each word as itself, but this also extends to more abstract concepts like emotions. She says in the second line of "Roastbeef" that "in the morning there is meaning, in the / evening there is feeling. In the evening there is feeling. In feeling anything is resting, in feeling anything is mounting, in feeling there is resignation, in feeling there

is / recognition, in feeling there is recurrence and entirely mistaken there / is pinching” (Stein *TB* 21). Stein suggests that the “meaning” that readers are searching for in her text is intimately connected to emotional processes. Occasionally the reader might feel “recognition” (Stein *TB* 21); perhaps the associational connections or recurring terms hold a clue to the meaning of a previous sentence, like another puzzle piece that one hopes will finally make the picture appear—“A puzzle, a monster puzzle” (Stein *TB* 29).

However, perhaps this “recurrence” does not afford the reader any clarity, and they feel “entirely mistaken” (Stein *TB* 21). Suppose after forty pages, they are “resigned” (Stein *TB* 21) to confusion, “the disorder” (Stein *TB* 46) and uncertainty of Stein’s nouns leading them to the conclusion that *TB* “suggests nothing” (Stein *TB* 46). Even Stein’s directions for reading her work are suspect, as she says “lecture, lecture and repeat instructions” (*TB* 26) and then two lines later asks “what language can instruct any fellow” (*TB* 26).

It is no wonder then, that many hypothetical readers find it difficult to concentrate on or pay attention to *Tender Buttons*, with such shifts and seeming contradictions. Like Skinner, modernist poetry critic Marjorie Perloff in her book *Poetic License* divides Stein’s work into two categories: it is either “accessible, public, transparent” or “opaque, private, experimental” (145). *Tender Buttons* is in the second category. Different modernist scholars have various understandings about the “something” (Skinner 56) that happens when a conscientious reader engages the aesthetics of such an opaque text. For example, a flat out refusal to read it.

Natalia Cecire explains that Stein’s impermeable style has been called both “genius” and “fraudulent”: “it has been praised as innovative and condemned as nonsense on exactly the same formal grounds: a simple vocabulary, the elevation of sound-sense above semantic sense, and

above all, repetition” (284). These expressive practices construct a text that many readers consider “inaccessible”: unreadable, or incomprehensible. One way to treat an unreadable text is simply not to read it. Because this text frustrates normative reading strategies, readers and critics choose alternate ways to approach the text, which Cecire lists as “testing, sampling, diagnosis” (289). Cecire references an editorial in the 1934 *Journal of the American Medical Association* which diagnosed Stein and/or her work with “palilalia, a form of speech disorder in which the patient repeats many times a word, a phrase or a sentence which he has just spoken” (290). This has contemporary associations with perseverance or verbal stimming (self-stimulation), present in Autistic people, or people who have ADHD/OCD.

As mentioned earlier, Skinner obviously chooses to read Stein’s early work as a symptom of hysteria. Cecire includes his critique as an example of her argument and concludes that “such accounts approach the problem of Stein’s unreadability by imagining a scene of writing whose pathology explains the output” (290). In diagnosing Stein’s work as unreadable and *TB* as symptomatic of her pathology, one is able to disregard, like Skinner proposes, the difficult works she created. This diagnosis “gives one the freedom to dismiss one part of Gertrude Stein’s writing as a probably ill-advised experiment and to enjoy the other and very great part without puzzlement” (Skinner 57). However, it remains for many readers “a monster puzzle” (Stein *TB* 29).

As Barber-Stetson might affirm, refusing to be puzzled excludes certain joys. The dismissal of Stein’s writing on the grounds that the reader just can’t understand or normalize the text is connected directly to her supposed disability. One cure for readers of the text to deal with their own discomfort at encountering such puzzling aesthetics is ousting *TB* from the canon of literature in favour of Stein’s more transparent work. Another cure is to turn to strategies of

“compromised reading” (Cecire 281) like machine reading which practices reading at a distance from the text.

For example, Tanya Clement uses digital algorithms to “distant read” *The Making of Americans*, another of Stein’s experimental books. Critics often suggest that *TB* should be taken apart by a computer or played with like a game (Crandell; You; Van Dyke). This is intriguing because these strategies construct a mechanical reader who cannot be confused, or who cannot “misread” the text (Cecire 298).

This mechanistic ideal reader is perhaps similar in some ways to Joyce’s ideal insomniac of Chapter 1: a reader with infinite time to consider the complications of such impermeable texts, or a reader with uninterrupted focus to wade through the chaos of Stein’s disorder. This suggests a non-disabled, impersonal reader might be best to navigate *TB*; a reader whose attention, absorption, or engagement with the text is technologically mediated and unwavering. While this saves the reader from having to experience the different disability aesthetics that critics and readers diagnose Stein with (palilalia, hysteria, etc), this distant or “compromised” (Cecire 281) form of reading is at odds with Stein’s professed purpose for *TB*: for the reader to experience objects, nouns, things, close up, without having to categorize them in discrete linguistic boxes.

Therefore, Cecire argues, readers that diagnose Stein’s body, mind, and work with various pathologies use such diagnoses as excuses for unreadability. Regardless, if readers are going to brave Stein’s more experimental works up close, they must be aware that as Perloff says, “an enigma text like this one demands, of course, a great deal from the reader; indeed, many readers will find the demand *excessive*” (emphasis mine “Poetic License” 154). Perhaps the demands are

excessive because Stein is possessed of an excess of consciousness. If, however, a reader does not find it strenuous or excessive, what does this say about them?

### 3.4 Ways of Reading Stein: The Ghost of Explanation:

Bernstein suggests that one way to read Stein is to stop looking (as Stein suggests) for the “centre” (Stein *TB* 69) of the text, the clue to the puzzle that will offer overarching meaning, but instead to focus on the feast of language that she provides in the margins. As Stein says in “Rooms,” “If the centre has the place then there is distribution” (*TB* 43), a scattering to the edges. Bernstein relates his reading pleasure in her “palpable, intense, I’m tempted to say absolute, sense-making: you can almost taste it; a great plenitude of meaning, of possibility for language, in language....it makes me want to savor its words more than account for them” (*A Poetics* 143). My copy of *Tender Buttons* is graffitied. On the blank page before “Rooms” I wrote at some point: “my voice mimics you into a black hole. my voice overlays yours and i sleep off philosophy.” As demonstrated by the amount of readers who find *TB* unintelligible, this savouring is not universally shared.

Bernstein asserts that “Stein criticism is haunted by the ghost of explanation” (*A Poetics* 143) and that “Too much of the commentary on her work starts with the premise that there is something wrong, something unintelligible, something troubling in its difficulty, something puzzling, something disturbing or deranged or missing or lacking or defective or absent or restricted or nonsensical or impossible or perverse, something enigmatic or something hidden” (*A Poetics* 143). Like Cecire, Bernstein is critical of testing or diagnosing *TB* as if there is something wrong with it. He rejects the notion that Stein’s texts must be “treatable” (Bernstein *A Poetics* 145) to be

understood, or that they pose “a puzzle that must be cracked, a code that must be deciphered, a problem that must be solved or dissolved, an inchoate phenomenon that must be theoretically psychoanalyzed; and worst of all, a secret that must be detected” (Bernstein *A Poetics* 143). Instead, he argues, *TB* is a product of presence; writing that is intended to keep the reader present, their attention focussed on the words on the page instead of allowing literary allusions or allegory to shift their attention to outside associations.

Stein zeroes in on nouns to identify their “thingness” (Stein “Poetry and Grammar” 141); she is not describing, she insists, but she is making sure that her reader recognizes words as objects in the process of engaging and discovering them anew. This act of discovery, of encountering words as if for the first time, creates poetry: “Poetry is doing nothing but using losing refusing and pleasing and betraying and caressing nouns” (Stein “Poetry and Grammar” 138). She suggests that poetry is about naming—about discovering the exact name of a thing, and loving it enough to call it by name. She continues to explain that in naming something, she discovers its unique “thingness,” and this is the work of poetry: “I called them by their names with passion and that made poetry, I did not mean it to make poetry but it did...I discovered everything then and its name, discovered it and its name. I had always known it and its name but all the same I did discover it” (Stein “Poetry and Grammar” 141).

Putting her nouns in unfamiliar environments highlights this experience of discovery by dismantling the established connections a reader assumes are going to be present with certain words. This experience is meant to defamiliarize the reader—to deconstruct the unconscious associations that readers bring into a text which put nouns in specific contexts. Meyer argues that Stein wanted “words without echoes that functioned as their own echoes” (150).



Therefore, Stein avoided words that had obvious connected associations, because “it distracted from the writing by removing one’s attention from the object on the page and breaking one’s concentration....One had no control over one’s associations....and as such they were a sign of one’s dependence on habit” (Meyer 152). She worked to intentionally break such associational habits in her own writing and her poems “return us constantly, constantly return us, turn us, constituting, to where we are” (Bernstein *A Poetics* 145). Stein’s style intends to remove all distractions for the reader. As Bernstein asserts: “the power of making aware, which necessarily involved a disruption of a single plane of attention or belief, results in a hyperattentiveness that has its own economy of engagement” (*A Poetics* 83). Essentially, the “economy of engagement” (Bernstein *A Poetics* 83) at work in *TB* intends to produce a state of hyperfocus on the present: an excess of consciousness without distraction.

This hyperfocus on the words in front of a reader however, is difficult to maintain; associational echoes that point a reader away from the density of the page still occur intertextually. For example, when “hope” appears in “Glazed Glitter” and then in “A Chair,” the repetition of the word calls back to the previous poem. Readers of the text often assert that one of the most mind-numbing aspects of *TB* is its repetition. In the short poem “Eating,” Stein repeats “is it so” six times before moving on to comments on heat and eating (*TB* 37). Often repeated words include: centre (Stein *TB* 7, 9, 11, 21, 25, 26, 38, 39, 43, 46, 49, 50, 51), harmony (Stein *TB* 23, 44, 74), table (Stein *TB* 4, 5, 6, 7, 15, 23, 39, 44, 45, 49), and memory (Stein *TB* 21, 23, 31, 45, 48).

Perloff explains that Stein’s strategy of “repetition, variation, permutation, the minuscule transfer of a given word from one syntactic slot to another, one part of speech to another, creates a compositional field that remains in constant motion, that prevents closure from taking

place” (*Poetic License* 152). She asserts that “the best words, from Stein’s perspective, are those whose meanings remain equivocal and hence able to take on a slightly different shading at each reappearance” (Perloff *Poetic License* 151). This “compositional field of constant motion” (Perloff *Poetic License* 152) thus requires the conscientious reader to adapt their “habits of attention” (Solomons and Stein 497). Perloff asserts that with various words in *TB* going through the processes of “repetition, variation, and permutation” (*Poetic License* 153), the compositional field of *TB* is constantly in motion and “we have to be particularly attentive to uncover the connections between [objects]” (*Poetic License* 155).

Repetition and permutation connects to Meyer’s idea of words that are their own echoes—by repeating certain words, Stein begins to catalogue sensations within the text as a whole, pushing aside what the reader might recognize from previous associations and creating her own constellations of meaning. Bernstein echoes this by saying that in *TB* “the words do not represent something outside of the context in which they are performed . . . . The sections of the work are not “about” subjects that are discussed but are their own discrete word objects (verbal constellations)” (“The Revolution” n.p).

Stein maintains that what comes across as repetition, as a movement into memory, is actually a vibrating forwards—nothing is repetition because of the constant of change; each time she uses a word, there is more layered onto it. In “Portraits and Repetition” the poet asserts that repetition doesn’t exist because each time one repeats something it’s with a new emphasis. She calls this “insistence” (288), and asserts that repeated insistence is the essence of existence. The repeated idea of a thing insists on its constant presence, as it is created, and then re-created

through each repetition. Stein puts it like this: “I said in the beginning of saying this that if it were possible that a movement were lively enough it would exist so completely that it would not be necessary to see it moving against anything to know that it is moving. This is what we mean by life” (“Portraits and Repetition” 290). Repetition only becomes repetition when it is not the “thing”—the word itself, cloaked in what looks like repetition, is actually in constant motion, produced by the associational echoes within *TB*.

Thus, what actually happens for many readers is that *TB*'s constant motion pushes them into a series of “attentional shifts” (Bernstein *A Poetics* 76), between absorption and impermeability, between “recognition” of the “recurrence” of a word or phrase, and then “resignation” to the disorder of *TB*'s next sentence (Stein *TB* 21). Paul Stephens in “The Poetics of Information Overload: From Gertrude Stein to Conceptual Writing,” quotes Ellen Berry, Barbara Will, and Linda Stone who describe this way of reading. Ellen Berry calls this mode “a relaxed hyperattention, an unconscious hyperconsciousness, a borderline state of awareness a little like insomnia” (in Stephens, 50). Barbara Will refers to it as “attentive inattentiveness” (in Stephens 50), and Linda Stone frames this way of reading as maintaining a “continuous partial attention... keeping tabs on everything while never truly focusing on anything” (in Stephens, 50). Stephens adds that during the experience of Stein's writing “the reader cannot help but daydream or lose their train of thought” (50).

The above quotes illustrate that what is happening to a reader's attention while reading *TB* is a topic of interest in contemporary Stein scholarship. For Stephens these attentional shifts shouldn't be pathologized, but celebrated in conjunction with writing like Stein's, as it “produces not stress or crisis, but rather pleasure and possibly contemplative absorption” (Stephens 50).

Like Bernstein, Stephens reframes the experience of reading *TB*. The text is not an enigma, a problem, lacking or defective; the text doesn't need to be psychoanalyzed because there is nothing wrong with it. Even Perloff's assertion that "even at her most 'repetitious,' Stein is not just indulging, as some critics have supposed, in automatic writing" (*Poetic License* 155) dismisses the idea that anything in *TB* belies an actual disorder.

While I understand the impulse to reject accusations of pathology or deviance (something that Stein does herself), emphatically positioning "enigma" and "pleasure" as opposites to each other occludes the value of readings produced by those with disorders like ADHD, readers who do deviate from neurotypical norms, and who have unique perspectives on how a brain with a "lack" or "excess" of attention actually operates. Though Stephens does bring up ADHD in the introduction to his text, he frames it as a problem of the information age (19) and the disorder doesn't factor into his chapter on Stein.

I argue that *Tender Buttons* prompts readers into neurodivergent expressions of attention. "Hyperattent[iveness]" (Berry in Stephens 50) and conversely "continuous partial attention... keeping tabs on everything while never truly focusing on anything" (Will in Stephens 50) are descriptions of how many people with ADHD think. Instead of framing ADHD as merely a problem of the information age, I argue that there is ADHD reading value in *Tender Buttons*, and that ADHD cognitive processing styles play a part in producing the "palpable, intense" (Bernstein *A poetic* 143) pleasure of Stein's experimental work.

### 3.5 CDT Constellations: ADHD Expressive Practices: Associational Echoes

In Chapter 1, I used Ato Quayson's concept of aesthetic nervousness as a way to explain the visceral and kinaesthetic discomfort that readers of *Finnegans Wake* may experience. This aesthetic nervousness is present as readers encounter characters like Shem, who are intentional anti-eugenic representations of disability. In addition, the structure and language of *Finnegans Wake* diverge from textual norms so dramatically that they trigger aesthetic nervousness for readers who are forced to deviate from "normative" reading strategies. Quayson establishes this nervousness as a sensory experience the reader undergoes which can prompt ethical change (31).

In Chapter 2, I explored Barber-Stetson's notion of "cognitive processing styles" which describes how different aesthetic choices can prompt the reader to recognize the limits of their active processing frameworks, or the ways in which a text stimulates them into different cognitive modes. Barber-Stetson's work on "slow processing" demonstrates that literature, specifically poetry, can not only represent a cognitive disability effectively, but can use different aspects of these disabilities to change how a reader reads, (ie. slowing them down.)

In this chapter I connect Barber-Stetson's cognitive processing styles with Julie Miele Rodas' understanding of "expressive practices" (29). In my introduction, I suggested that the field of CDT lacked robust ways of describing how neurodivergent aesthetics worked in experimental or inaccessible poetry. It is essential to expand the notion of disability aesthetics to include cognitive disability aesthetics in poetry, in addition to prose literature. In Quayson, Mitchell and Snyder, and Fraser there is little discussion of disability aesthetic in poetry, instead of prose. Prose literature deals primarily with characters and characterization, plot, narrative, motifs, and symbols. While poetry may employ these aspects, the experimental poetry that I have been studying generally will not. Instead, I argue that experimental poetry that uses many antiab-

sorptive techniques doesn't explicitly rely on character representation, plot, etc., and disability aesthetics are located more frequently in the structure and syntax of the text. As I stated in my introduction and in Chapter 2, I have found this avenue of study primarily in Barber-Stetson, and Miele Rodas' work, though Rodas' criticism still focuses primarily on fiction (24). As I also noted in my introduction, my first two chapters do deal with disabled characters (Shem, HCE, and ALP) but I connect these characters to Joyce's structural and syntactical choices.

This third chapter continues to consider structure and syntax, as I argue this area of study needs to have theories developed specifically to connect critical poetic scholarship to disability aesthetics because poetry that doesn't rely on character representation, plot, etc., engages disability aesthetics in different ways than texts that include characters, or narrative. I propose that attending to cognitive disability aesthetics in the way that Miele Rodas and Barber-Stetson do and applying it to poetry means studying how the reader approaches a text which is disruptive from the beginning. The significant usage of antiabsorptive strategies makes the text "abnormal"; there may be few things for the reader to grasp that feel familiar. These effects can significantly destabilize readers, as I display throughout this dissertation.

Miele Rodas begins by outlining that her text *Autistic Disturbances* "recognizes echoes, tones, patterns and confluences between autistic language, which is typically pathologized and devalued, and language used in culturally valued literary texts" (2). She is arguing that the presence of disability in art and literature makes obvious contributions to these fields but is often not explicitly labelled as disabled. She asserts that there is a difference in value assigned to texts that are considered to be "just" autistic writing, while texts with "similar expression [enjoy] prized status as literature" (Miele Rodas 3). In Chapter 2 I used the example of "klanging" which de-

scribes both a schizophrenic and literary practice of grouping words by sound and rhythm instead of concept; it is deemed “inappropriate” if not used in a literary context. Rodas seeks to break down these boundaries and illuminate that valued literature depends on autistic expressive practice “as an elemental aspect of human voice and experience” (29)

In her manuscript, Miele Rodas outlines some expressive practices shared by Autists, then locates and analyzes this type of writing within canonized literary texts. What she means by “expressive practices” are language markers, techniques, voice, or styles of expression that, while not exclusively unique to autistic people, are usually considered “symptoms” of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Expressive practices are similar, as I have outlined in my introduction, to Barber-Stetson’s description of interpretive modes that stimulate the reader into ways of reading or processing that are non-normative. What I see as the difference between these terms is that expressive practices are generally externalized—Miele Rodas uses terms like “voice,” and “language markers” to denote the writer communicating in neurodivergent ways—and interpretive modes or cognitive processing styles indicate a reader interpreting information they’re receiving.

Often for autism, “aesthetic and clinical practice are enmeshed” (Miele Rodas 13). This is due to what she calls the “speculative autism diagnosis game” (Miele Rodas 13) where both literary scholars and clinicians “read” autism onto textual and actual bodies. These retroactive diagnoses of characters or authors rarely describe autistic expressive practices as positive or beautiful; instead of recognizing poetic value in autism or autistic writing, many critics and scholars turn to reading diagnoses just as Cecire describes critics diagnose Stein—as a way to dismiss poetry they don’t understand.

Instead, Miele Rodas studies autistic style language in a way that is “text-focused” not “person focused” (2). She’s not interested in retroactively diagnosing characters or authors and looking for “symptoms” or “evidence” of autism (Miele Rodas 29) but intends to “point to the autistic value present in the text” (Miele Rodas 29) independent of the author’s (supposed or actual) neurological status. Her understanding of how autistic aesthetics works is much less about how the body of the reader interacts with represented character bodies, and instead focusses on how the body of the reader interacts with the autistic voice or techniques that are formally recognizable in the construction of the text. Her book “imagines autistic voice as a widespread and influential aesthetic, with distinctive patterns of expression—narrative, rhetorical and discursive—running through an array of texts, sometimes broadly visible and in other instances as a fine thread” (Miele Rodas 29).

In this chapter, I will make a similar argument about ADHD expressive practices—that ADHD voice is distinctive, that ADHD ways of communicating and of processing are present in many different kinds of texts, and that calling ADHD techniques out when one sees them is essential, precisely because ADHD voices are part of a constellation of neurodiverse ways of reading, writing, and interpreting, both in the academy and outside it.

Miele Rodas’ tracks a set of textual strategies: ways “of seeing and interpreting, a vantage, a mode” (29). The expressive practices she lists are only some autistic practices that are possible to read: “silence, ricochet, apostrophe, ejaculation, discretion, and invention” (Miele Rodas 24). While these strategies could come from Autistic people, she catalogues them as a literary aesthetic regardless of their origin. Finally, Miele Rodas hopes to display to readers “the contributions of autism voice, rhetoric, aesthetic, and perspective, to demonstrate that these ways



of seeing and speaking are necessary to the larger experience and condition of humanity” (30).

Her hopes are similar to those of Siebers, Quayson, and Fraser: ideally, encountering and recognizing disability in art and literature will broaden an audience’s understanding of personhood. However, explicit embodied representation by the author or a disabled character is not necessary for Miele Rodas. She cautions that “reading more ‘traditional’ literary texts with a diagnostic lens is a fraught endeavour” (Miele Rodas 22), and asserts that her work is not retroactively diagnosing authors but looking for textual value.

This way of reading “focuses more on aesthetics than the condition of a text’s production” (Miele Rodas 149), and while Barber-Stetson suggests that authors like Joyce and Eliot would have been aware of new diagnoses like autism as a “symptom of schizophrenia” (150) she leaves this assumption at the writers intentionally choosing to “make this way of processing information visible in their texts” (150). This is not to say that modernist authors were autistic, or necessarily wrote in intentionally autistic ways, but that they wrote to disrupt a typical processing norm using aspects of autistic voice; recall from Chapter 1 William Carlos Williams’ suggestion that readers need “new receiving cells” (86) to engage *Finnegans Wake*. I mentioned in Chapter 2 that using or adapting pathologized voice in modernist literature was frequent practice, particularly for the Dadaists and Russian Trans-Sense movement (Chris Eagle “Stuttistics” 83). Another modernist aesthetic movement that included the techniques of the “mentally ill” was Surrealism.

Katherine Conley points out that André Breton, the founder of the movement and author of “Manifesto of Surrealism” in 1924 saw Surrealism, which sought to produce a version of automatic, or stream of consciousness writing, as the work of outsiders: “so-called ‘primitive peo-

ples'...the mentally ill, mediums, visionaries" (135). The writers and artists would use trance-like states to produce "a pure psychic automatism by which one proposes to express, either verbally by means of the written word, or in any other manner -- the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by the thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern" (Breton, 5). Surrealist writing was meant to be an experience of pure thought.

Stein did not think much of the Surrealists. In the *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* she called them "vulgarisers" who take the "manner for the matter" (196); those who prioritize the practice of creation over the content of the work itself. She criticized Surrealism for its emphasis on emotion in contrast to her own creative practice: "Gertrude Stein, in her work, has always been possessed by the intellectual passion for exactitude in the description of inner and outer reality. She has produced a simplification by this concentration, and as a result the destruction of associational emotion in poetry and prose" (Stein *Autobiography...* 196).

Stein's disdain for Surrealism echoes her and Solomons's findings in their automatic reading and writing experiments. Meyer explains how Stein was against the notion that anything she wrote was automatic and quotes Stein on the making of *TB* in 1946: "I soon found out...that there is no such thing as putting [words] together without sense. I made innumerable efforts to make words write without sense and found it impossible. Any human being putting down words had to make sense out of them" (in Meyer 144). Thus, Meyer concludes that Stein's assessment is: "Automatic writing was impossible...for anyone who was not clinically hysterical" (144).

Stein considered herself to be the opposite. She concentrated so hard that in writing *TB* she had a single objective: to create "an exact reproduction of either an outer or an inner

reality” (Stein *Autobiography...* 197). She was not hysterical; she was intentional, hyperaware. Her attention to detail didn’t waver—she existed in a continuous present. Stein rejected the Surrealists insistence that automatic writing is thought breaking through everyday language (R. Williams 73). Her writing is directly realistic, representing exactly what is, and thus, is decidedly not hysterical. It is understandable that Stein chose to distance herself from the Surrealists—automatic or unconscious writing, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, was theorized by supporters of eugenics theory as a “special kind of insanity” (Lombroso-Ferrero 287) that some authors practiced, and it was linked to illness and criminality.

However, like Cecire and Miele Rodas suggest, acknowledging ADHD voice or processing styles in a text is not a diagnosis of the author, nor, as Cecire implies, does it have to be out of fear of pathology. Is it pathologizing when a diagnosis is desired, when acknowledgement ends with familiarity, even though the writing is intended to defamiliarize, to help the reader see objects anew? When does a diagnosis become desired identity instead of demarcation? I imagine a hypothetical reader who might intentionally step into the centre of a rushing stream of consciousness to watch the soft undulating movements of their fingers caught in current. As Stein asks: “what is the current that makes machinery, that makes it crackle” (*TB* 8)? One might answer: “a change is in a current and there is no habitable exercise” (Stein *TB* 49). You can never step in the same river twice.

### 3.6 Attention Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD): Making machinery crackle:

In this vein then, of reading and not-diagnosing but noticing and recognizing (re-cognizing), I outline a short history of Attention Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder, or ADHD, with some

additions (my own personal prickly thoughts). ADHD is classified in the DSM-V as a neuro-physiological developmental disorder of executive function, which controls cognitive processing. This disorder can appear with symptoms of significant hyperactivity/impulsivity (ADHD-HI, which i imagine as ADHD appearing to loudly yell a salutation at you), inattention, (ADHD-I) or a combination of symptoms (ADHD-C). It is a heterogenous disorder with common qualities.

According to the DSM-V, symptoms of inattentive ADHD could look like: careless (how do you quantify care?) mistakes; inability to sustain attention in activities and conversation; starting tasks but losing motivation to finish (this dissertation); difficulty organizing tasks or poor time management; disliking tasks that require sustained mental effort, often losing necessary objects like keys, glasses, etc.; being distracted by extraneous stimuli and forgetful in daily activities (Reynolds and Kamphaus 1):

forgot where and when i parked my car  
received a ticket  
haven't paid this parking ticket  
even though i think about it every day  
three months later the ticket has tripled in price  
an example of "ADHD tax"  
(also incurred when i have to buy  
multiple umbrellas)

Hyperactive or impulsive ADHD appears as external movement (fidgeting, self-stimulatory movements), getting up and moving around when meant to be seated, the inability to engage in activities quietly. Internally ADHDers might feel always on the go as if driven by a motor,

restless: “like the motor going inside and the car moving” (Stein “Portraits and Repetition” 290). We might talk excessively (how does one measure excess), interrupt in conversation, and be unable to wait for our turns (Reynolds and Kamphaus 2).

ADHDers have difficulty with executive function (prioritizing, beginning, or switching tasks) problems with working memory, and are constantly stimulation seeking due to lack of the neurotransmitter dopamine (Littman n.p.). Significant and frequent co-morbidities associated with ADHD including depression, anxiety, various learning disabilities like dyslexia and dyscalculia, sensory processing disorders, eating disorders and ASD. ADHDers are considered “neurodivergent.”

There is debate over whether ADHD exists neurobiologically or whether, like the wind, folk just see the symptoms when the ADHDer butts up against the requirements of a 9-5, five day work week. ADHDers tend to do better cognitive work through body doubling (working with a person nearby), and with short periods of structure followed by movement breaks. In addition, occasionally low consistent stimulation (like listening to music or white noise or the vibrations of a coffee shop) can give the ADHDer the dopamine required to focus on a task. Stimming, or self-stimulatory behaviour, can also help alleviate boredom during a task or relieve excess energy (I spin my nose ring, or my engagement ring when I had one, or pick at my fingers, fidget my bouncing leg, or tug on my left ear).

While most studies agree that ADHD exists, there are still significant clinical questions surrounding the disorder like: is it being overdiagnosed worldwide (Kazda et al. 1)? Is the medical community overmedicating ADHDers without considering other avenues of treatment? Is ADHD-I its own disorder instead of a subtype of general ADHD? Do ADHDers have superpow-

ers?

There are also literary questions. N. Katherine Hayles distinguishes “hyper attention,” or an ADHD type of attention, from “deep attention” (187) when it comes to the literary classroom. If, as the scholarly literature shows, students have less capacity for attention than in previous decades, how should pedagogy change to teach dense literature that requires strenuous close reading? While most of these questions are beyond the scope of this chapter, I list them to show that clinical and literary ideas of ADHD are not clearly defined, and indeed have gone through a winding history to get to where they are currently.

ADHD’s existence was not well defined at the time of Gertrude Stein’s writing or her experiments with Solomons. While these experiments focused on normal motor automatism to study how symptoms of hysteria functioned, I am intrigued by how they treat “attention” in these subjects. As far as I know, I am the first to connect Solomons’ and Stein’s work, her self-disclosed writing strategies for *TB*, and expressive practices that are similar to what we now know to be ADHD in *TB*. Again, I am not interested in diagnosing Stein with ADHD, though this does occur posthumously with historic figures, for example Hartmann’s *The Edison Gene* or suggesting that Salvador Dali experienced ADHD symptoms.

Primarily, Stein and Solomons were working with hysteria. The disease of hysteria has gone through many iterations. Initially, hysteria in ancient Greece was only associated with women and was thought to have been caused by the womb leaving its proper spot to wander around the body, causing ailments wherever it appeared (North 498). The modernist perception of the disease in theory, though not often in diagnosis, was that it occurred equally among both sexes. By the nineteenth century, the combined efforts of French psychiatrist Pierre Janet, French

physician Paul Briquet, French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot, and Austrian psychotherapist Sigmund Freud had contributed to the conception of hysteria as a “neurodegenerative” disease (North 499). Symptoms included disassociation along with “physical complaints about bodily functions, neurological symptoms such as amnesia, paralysis, anesthesia, pain, spasms, and convulsive fits” (North 499). I have already illustrated how Lombroso considered it a sub-type of epilepsy, which shares many of the above symptoms.

The reasons for these symptoms differed. Janet suspected dissociation as the cause: “abnormal splitting of mental processes resulting in compartmentalization of the personality into segments inaccessible to one another” (North 498), which contributed to the idea of the double personality that Stein and Solomons were interested in. Freud, on the other hand, theorized that hysterical symptoms occurred when the brain couldn’t deal with trauma; he “emphasized psychological origins to hysterical conversion phenomena, in which ideas or memories too unpleasant for conscious awareness are repressed into the unconscious and ‘converted’ into physical symptoms to solve unbearable psychological conflicts” (North 499).

In their experiments Stein and Solomons had come to some interesting conclusions while studying hysteria, and they were mostly about how attention functions. Niemeyer connects Stein’s interest in these experiments to a psychology course taught by William James, pointing out that “the role of attention in the hysterical, and normal, subconscious, was of special interest to Stein” (78). He continues to say that the “experimenters were convinced that they had observed unconscious intelligent activity...these unconscious actions could be elicited when the subject’s attention was diverted from direct consideration of the response desired” (79).

Stein and Solomons' own writings confirm this—they argue that the writing and reading activities are only able to be completed by a hysteric because of his or her “anaesthesia” (511) which distracts them from the task they're meant to be attending to. The experimenters count automatic reading as successfully distracting the attention of the subject to the point where some other part of them takes over as their attention span adapts to this simultaneous polyactivity. The experimenters themselves were only able to perform automatic reading or writing when they focused intently on overcoming the “habit of attention” (Solomons and Stein 498). Solomons and Stein concede that “real automatism...comes only at intervals and for short periods at a time. But it comes whenever the attention is sufficiently distracted” (499).

The colleagues distinguish themselves from the hysteric by proposing that: “in hysteria this removal of attention is effected by the anaesthesia of the subject. We *would* not, the hysteric *cannot*, attend to these sensations...it is a *disease* of the *attention*” (emphasis in original Solomons and Stein 511). Stein repeats the sentiment in 1898: “our training was purely a training of the attention. Our trouble never came from a *failure* of reaction, but from a *functioning* of the attention. It was our inability to take our minds off the experiment that interfered” (“Cultivated Motor Automatism” 305). I am not making the argument that Solomons and Stein were actually studying ADHD while they thought they were studying hysteria. However, with the claim that hysteria is a “disease of the attention” (Solomons and Stein 511) they highlight how interconnected early understandings of these disorders were.

### 3.7 Moral Defect: Breuer and Freud, Still, James, and Stein:



The continual emphasis on attention in studies of hysteria was being expanded by Freud at the time—Breuer and Freud’s text *Studies on Hysteria* had just been published in 1895, and had inverted Janet’s assessments of hysterics. While Janet argued that hysterics experience dissociation and a second personality because they are too weak-minded to stop their consciousness from splitting from the aggression of powerful thoughts, (Breuer and Freud 230), Breuer and Freud disagree. Breuer and Freud propose that “in complete opposition to Janet’s views, I believe that in a great many cases what underlies dissociation is an *excess of efficiency*, the habitual co-existence of two heterogeneous trains of ideas” (emphasis mine 233). In a “normal” person, these trains of thought return together, but in the hysteric, they do not, and result in a split consciousness. Again, an excess of efficiency is too much, beyond the norm, and while Stein takes it as a mark of genius, supporters of eugenic theory saw it as stigmata of illness.

For example, Breuer and Freud say: “It may be taken for granted that a stream of ideas and recollections runs through the consciousness of any reasonably intelligent person while his mind is at rest” (205). If this stream of thought sweeps you away into a state of extreme “intracerebral excitation” (Breuer and Freud 197) this extra feeling/tension needs to be discharged through physical/mental means. For instance, “shouting and jumping for joy, the increased muscular tone of anger, angry words and retaliatory deeds—all these allow the excitation to flow away in movements. Mental pain discharges it in difficult breathing and in an act of secretion: in sobs and tears” (Breuer and Freud 201). If this excess of emotion or thought is consistently “abnormally discharged” (Breuer and Freud 206), then it lodges itself in the body and becomes known as a somatic “hysterical conversion” (Breuer and Freud 207). Breuer and Freud base their

idea of hysteric conversion on the connection between psychic and motor responses which has roots in what is now trauma theory: the ability to regulate one's affect and limbic system.

The study of attention allocation, and the “stream of thought” matters significantly in the psychology and nosology of hysteria during this time period. Simultaneously, the study of ADHD was being developed by pediatric doctor George Frederic Still, often credited as the first strong link to contemporary ideas of ADHD. Even though his theories are based more on defective moral control than problems with executive function, he does go into detail on how his subjects experienced difficulties in attention allocation. In his Goulstonian lectures in 1902, Still discussed students that he classified as intellectually capable (not “feeble-minded” but academically “backward,”) (45) as having significant attention problems. His subjects are children with “a marked inability to concentrate and to sustain attention,” an “abnormally defective” memory, and, while these children were intellectually average, they had “an abnormal lack of judgement in regard to everyday matters” (Still 45).

These symptoms correlate to contemporary knowledge about ADHD task switching, working memory (ADHDers often have excellent long-term memory but poor short term memory), and a “lack of judgement” from either developmental delays, or impulsiveness that comes from dopamine seeking behaviour. Further, Still quotes William James: “adopting however, the view that ‘effort of attention is the essential phenomenon of will’ (James) I would point out that a notable feature in many of these cases of moral defect without general impairment of intellect is a quite abnormal incapacity of sustained attention” (44).

Indeed, Niemeier proposes that James' *Principles of Psychology* was the driving force behind Solomons' and Stein's hysterical automatism studies: “passive immediate sensorial atten-

tion,” which is “concerned with fleeting stimuli” (78). People generally learn how to manage their attention as they mature, but sometimes they do not. Apparently for hysterical people their work “to the end of life, gets done in the interstices of their mind-wandering” (James *Principles of Psychology* 270); in the breaks between an endless barrage of information. Still, the father of the modern understanding of ADHD citing William James’ conceptions of attention confirms further that attention as it is being theorized in psychology at the time period has inroads into both hysteria and what will become Attention-Deficit Hyperactive Disorder.

Beyond the fact that “interstices of mind-wandering” is an excellent and beautiful phrase, it is very ADHD. “Interstices” according to Google’s dictionary are small “intervening spaces”; moments that allow for a breath. Google’s example is as follows: “sunshine filtered through the interstices of the arching trees.” Like flashes of cognizance, I pull back from what has distracted me, I attempt to bring myself back to the task at hand. ADHD brains require a certain amount of stimulation to function and are constantly taking in stimuli from the world around them. ADHD folk, studies show, likely have a mindset that is more evolutionarily oriented towards a hunter-gatherer context. For example, ADHD symptoms like difficulty sustaining attention and trouble prioritizing tasks according to necessity rather than interest could correspond to helpful qualities in a nomadic lifestyle. Sherman et al. suggest that “what might be considered ‘short attention span’ and ‘poor planning’ also could be described as continually monitoring the environment and being flexible, ready to change strategies and react instantly to new sights or sounds” (Sherman et al. 197). In a non-nomadic society however, this continual monitoring and difficulty focusing can make work, specifically reading and writing, an overwhelming and exhausting process.

In the subsequent experiments that Stein took on alone and published in 1898, Stein is

more focussed on attention from the beginning, describing some of her subjects, “girls who are found naturally in literature courses and men who are going in for law,” as “nervous, high-strung, very imaginative, [who have] the capacity to be easily roused and intensely interested” (“Cultivated Motor Automatism” 297). These subjects, according to Stein, have their attention “strongly and easily held by something that interests them, even to the extent quite commonly expressed of being oblivious to everything else. But, on the other hand, they find it hard to concentrate on anything that does not catch the attention and hold their interest” (“Cultivated Motor Automatism” 297).

Although this is not exactly how ADHDers work (and again, we’re heterogeneous), some of the characteristics are recognizable. ADHD researcher and psychiatrist Thomas Brown categorizes ADHD executive function struggles into six categories, one of which is focus: ADHDers “are distracted easily not only by things that are going on around them but also by their own thoughts. In addition, focus on reading poses difficulties for many. Words are generally understood as they are read but often have to be read over and over for the meaning to be fully grasped and remembered” (912);

my eyes move down the page

but i’m thinking:

what if snakes had feet...

However, people with ADHD also report hyperfocus—“they can focus their attention very well for a few specific tasks in which they have strong personal interest or when they feel immediate pressure to complete a specific task” (Brown 911). (all those times

i nearly combusted from panic attacks

printing my paper with

22 minutes to spare before the deadline

running 25 minutes to campus to hand it in).

Stein’s experiment goes through several examples of each type of person. While it’s true that she’s more interested in hysteria, the focus on attention allocation for this experiment has similar language to how diagnosticians had begun to talk about ADHD. Further, studies in the 20th century, as late as the 1950s, were looking at the possibility that ADHD was hereditary. They considered mothers with hysteria or Briquet’s syndrome, as well as mothers with sociopathic and psychopathic disorders and alcoholism (Wender 99). With the addition of psychopathy and sociopathy as possible hereditary causes of ADHD, it’s clear that G.F. Still’s “moral defect” ideas still have some sway in this conversation, like Lombroso’s belief that criminality was frequently a result of mental illness. As I outlined in Chapter 1, dysgenic categories of people who deviated from the norm were conflated with moral, mental, and social ills as eugenics transformed “social generalisations into scientific categories” (Jones 82) with usually the same result: deviations must be removed for the benefit of society.

### 3.8 Deviant Thinking and ADHD Polyactivity:

This chapter has so far traced the threads of attention through disorders that are historically important for modern ADHD, and has shown how prevalent attention is to Stein's experimental scientific work. Stein's automatic writing studies have historically been of interest for Stein scholars. For example, Niemeyer typifies Melanctha as a hysteric with two personalities in Stein's *Three Lives*, proposing that Melanctha's characterization comes from Stein's and Solomons' conclusions in the automatism studies. I propose to swivel the reader's attention in a different direction which has not yet been explored: to the ADHD overlap with hysteria symptoms in the study, and how this attention to attention allocation, divergent thinking, and disorder finds resonance in the expressive practices of the rooms, food, and objects of *TB*, Stein's experimental poetic work.

How do ADHDers focus on objects and the environment around them? We have seen that Stein works in *TB* to create a reaction in the reader—that the “something happening” (Skinner 56) is her intention to create an interaction with the words as if they were things themselves instead of descriptions of things. This text doesn't depend on outside associations; it depends on experiences with the words as objects themselves. Stein's desire to uncover the “thingness” of each object leads her to the understanding that the best way to capture the vitality of each thing is by “talking and listening” (“Portraits and Repetition” 290) simultaneously. She insists that this is “the essence of genius, of being most intensely alive” (Stein “Portraits and Repetition” 290).

Stein argues that one should talk and listen “not as if there were one thing, not as if they were two things, but doing them...like the motor going inside and the car moving, they are part of the same thing” (“Portraits and Repetition” 290). She uses the example of her aunts who would, as she says, talk to each other and listen simultaneously (Stein “Portraits and Repetition”

289-290). When she lived in Baltimore Stein would listen to her congregation of aunts, ten or eleven of them, as they shared knowledge and information. These aunts “had to say and hear said whatever was said and anyone not hearing what it was they said had to come in to hear what had been said” (Stein “Portraits and Repetition” 290). As long as her aunts were both talking and listening, they existed in the present, and no matter how many times they restated information, they were insisting, not repeating. Each thing that is said during this process of speaking and listening, according to Stein, is new, vital information.

These two processes seem contradictory: taking in information at the same time as speaking it is difficult. However, it can be something that ADHDers excel at. While often the benefits of ADHD are not expounded, there are many things ADHDers might like about themselves, including creativity, thinking outside the box, empathy, polyactivity (meaning they can work on several activities either at once or directly one after another) and ample energy (Sherman et al. 198). In a 2018 study, Sedgwick et al. interviewed ADHDers to talk about the positive aspects of ADHD.<sup>4</sup> These participants are classified as having what this and other recent studies (Lesch) are calling “high-functioning ADHD” (HF-ADHD), which refers to folk who “meet the diagnostic criteria for ADHD but are still able to function relatively well” (Sedgwick et al. 241) though what “functioning” means is unclear. I will consider Lesch’s definition in the next section.

However, since Autism scholars and Autistic people are moving away from the phrase “high functioning” in ASD discussions, because it’s not an accurate assessment of adaptive skills, struggles, or support requirements, it should probably be retired as a descriptor of ADHD

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<sup>4</sup>A note on this small study is that these participants were all men. This likely reflects the erroneous but long-held assumption that women, who are less often diagnosed (and when they are, they are often diagnosed with inattentive ADHD) are less likely to have ADHD than men.

potentialities as well. What does it even mean to “function well”? Remi Yergeau explains that “functioning” is indicative of the “crip continuum” (*Authoring Autism* 50) which is situated between the end poles of lack and excess and is one way that Autistic rhetoricity and personhood is policed and denied. Yergeau asserts that “spectra are master tropes for neurodivergence” (*Authoring Autism* 50) and that spectra that uses the language of “functioning” holds neurodivergent people in a liminal space where they will both high and low functioning, too much and too little.

For example, this is a consistent tightrope that people seeking diagnoses in order to qualify for accommodations at their university or workplace, or for government subsidies are asked to walk. One must be neurodivergent enough to qualify, but at the same time is also expected to mask their disabilities in the same setting to pass as neurotypical. This constructs an environment that constantly positions a person as too much and not enough simultaneously. At the same time, this environment is linked intrinsically to production. Yergeau suggests that one look at the “capitalistic logics of the term *functioning*” and that all means of “treatment” for neurodivergent folks focus on “crafting independent persons capable of producing and laboring” (*Authoring Autism* 50). “Functioning” therefore, is a vague diagnostic term which doesn’t often describe the lived experience of ADHDers. What terms might better describe the positive aspects of ADHD?

The best definition Lesch seems to offer in his study is that the ADHDer who is, to the “outside observer...less impaired” (191) is “flourishing”; though they are likely still struggling to be able to “flourish,” they “may not appear to be” (191). HF-ADHDers have learned how to mask their deficits through different coping mechanisms, and according to Lesch can be recognized by their “go-getter” attitude, and prompt decision making which can push them to excel in fields of entrepreneurship, technology, politics, and sports among other pursuits (192).



However, this method of classification continues to measure ADHD levels through the metric of productivity without any significant understanding of the ways that even “flourishing” folk with ADHD need to slow down, embrace crip time—recall Alison Kafer’s discussion of crip time (*Feminist, Queer, Crip* 26) in Chapter 2—take their medication if they have it, or navigate difficulties in interpersonal relationships. Also, only including “flourishing” ADHDers in studies that measure ADHD benefits further reaffirms, as my discussions in the previous chapters touched on, that capitalistic societies create and exacerbate what is classified as a disability; consistently orientating discussions of ADHD positivity towards school, work, or entrepreneurial success criteria demonstrates this.

Sedgwick et al. conversely focus their study more on self-reported virtues instead of productivity metrics. Their interviewees responded with aspects of their lives that they found positive, including several traits that Sedgwick et al. grouped under six core themes: “cognitive dynamism, courage, energy, humanity, resilience and transcendence” (243). They compared some of the self-disclosed traits to the CVS (character strengths and virtues) handbook and decided that some unique ADHD positive traits can be catalogued as “divergent thinking, hyper-focus, nonconformist, adventurousness, self-acceptance and sublimation” (Sedgwick et al. 244).

These researchers make the case that more conversation surrounding positive aspects of ADHD will make it easier for populations to desire to conserve disability (Sedgwick et al. 250), leading to more robust societal neurodiversity. I do not use these studies to negate anyone’s personal struggle to live with ADHD, or to suggest to someone that they should rejoice over it as a gift. It is important to consider negative affect and the hard, painful moments of disability.

While I suggest that readers should recognize neurodivergence in certain language mark-

ers and interpretive modes, it's still true that many of these styles are denigrated ways of reading and expressing for neurodivergents who are "biased" towards them by their neural formations (Barber-Stetson 148). Even naming an already accepted way of reading Stein, ie. with "continuous partial attention" (Stone in Stephens 50) as an ADHD style might stigmatize and de-legitimize it. Because of this general rejection of such cognitive styles as acceptably "literary," I do not want to erase the enormous difficulties that neurodivergent people face. Beyond academic difficulties, ADHDers have high rates of comorbidities with mood disorders and anxiety disorders (D'Agati 238), and adults with untreated ADHD are at higher risk of developing substance abuse and addiction.

However, I argue that recognizing ADHD voice as a valuable reading methodology will lead towards greater communal flourishing, and the last few pages of this chapter will be devoted to modelling this interpretive practice. While Stein likely did not intend to use ADHD voice in *Tender Buttons*, ideas of attention and "consciousness" appear frequently in her work, as I have explained, from her early experiments to her later criticism and rebuttals. Given what we now know about attention, and its deficits, as well as how often ways of reading this text sound like ADHD without being explicitly named as ADHD, I want to identify a few possible ADHD expressive practices in *Tender Buttons*.

I interrogate ADHD expressive practices that are not often privileged, for example: interruption. How might interruption in *TB*, often seen as a negative symptom of ADHD, be a generative reading value? Stein's scene of her eleven aunts communing with each other is an image of polyactivity, and also a space of inevitable interruption. While Stein doesn't say this outright, the reader is led to believe this by her insistence on the simultaneity of talking and listening. I don't

expect eleven people can do both at the same time without becoming a cacophony of interruption.

This polyactive space of vitality and interruption represented in *TB*. Readers consistently complain of the swift changes in topic and direction—Stein moves from “a white bird, a colored mine, a mixed orange, a dog” (*TB* 29) to “a canoe is orderly. A period is solemn. A cow is accepted” (*TB* 29) within three sentences. The desire for information and to share information at a rapid pace is interruptive, and *TB* appears to interrupt itself continuously because “news is pressing” (Stein *TB* 14). For example, from the poem “A Little Called Pauline”: “I hope she has her cow. Bidding a wedding, widening received treading, little leading mention nothing. / Cough out cough out in the leather and really feather it is not for. / Please could, please could, jam it not plus more sit in when” (Stein *TB* 15). These interruptions prompt the reader into practicing “continuous partial attention...keeping tabs on everything while never truly focusing on anything” (Stone in Stephens 50) since the topic at hand changes without warning from sentence to sentence, and even within sentences.

Readers who encounter this aesthetic might recall expressive practices of ADHD that I listed earlier: ADHDers might talk excessively (again, how does one measure excess conversation), interrupting in conversation, difficulty waiting for their turn (Reynolds and Kamphaus 2). Interruption here is a benefit—it is an experience of the vitality of the reading, signalling that the interrupter is being present. The impulse of someone with ADHD to quickly process and engage without “waiting for their turn” is, to identify and interpret multiple avenues at once is, as Stein suggests, the vital element of presence, of poetry, and corresponds well to the quick shifts of

meaning in *TB*.

### 3.9 ADHD Flourishing: Hyperfocusing in the (Compositional) Field

The ADHD brain is also, supposedly, primed to be continuously picking up new stimuli—the quick syntactical changes (cow to period), the bite sized chunks of “Objects” and “Foods” crowd onto the pages of *Tender Buttons*; the reader loops back around to outside associations Stein intends to deny by flooding the reader with intratextual associations which build each time a phrase is mentioned. These strategies produce a reader who is attenuated to all the different threads or angles that organize Stein’s chaotic compositional field. As I outlined earlier, Stein’s desire to prevent the reader from bringing in outside or “emotional” associations for the word-objects she creates sets each word on a “continuum of change and transformation” (Perloff, *Poetic Licence* 156) where associational echoes are permuted within the text, and add to the vitality of the word. For example, while on page 15 Stein hopes that “she has her cow,” on page 29, the “cow is accepted” (*TB*). Stein’s “insistence” (“Portraits and Repetition” 288) (recall that Stein calls her repetition, “insistence” and that to her this insistence means that the reader apprehends the word-object instead of the memory of a word rich with outside associations) rather than “repetition” layers meaning onto words. This “insistence” emphasizes that the reader is viewing them anew and seeks to stimulate the reader into experiencing each layered word in a continuous present, to ensure that these words are not “pigeonholed or seen from one angle only” (Perloff *Poetic Licence* 157). Stein created this continuum through an “xcess of consciousness” (in Meyer 141) an ability for exactitude, and asks her readers to do the same.

I read her “xcess consciousness” and intense concentration as comparable to “hyperfocus”—the flow that an ADHDer discovers when they encounter a task that stimulates dopamine receptors exactly right, and often launches them into a state of concentration that is difficult to break. (i was shocked when i just looked at the time and saw 2 hours had gone by). *TB*’s shorter poems prompt the reader to be overly attentive to each moment, to be hyper-conscious or hyper-focused, and to cease attending to anything that is not the poem in front of them. Solomons and Stein referred to this kind of attention in their hysteria experiments as “consciousness without memory,” which has to do with a lack of conscious association of words or ideas—“one word going out of consciousness before another has come in to be associated with it” (501). This type of focus which doesn’t rely on associational thinking is often called “divergent thinking.”

Creative or divergent thinking allows a person to develop new ideas without being dependent on preconceived knowledge. Several studies (Weiss; White; White & Shah) have proposed that ADHDers “may excel at tasks or in situations that require divergent, unconstrained thinking” due to low inhibitory control in working memory that leads to “uninhibited imaginations” (White and Shah 673). Essentially, because ADHDers don’t have working memories that always reliably pull up previously learned solutions to problems, we often end up solving them in ways that are novel.

Holly White in her article “Thinking ‘Outside the Box’: Unconstrained Creative Generation in Adults with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder” connects ADHD divergent creativity to “chaotic cognition” instead of “ordered cognition.” Chaotic condition is “disorganized, spontaneous and relatively unstructured” (White 474), the opposite of the “linear, organized, and goal-

directed”(474) ordered cognition which also emphasizes connectedness to previous solutions to problems. Chaotic cognition instead finds relevance in concepts that are laterally instead of linearly connected—these broad associations “bring multiple ideas into close proximity which facilitates original creative thinking” and also promotes “imaginative divergence” (White 474).

White’s studies position ADHD with its “creative differences” within the paradigm of chaotic cognition, or overinclusive thinkers (475). Chaotic cognition takes in more stimuli, and thus produces more vibrant connections between seemingly disparate items. Bringing multiple diverse ideas into close proximity, or “overinclusive thinking” is relevant for *TB*, especially in the “disorder” of the sprawling poem that is “Rooms.”

As I pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, *TB* is usually published “out of order”, which makes Stein’s assertion at the beginning of “Rooms,” that the reader should “act as if there is no use in a centre” (*TB* 43), poignant. Stein consistently directs her reader to read into the margins and out of an ideal centre for the text. “Rooms” immediately overwhelms the reader. Using normative interpretive practices, there is an impulse to get to the “centre”—to access the “main idea” of a text. One difficulty of a looping, chaotically cognitive set of reading practices that highlights lateral or divergent instead of linear thinking is that the “centre” of such a text does not really exist. This reading is instead a process of “excreation,” (Stein *TB* 38): “real is only, only excreate, only excreate a no since” (Stein *TB* 38). What follows are the words “a no since” repeated with various permutations for three long lines. From ex-creation the reader can extrapolate the concept of creation out of “no since” (nonsense?). One can read the prefix “ex” as an insistent reminder of the past which builds the present in Stein’s refusal of repetition, or the homophonic “excrete.”

If there is no use in a centre, then the rest of the text is marginal—there is no correct order to read the text, just as the word-objects Stein offers have no hierarchy. The “order” of reading, especially for those looking at descriptions of objects as symbolic, is chaotically disrupted. Bernstein describes it like this: “there is no center, only peripheries that agglomerate in various ways—like blood clots at the sites of trauma” (*A Poetics* 188). Bernstein is more certain about the lack of centre than Stein—she says on page 46 that “it is not very likely that there is a centre” (*TB*), but regardless, the reader is meant to act as if it does not exist. way.

An example of these unordered periphery objects is presented to the reader as an option on page 46, where Stein says there is no “certainty” (*TB*). Instead “there was an entire collection made. A damp cloth, an oyster, a single mirror, a manikin, a student, a silent star, a single spark, a little movement and the bed is made. This shows the disorder, it does, it shows more likeness than anything else, it shows the single mind that directs an apple” (46). In the disorder, Stein suggests, the reader finds similarities, odd unions, a level compositional playing field, where meaning is made laterally, instead of hierarchically. In the paragraph previous to this one, Stein states that “any little thing is water” (*TB* 46). Each of the objects that come after this statement could be consumed by this overarching descriptor—cyclical, with undefined boundaries, like water moving through various streams. That “any little thing” may be one thing or another produces disorder (Stein *TB* 46) and a lack of “certainty” (Stein *TB* 46), but also attunes the reader to the word-objects in the text.

Again, my intention is not to diagnose Stein with ADHD, but to notice the intentional strategies that she used to construct a compositional field that would be apprehended most effectively through lateral thinking—through attending with a variable focus in order to meet words

as themselves. Stein privileges internal association, instead of external associations. She pushes the reader into her compositional field, and asks them to practice “consciousness without memory” (Solomons and Stein 501) as if meeting each “object” for the first time within the text. However, then her repetitive “insistence” prompts an interpretive mode of readerly interruption.

When the reader encounters a word they’ve seen before, like “cow” on page 15 and then 29 (*TB*) they may interrupt their reading to return to the previous context. While this interruption moves the reader’s focus from the page they are on, it maintains a hyperfocus on the larger compositional field, as it adds to the reader’s previous understanding of the word object. These “attentional shifts” (Bernstein) then, make use of both hyperfocus and interruption to absorb the reader in this impermeable text.

Neurodivergent aesthetics upend what cognitive processes are considered valuable, but this is not to say that all processes must be equally productive. Readers of *Tender Buttons* may become frustrated with the poem’s antiabsorptive techniques. They may hit their limit for absorption. As I mentioned, ADHD flourishing may also include the need for rest. Because ADHDers absorb more stimuli than a non-ADHDer, their ability to remain in highly stimulating environments may also wax and wane. Stein uses the example of her aunts again to describe the difficulty of sustained attention. She explains what happens when some of the aunts “are no longer listening” (“Portraits and Repetition” 290): “it might be that the attention of one of them had been worn out by adding something” and so they ceased the practice of talking and listening at the same time, and this pushes them out of the vital presence of the conversation. Stein produces poetry that is overwhelming. She asserts: “The reason that nothing is hidden is that there is no suggestion of silence” (*TB* 45). A few pages later, she asks “why is there that sensible si-



lence...does silence choke speech or does it not" (*TB* 47)—the reader can infer, based on her description of her conversing aunts, that it does.

Such polyactivity, or "attentive inattentiveness" (Will in Stephens 50) to Stein's shifting ideas sounds exhausting. Indeed, *TB*'s readers might suffer from overstimulation, which is particularly difficult for ADHDers who "experience chronic difficulty regulating sleep and alertness. They often stay up too late because they cannot shut their head off" (Brown 911). Because "there is no suggestion of silence" (Stein *TB* 45), readers must become more active processors and may gain a better understanding of the type of overwhelm that ADHDers feel on a daily basis. However, like Barber-Stetson suggests, sometimes these seemingly "uninhabitable" spaces (161) can be generative.

The benefit of Stein's disorder, the assertion that "any little thing is water" (*TB* 46) alongside the overwhelm of information means that the reader may at any point stop trying to sort out *TB*. The book, like *FW*, may never finish "being read"—as Bernstein says, there is no puzzle to solve, the reader continues until they run out of steam, and this is accepted, like Stein's cow, like her aunts who will have another conversation another day.

Accepting that the reader may be overstimulated and overwhelmed by a difficult text could lead to Stein's paradox of simplistic complexity—or what I call her Gordian knot. Stein insists in "Poetry and Grammar" that something can have a "final simplicity of excessive complication" (132) that elicits pleasure—for example, the pleasure of solving a difficult problem. She asserts that "when it gets really difficult you want to disentangle rather than to cut the knot, at least so anybody feels who is working with any thread, so anybody feels who is working with any tool so anybody feels who is writing any sentence or reading it after it has been

written” (“Poetry and Grammar” 132).

Contextually, she’s saying this as an attack on commas, but I extrapolate to apply this notion to the concept of “unreadable” poetry—in this metaphor, the inaccessible or entangled text should not be cut straight through, which is usually the way the Gordian knot story unravels. Alexander the Great of Macedonia tries his hand at the labour of untying the Gordian knot, an extremely complicated tangle of knots in Phrygia. Legend has it that whoever loosens the knot will go on to “become ruler of all of Asia” (Andrews n.p). Apparently after some struggling with the knot, a frustrated Alexander the Great takes out his sword and cuts the knot in half, effectively untying it. I compare Alexander’s efficient solution to a reader, neurotypical or otherwise, whose discomfort with an experimental or poetic text causes them to lose patience and cut it down to size by refusing to read it or by diagnosing the author with hysteria. However, Stein’s suggestion here doesn’t actually necessitate disentangling.

The joy that she’s proposing doesn’t come from freeing a rope of knots or from understanding a sentence so it’s entirely accessible or absorbable, but from the “pleasure of concentrating on the final simplicity of excessive complication” (“Poetry and Grammar” 132); this excessive complication emerges from the experience of joyfully and simply turning attention to stimuli that in another moment might have been overwhelming, but is just complex enough now to hold attention. Just because *TB* may be “excessive” does not mean that it must be decoded. The joy here in the beauty of complexity could come from understanding or failing to understand how each section of the text connects to the next, following each complicated path, losing it, and beginning at another section, always interrupted, but pulled back in. This isn’t a maze but an in-

terconnected complex system. Why is the impulse to undo? Knots are essential—they hold together disparate parts. And as Stein suggests, “a whole is inside a part” (*TB* 39).

## Chapter 4: AI (I will not abandon you, I will remain by you): Hannah Weiner's Mutations

### Pre-Introduction: An Error Message or The Structure of :

When I first wrote about Hannah Weiner's *Code Poems*, it was because of a mistake.

I'd learned about Weiner in a contemporary poetry class during my master's program. A colleague and I were slated to give presentations on Weiner's *Code Poems (CP)*: the collection of performance works that Weiner wrote during the late 1960s and later published. They are a series of poems written using the *International Code of Signals for the Use of All Nations (ICOS)* and Weiner enlisted the US Coast Guard to help perform them using semaphore signals and flags, flares, flashing lights, morse code, and sometimes a megaphone between 1966 and 1975 in Central Park and on the streets of New York, New York.

The poems are confusing without the proper context, which Weiner gives in her introduction to the volume. The editions of the *ICOS* that she uses are two British editions from 1859 and 1899, and an American post WWI edition from 1931. These years are essential because the encoded systems received updates. Weiner explains this code of communication for marine vessels: "Flags, one for each letter of the alphabet, are hoisted on the mast, singly or in groups of two, three, four. Single and two flag hoists are distress signals, three flag hoists are general signals, four flag hoists geographical signals. In addition, each flag has a name; A, Alpha, B, Bravo, C, Charlie, etc." (*Code Poems* 5).

In the *Code Poems* book of poetry, compiled and published in 1982, the format that Weiner employs is first the code, then the communication it matches: e.g.: "MDK have you men enough?" (15). For the visual code poems in the book, she does not include a title. Poems that

were performed by flag are symbolized by a blocks of flag pictograms, or the dots and dashes of morse code. The first poem of the collection, entitled “RJ Romeo and Juliet” is her retelling of Shakespeare’s play through code. Her version includes the character of Mike, who takes the place possibly of Mercutio or Benvolio to wingman Romeo at the party. He disappears as soon as R and J begin to argue over dinner—Romeo advises soup, potatoes, cheese and ale (or possibly claret) while Juliet counters with goose, oysters, lobster, mushrooms and rice (Weiner *Code Poems* 9).

Weiner decides to keep the original dramatic structure of the text, and so arranges her poem as a loose script, though the only stage directions happen when “Mike leaves” (*Code Poems* 8). Thus, we receive lines like: “NM Romeo: I am on fire / MLI You must not or cannot make any excuse / TMV Shall I have the pleasure to or of / F Foxtrot” (*Code Poems* s8). In Weiner’s poem, Romeo and Juliet have dinner, consider the necessity of a Protestant minister (instead of an Italian friar) and engage in a hilarious bout of encoded lovemaking, which results in possible anal sex, a broken cock, an overenthusiastic blow job, and Juliet racing to get off before Romeo finishes too quickly and falls asleep.

As my colleague and I read through the poems, we had several questions. My colleague ended up writing an excellent paper on the firm structure of the text and how the code functioned. I was more interested in Weiner’s explanation for her code work: “Trans-Space Communication” which she wrote in 1969 and opened up to the public for replies. She proposed that “I am interested in exploring methods of communication that will be understood face to face, or at any distance, regardless of language, country or planet of origin, by all sending and receiving” (Weiner “Trans-Space Communication” 1).

Weiner began exploring these alternative methods of communication through the writing of the *CP* with the *ICOS*, of which she says: “I consider this code an exploration of linear communication, which has served the binary neurological function of the brain...one kind of signal may equally be substituted for another with the exact same meaning. It then becomes very clear when a different, non-linear thinking appears, as in ‘knight’s thinking’ (schizophrenic thinking)” (“Trans-Space Communication” 1). Knight’s thinking, which was classified at the time as a symptom of schizophrenic thought disorder, is taken from the way that the knight piece moves on a chess board —“two up in a linear fashion, but then one jump to the side, to a conclusion or connection that may baffle the listener if he is expecting a linear-causal relationship” (Weiner “Trans-Space Communication” 1). This chapter will closely consider Weiner’s interest in “knight’s thinking,” as well as her determination that linear-causal thought may be disrupted by neurodivergent thought patterns.

Weiner suggests that her “own explorations have dealt with the use of minimal clues: how much information can be received, and how accurately, through how little means” (“Trans-Space Communication” 1). She expects answers to this received information and asks for people to reply to her suggestions: “send replies to: Box 619 / Woodstock, NY” (“Trans-Space Communication” 2).

I send my reply to Box 619 / Woodstock, NY. I became hyper-fixated on the idea of trans-space communication. As a neurodivergent person who was unaware of it at the time, in my poetry I was constantly writing to either communicate my self, the strange movements of my brain to another, or to intentionally disrupt this communication. I connected deeply with Weiner’s idea, and began to decode her work using the *ICOS*.

Somehow, while I understood the general concept of the *CP*, I must have forgotten to read the introduction. I used the 1969 American version of the *ICOS*, which unbeknownst to me had undergone a significant update since 1931 that had moved most of the signals to a two flag system, instead of the three flag system that Weiner was working with. As a result, my colleague and I, with whom I shared the information, were stumped. The code rarely matched the script; sometimes it did, but in other places the code was the exact opposite of what Weiner had written down.

For example, in the 1969 version for the code “AI” which ends the *Romeo and Juliet* poem as they drift off to sleep after sex, I received: “Vessel (indicated by position and/or name or identity signal if necessary) will have to be abandoned” (*ICOS* 29). However, Weiner’s version directly contradicts this communication: “AI Romeo: I will not abandon you. I will remain by you” (Weiner 11). This confusion led to frustration, and anger. We felt like we were going crazy and spent a few nights on the phone, trying to hash out what exactly this Language poet was doing. I’ll address this sentiment later in this chapter by talking about the “mad affects” (Zolf 209) that audiences may feel in response to the *CP* and one of Weiner’s other impermeable texts, the *Clairvoyant Journal (CJ)*.

Eventually, I determined that this confusion was a result of Weiner’s intentional use of schizophrenic thinking—the disruption of a linear-causal relationship in which she was allowing the audience an opportunity to make our own meaning alongside her lines, inventing the text through similarity or contradiction. I wrote that paper for a seminar, was very proud of it, and contradicted scholars who were working in Weiner’s field. At the time I wrote this, there were just two significant papers on the *CP*, by Judith Goldman and Mark Leahy, while other writers

touched on it in passing (McSweeney; Durgin) on their way to talking about Weiner's *Clairvoyant Journal* and the clair-style which she developed in the early 70s. I even presented my paper at the American Pop Culture Conference. No one contradicted me, or questioned my reading (to be fair, I was a sacrificial Master's student at the time). It wasn't until I revisited the Code Poems last year as I began writing this dissertation that I re-read

(or read for the first time,

emblematic of how my ADHD functions in  
academic reading practices

speed read for essential information

—which is what we're taught to do upon entering

academia as we don't have

time to read everything, who does?

my brain on ctrl+F mode for the key, the clue      the super power

i miss vital information

i don't know it at the time)

and realized my colossal mistake: I had been looking at the wrong version of the code the entire time. Once I'd downloaded an American version of the code's reference from 1909, the signifiers started to match more consistently. They did not match perfectly, since Weiner highlights that she's specifically used the 1859 and 1899 British versions and the 1931 American version, but with more consistency than the 1969 version I had been using.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In this chapter I will use the American 1909 version of the *ICOS* unless otherwise specifically noted for the sake of comparison.



An update, a human error, a jump to the left instead of moving in a logical line. The subsequent realization of it and now my response to it in the form of this chapter, is my reply to Weiner—all sending and receiving, across both space and time which as Einstein informs us are both relative, to the atoms of her which linger in new forms and old pages:

To: Hannah Weiner / Box 619 / Woodstock, NY:

hannah, we share a name. we share initials. we share indeterminacy. this is my reply. i could find you in the phone book. i'm sorry i got it wrong the first time, but i think you would have laughed. i think the confusion would have pleased you. i hope you would have introduced me to paw and i hope the colours of my writing are various darkening shades of olive green. thank you for the invitation; i have been a vegetarian for 10 years but i dearly miss hot dogs.<sup>6</sup>

#### 4.1 Introduction: What this chapter is doing here:

My experience of Weiner's poetry is included as an introduction to this chapter as partial justification for her work's presence in this dissertation. She is not as publicly well known as Stein or Joyce, her work not as well read, and she doesn't fall under the broad umbrella of modern poetry, as she wrote from the 60s until her death in 1997. While according to her sparse Wikipedia page she is "grouped with the Language poets" (n.p.) Weiner does not fit neatly into that categorical box, by her own testimony or that of others.

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<sup>6</sup> (this in reference to the time in when Hannah Weiner hired a hot dog stand in New York City, rebranded it "Weiner's Wieners" and sold people hot dogs for the day.)

As I mention in my introduction to this dissertation, while these poems have not been considered particularly “genius,” they stand out in Weiner’s circle of colleagues and friends, and in the American Language Poetry movement of the 60s-80s in general. The only other writer working with encoded poetry at the time was Jackson Mac Low, who maintains that he didn’t collaborate with Weiner. Judith Goldman asserts that “*Code Poems* should be considered a landmark collection in the American avant-garde for a number of reasons” (124), notably their novelty, and “in the way she tests the limits of the material to comment on language” (Goldman 124).

I include the *Code Poems* in this dissertation for a few reasons: the poems’ conceptual and experimental forms; reader testimony that deems Weiner’s work “unreadable”; and her emphasis on schizophrenic language markers like knight’s move thinking as an aesthetic choice. I am aware that these poems might not fit neatly. As Julie Miele Rodas says, not everything must be a “good diagnostic fit” (25); this is not how bodies work either, and if there is anything I have learned from Weiner and CDS, it is that messiness, overflow, and a rejection of neat borders can be generative.

In her later life, Weiner both engaged with and also refused to engage with the diagnosis of schizophrenia. In 1970, Weiner began to see words, hear voices, and experience colours and “astral visions” after experiments with LSD. She was subsequently diagnosed with schizophrenia. Her diagnosis is treated differently in scholarship by critics and friends, specifically because she rarely acknowledged the diagnosis, and insisted instead on her self-proclaimed identity as a clairvoyant medium in touch with higher forces: a “silent teacher” (Bernstein and Weiner ““LINEbreak”” 153). Most of the critical scholarship on Weiner’s work focuses on her clairvoy-

ance, beginning with *The Fast* in 1970 and her famous *Clairvoyant Journal* in 1974, which Weiner wrote in what she called her “clair-style.”

This chapter will explore how Weiner’s poetry is alternately or simultaneously labelled brilliantly poetic or clinically pathological. As I have outlined in previous chapters, both James Joyce and Gertrude Stein received multiple “diagnoses” from their critics and audiences. These diagnoses often emerged from eugenic ideas that were part of the larger cultural conversation at the beginning of the 20th century, and reflected fears of deviation, degeneration, criminality, and contagion for the general public. Weiner’s writing, however, materializes as modernism shifts to postmodernism, and as eugenic theories fade into more socially acceptable (but still damaging) theories of “social hygiene.” Psychiatry and psychotherapy were concretizing as disciplines, but also being subjected to more scrutiny. This chapter considers the afterlife of eugenic ideas in the field of mental health, particularly in self-advocacy and self-diagnosis.

I will discuss audience reactions to Weiner’s work in addition to how I am affected by her poetry. Weiner’s diagnosis and rejection of that diagnosis produces a tricky line for critics to walk. Charles Bernstein, Weiner’s long-time friend, writes in his eulogy for her that he “always played the resolute skeptic to Hannah’s more heterodox beliefs; but [never] doubted that she was a visionary poet, and [found] her insistence on her clairvoyance to be a welcome relief from the heavy-handed rhetoric of poet as prophet that she so utterly rejected” (“Hannah Weiner” n.p.). This tremulous navigation produces scholars that hold her clairvoyance and her schizophrenia simultaneously, (Goldman; McSweeney; Leahy), reviewers that highlight the pain that her mental illness caused her, (Bernstein; Truitt; Kimball), one unpublished trauma-informed reading by Maria Damon, and scholarship that moves beyond this dichotomy to position her as an example

of a “psycho-social” poet— maneuvering beyond disability studies’ identity politics to a “none of the above” diagnostic space (Durgin “Psychosocial Disability” 138). Declan Gould illustrates the complex nature of Weiner’s diagnoses and self-diagnoses, saying that “Rather than simply being symptomatic of schizophrenia, the origins of Hannah Weiner’s poetic innovations are complex and interactive, and the resulting text is a negotiation not only of her psychiatric disability, but also of her sociohistorical context, material conditions, and aesthetic affiliations” (n.p).

However, the majority of scholarship that takes into account Weiner’s “negotiation” of her disability or psychic abilities is centred around her journals written in clair-style, and does not include the *Code Poems*. In this chapter I argue that scholarship on Weiner’s psychic differences should include the *CP*, at the very least because she deliberately outlines schizophrenic thinking as a “non-linear” method of communication that she is considering while writing them. She introduces readers to the *CP* in her “Trans-Space Communication” letter by asking questions like: when does the code begin to fail? When does the amount of information the brain takes in necessitate neurologically diverse, non-linear patterns?

I argue that Weiner intentionally angled her expressive practices toward neurodivergence; or as she might call it: the “evolution of the brain” (“Trans-Space Communication” 1). Her work insists readers practice non-normative reading strategies because of these strategies’ abilities to transmit overwhelming amounts of information. As I’ve demonstrated in the first three chapters of this project, experimental works that use disability aesthetics (particularly neurodivergent aesthetics) structurally and syntactically as well as in their content and characters can disrupt reading “as usual.” Joyce uses anti-absorptive strategies to induce aesthetic nervousness in the reader with his anti-eugenic character Shem and the “deviant” nature of Wake, allowing the reader

space to deconstruct why his work and body might be both diagnosable and celebrated. The *Wake* is also replete with disfluent moments which slow the reader, and offer them reading practices that are coextensive with divergent listening in the real world. Stein's repetition and internal associations push readers of *Tender Buttons* into deficits or excesses of attention; interrupting and returning to complex simplicity.

However, I argue that the haunting presence of Weiner's schizophrenia diagnosis as well as her intention to push the boundaries of communication encourages us to disrupt received neurotypical reading strategies even more poignantly. Weiner is the obvious final chapter for my project; I move from Joyce, who consumed and returned his readers' criticisms of disability and degeneration, to Stein who rejected a diagnosis of lack and embraced one of excess, and finally to Weiner, who also submits a counter-diagnosis, but at the same time is interested in using some of the symptoms associated with schizophrenia to ask her readers to embrace expansion, to evolve. Each of the authors I study in this dissertation worked criticisms of disability into generative frameworks of neurodivergent aesthetics.

However, while I have organized these works chronologically to satisfy generic conventions, each chapter intersects with and complicates the others while inviting readers to consider the fluidity of such reading frameworks; there is no final trajectory. Joyce and Stein were contemporaries often compared to each other, and as Maria Damon points out, Weiner and Stein were both Jewish-American women who lived through the horrors of WWII. Further, while each chapter considers different neurodivergences, often neurodivergent "symptoms" overlap, so features of the different disorders I recognize in this dissertation may appear to an observant reader to apply to more than one of the texts discussed. Like Joyce's suggestion that "the words which

follow may be taken in any order desired" (*FW* 120.13), this dissertation should be organized according to the pleasure of the individual reader. Read for ADHD in *FW*, or find Stein's blunt, repetitive sentences in the *Code Poems*.

Weiner wrote her *Clairvoyant Journal* in what she called "clair-style"; this involved a typewriter, and her typing in three voices, as she explained to Charles Bernstein in her "LINE-break" interview with him in 1995: "The capital words...give instructions, the italics...make comments, and the ordinary type...is me just trying to get through the day. And it was a quite wild thing to type" (146). The *Journal* is dense, involved and includes significant personal and confessional writing. In this interview, Bernstein mentions that some writers (Louise Bogan) would say there is a "lack of literary quality [in this poem].... A lot of things that might be considered trivial, where nothing is happening" ("LINEbreak" 148). Weiner responds that her conceptual art is on par with the time period of the 60s and 70s, and when Bernstein asks if she is embarrassed by the "openness to the triviality of thought, to the shifting of thought," she insists that she doesn't have time to be embarrassed, because she is "always seeing words" ("LINE-break" 149).

In this interview she relates that she joined the Language group in 1975, but was "stomped on" for being too personal (Bernstein and Weiner "LINEbreak" 150). She published several poems and excerpts of what would become her manuscript with the mimeograph magazine *0-9* edited by experimental poet Bernadette Mayer and visual artist Vito Acconci between 1967 and 1969. Patrick Durgin outlines how Weiner had tangential connections to the second generation of the New York School of poets and visual artists, but was also engaged in the conceptual art world ("Psychosocial Disability" 145). She helped organize a series of open street art

installations called *Street Works* with Acconi and a number of other writers and artists, performing her *Code Poems* live at these events. Many of these poems were not recorded—for example, John Perreault notes that “one night she had two people waving flags at each other from one end of West 26th street to the other” but that later she “burned all her documentation and became a clairvoyant poet” (8).

As a petty response to how Weiner describes being stomped on for being too personal, this chapter will be filled with mundane and embarrassingly personal details (like explaining how mistaken I was about the Code Poems). While the *Clairvoyant Journal* is not the subject of this chapter, the scholarship devoted to it and her other clairvoyant writing means it is necessary for me to consider the *CJ*. Additionally, I propose that effects of the *CJ* and the *CP* on the reader overlap, although the writing modalities are different. Throughout this chapter I discuss Weiner’s writing process for the *Journal*, the content of the *Code Poems*, and Weiner’s conceptual ideas about what she wanted this work to do.

Weiner proposes that knight’s thinking or schizophrenic thinking is the next step in human evolution prompted by an information saturated context (“Trans-Space Communication” 2). Knight’s thinking, according to psychologists Robert R. Spillane and John Martin is an example of a “pathological” thinking style similar to creative thinking. The example of the “knight’s move” in chess metaphorizes how “schizophrenic thought seems to contain both a gap and a change of direction; it leaves out a logical forward step and comes to a conclusion that is aside from the direct line normally expected” (Spillane and Martin 240). Knight’s move thinking is an example of derailment, a type of “formal thought disorder” that often affects people with schizophrenia and schizophrenia-spectrum disorders. Psychologists Louis Sass and Josef Parnas says

that within categories of thought disorders “tendencies toward hyper-concreteness, hyper-abstractness, and vagueness are often described” (“Thought Disorder” 497), and he references Eugene Bleuler’s phrase “loosening of associations” which suggests that types of derailment exemplify how “habitual well-worn pathways of association have lost their cohesiveness” (in Sass and Parnas 497).

I suggest that Weiner’s interest in schizophrenic thought is reflected aesthetically both in the structure of the *CP*, and in the content of the poems similar to the above descriptions in several ways. Weiner’s form leaves a literal gap between the code and the corresponding phrase, as in the poem “CME            THE” (*Code Poems* 28). Each line of this poem references an encoded phrase that ends in “the \_\_\_\_”: “BEN Are or Is the \_\_\_\_? / BFE    Be the \_\_\_\_” (Weiner *The Code Poems* 28). Visually the effect is a line of left-aligned code, a space, and then the corresponding phrases. The code on the left prompts the reader to hunt for a “hyper-concrete” (Sass and Parnas “Thought Disorder” 497) signifier to connect directly to the phrase, signalled by the title of the poem: “CME            THE.” However, Weiner’s repetitive collection of phrases that end in “the \_\_\_\_” insists on “hyper-abstractness” (Sass and Parnas “Thought Disorder” 497); the article “the” can be applied to innumerable scenarios in many different ways. Further, the blatant “vagueness” (Sass and Parnas “Thought Disorder” 497) of each line ending in a blank illustrates Weiner’s sidestepping of any concrete associations. The poem plays with frustrating the reader’s attempts to complete the sentences by opening them up to many possible endings, while emphasizing and concretizing the formulaic “habitual well-worn pathways” (in Sass 497) of the *ICOS*.

Spillane and Martin suggest that “In a similar way ‘knight’s move thinking’ may arise from a failure to suppress divergent associations” (241). This doesn’t mean that the person’s



thought process is unrecognizable, but that the non-schizophrenic (neurotypical) person will have more work to do in order to follow the concept through. The non-linear style of schizophrenic thinking is another example of divergent thinking or chaotic cognition that I explored in Chapter 3 with ADHD. The fact that Weiner explicitly names this type of thinking in 1969 is interesting because this is the last time she'll talk about schizophrenia in relation to her writing, when she is pre-diagnosis. This call to a specific type of reader or evolutive move reminds one (yet again) of Joyce's ideal insomniac (*FW* 119.14). When Weiner was diagnosed with schizophrenia after the events recorded in *The Fast* in 1972, she insisted that her writing is clairvoyant, and rebukes anyone who disagrees with her. She understands that her style is different even to what she was previously writing, but she refuses to publicly acknowledge it as a diagnosed disability. Her clairvoyant work is experimental and conceptual, but not schizophrenic.

As Judith Goldman says, Weiner's "emphatic experiential claims and the terms on which she makes them at once legitimate her poetry *a priori* as testimony and overtly perform as a persuasive strategy within what are extremely self-consciously literary works" (122). She continues to say that in naming how the texts came into being "clairvoyant" writing "Weiner alerts us to the peculiar status of her texts without allowing us to medicalize and dismiss them" (122). This testimony is her "slow professing"—Barber-Stetson's deviation from "slow processing" that I recounted in Chapter 2—and a reminder that reading and writing is inescapably personal.

However, authors often do not treat Weiner's schizophrenia as seriously as her clairvoyance when considering her writing, which is understandable, but also undermines some of Weiner's own questions. In searching for a method of communication, she considers the possible benefits of schizophrenic thought. I've mentioned throughout this project that I am not interested in

posthumously diagnosing authors or their texts. In Weiner's case though, I believe it's important to talk about such an official diagnosis so that scholars' attitudes neither erase the specifics of Weiner's cognitive disability, or negate her insistence that she is a spiritual person and witness. There is some friction between these options that offers an opportunity to consider the messiness of diagnostic processes. Miele Rodas explains that she refuses to posthumously diagnose authors because firstly it is impossible to know their minds, and because she argues there is neurodivergent "value present in the text, regardless of the writer's clinical status" (Miele Rodas 29). It still may be true however, that Weiner chose to label her work as the product of a mystical, evolving "superconscious" (in Truitt 4), instead of a clinical disorder because of schizophrenic stigma.

While Goldman says that the self-reflexive nature of Weiner's work asks readers intentionally to read it "other than as a symptom of schizophrenia" (122), I suggest that's not necessary to the neurodivergent reading that I'm proposing. While Weiner had to be protective of her texts in the 1960s-80s so her readers wouldn't "medicalize and dismiss them" (Goldman 122), movements like the Mad Pride movement (which I shall discuss in detail in this chapter) and scholarship from neurodivergent authors like Remi Yergeau outline the necessity for claiming rhetoricity and poetic intention because neurodivergence is not apoetic. Further, as Rodas suggests, the expressive practices that Weiner uses still function the same regardless of what one labels them (a rose is a rose is a rose...); the interpretive modes Weiner's texts offer the reader can be read for schizophrenic value outside of any definite clinical status. Schizophrenia and what Weiner classifies as clairvoyance can both exist as valid audience readings of the text, precisely because in "Trans-Space Communication" Weiner establishes that one can interpret neurodivergent thinking as neurological necessity.

As I argued in Chapter 3, recognizing neurodivergent language markers in a text is not inherently negative. Weiner's writing can be excellent, personal, communicative, clairvoyant and schizophrenic, and also painful, mundane, and prophetic. Further, schizophrenia as an illness has been represented by and in some ways created through language for most of the 20th century. The amount of negotiating that Weiner and her friends and colleagues do with the concept of schizophrenia makes it a bogeyman, understandably enough for the socio-historical context. I am interested in this chapter at teasing out some of these negotiations. I have talked about the slipperiness of diagnoses—how they function as markers of privilege in some spaces, how they introduce spectra that push subjects into constant identity negotiations between being too neurodivergent and neurodivergent enough, and how intimately personal a diagnostic journey can be.

I want to respect Weiner's *rejection* of her diagnosis, or her counter-diagnosis, as much as I hold my own personal desire *for* a diagnosis. Regardless of whether readers conceptualize Weiner's writing as schizophrenic/clairvoyant (or, or both/and), her experiences and expressive practices fall under the label of neurodivergent, as the majority of neurotypical folk don't feel compelled to OBEY CHARLEMAGNE, as a phrase Weiner once saw instructed (Bernstein and Weiner "LINEbreak" 158). While embracing or acknowledging clinical "madness" may not have been an option for Weiner if she wanted her writing to be taken seriously, it is an option now. Readers who value neurodivergence can recognize schizophrenic aesthetic value without medicalizing, or dismissing her work. In this chapter I follow the entangled threads of her diagnosis and her counter-diagnosis, without trying to cut either.

#### 4.2 Bernstein and Weiner's "LINEbreak" Interview: a Superconscious that will drive you...

In a 1995 "LINEbreak" interview with her good friend and executor Bernstein, Weiner is witty, charming, annoyed, and staunchly supportive of her work and process. She does not allow Bernstein to reduce her cognitive processing style or her work. Weiner begins by talking about the *CP*, and explains that they are found poetry, saying "The performance work started because I couldn't write my own poetry. And I discovered from David Antin that I could use found pieces of poetry, and I discovered the International Code of Signals" ("LINEbreak" 144). One could argue that her clairvoyant work can also be classified as "found poetry" since she received much of it from her "silent teachers." With a laugh she insists: "I cheat in language" (Bernstein and Weiner "LINEbreak" 147). Later in the interview, Bernstein asks her how she positions herself as a poet, whether she considers herself to be avant-garde and experimentalist or not, and she responds that "Yes, I've always felt that the best thing . . . I mean, how can you not be *avant garde* if you're the only person in the world who sees words?" ("LINEbreak" 158). I include the next few lines of the interview in full:

[Charles Laughs] 'But I thought we all see words, in some sense.'

[Hannah] 'No, it isn't the same at all! If you saw words in color across the living room, twelve or twenty feet long, "OBEY CHARLEMAGNE" or something, or saw them every time you moved, you'd realize that it's really visual, and at the beginning it was in color. The color has disappeared. And at the moment I don't see words on my forehead. It's a little tiring for me now' ("LINEbreak" 158-159).

When Bernstein suggests that “everyone does this,” Weiner responds by reaffirming her difference. This is something that neurodivergent people often have to do. Because neurodiversity acknowledges that diverse brains function in a variety of ways, there is often some overlap between actions or aspects that identify someone as neurodivergent rather than neurotypical. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, this positions a person on a spectrum of neurodivergence that forces them to prove that they have consistently “abnormal” experiences. Weiner does not allow Bernstein to be reductive about her experience, but claims it as different, and also admits that it’s difficult—“tiring,” she says (“LINEbreak” 159).

At the same time in this interview she is especially conscious of how her writing is perceived to the point of self-editing. Bernstein mentions that she emphasizes her clairvoyance, and then asks “Why do you resist the more formal or structural characterizations of your work? Or do you?” (“LINEbreak” 151). Weiner responds that she doesn’t believe in formal structure, and after some interruption in the interview because of background noise, Bernstein is concerned that she has lost her train of thought.

(Weiner hadn’t but I have and now I want to talk about background noise and human error. Throughout the LineBREAK interview background noise disrupts communication. Bernstein mentions that there are cars and construction and hammer noises, and has to repeat questions. At one point, Bernstein instructs Weiner “Let me go back and ask the question in a different way. So we’ll erase that, and we’re starting again. I’ll ask it, and you can answer it in the same way” (“LINEbreak” 151). However, she doesn’t answer in the same way—he begins to ask instead about the formality of her work, which she says she doesn’t believe in, and the conversation shifts. As the audience of the transcript we have both answers. The background noise is part

of the information that we receive as we read this transcript—the slippage between answers reminds me of the *Code Poems*. The encoded messages are meant to convey one thing for the purpose of communication between vessels, but they are being used to illuminate something entirely different: communication between vessels. Bernstein doesn't actually erase the first answer, and Weiner doesn't answer the same way. Because of the disruption of communication the conversation moves in a completely different direction, while still maintaining multiple answers to one question. Both options are simultaneously present, like her diagnosis and counter-diagnosis.)

Weiner responds “No, sometimes I write nonclairvoyant. There have been two or three books, or four, I don't know. I can't write clairvoyantly all the time, it will drive you . . . I mean, it will take too much energy” (“LINEbreak” 152). I read the ellipsis in this quote as extremely important, because as one reads this absence, readers can presume that Weiner was going to say, “it will drive you *insane*” or “it will drive you *crazy*,” but she does not; she self-edits to position her work as requiring energy instead of mental fitness. She refuses to situate herself or her writing in the category of madness, even in a passing idiom, as Goldman says she does in order to prevent the reader from disregarding her work.

While we can't really know why she edits herself this way, it echoes Gertrude Stein's stark refusal of automatic writing when Skinner accused her of hysteria. While the threat of sterilization (or at the very least, denigration) that Stein may have faced is no longer present, it appears Weiner is painfully aware of how people might respond to a schizophrenic writer. Throughout the interview Weiner does use terms like “nutty” and “crazy,” saying of her book *Pictures and Early Words*, that it's “*really* nutty. I mean, it's not the best writing in the world, but that was a really crazy year” (“LINEbreak” 150). After Bernstein asks Weiner about whether she

sees the *CJ* as a feminist text because of the diaristic style, she responds “I don’t really believe it’s either one sex or the other. It’s a daily journal, and it’s gone slightly screwy, and is under control when you read it, with three voices, or when you see it, because of the three different type-faces” (“LINEbreak” 149).

While she allows herself to use terms like “nutty,” “screwy,” or “crazy”, she still positions herself in control of her work—the journal “is under control when you read it,” the pages that she sends to the publishers from “nutty” writing are “edited out” (“LINEbreak” 148). While writing in her clair-style, Weiner maintains her position as a mediator of her own experience, which does not allow her to be thought of as crazy, or at the mercy of her silent teachers or diagnosis.

Bernstein navigates the line that Weiner has set up with his own skepticism. In his eulogy for Weiner he acknowledges the difficulty that Weiner’s schizophrenia bestowed upon her life. He says: “Hannah’s illness was often shrugged off as eccentricity, as we’re all a little crazy after all. But few of us suffer from our craziness in the way Hannah did and her schizophrenia was not merely metaphoric, despite the fact that Hannah did not accept any characterization of herself as mentally ill” (“Hannah Weiner” n.p.). It seems then, that Bernstein does acknowledge that we do not all see words, that there is something unique about her writing and the way it came into being. He says also that “Surely there was the fear that since Hannah’s work was predicated on hearing voices and seeing words, her identification as schizophrenic would discredit the achievement of a poetry in which the very idea of a stable, expressive lyric self is exploded into what might, indeed, metaphorically be described as a kind of schizophrenic writing” (“Hannah Weiner” n.p.).

The idea that her diagnosis would discredit her poetry is predicated on the notion that disabled people don't create good art, or that if they do, they are not the working subject, but the vessel. Bernstein dismisses the idea that a schizophrenic writer could intentionally write valuable, aesthetically "schizophrenic" writing. Similarly, Remi Yergeau describes how clinicians and parents refer to autism as a body-snatcher that invalidates autistic rhetorical intention: "when autism is diagnosed, it is thought to reside, to push out the normalcy and invade, body-snatcher style" (*Authoring Autism* 17). The stories told about autistic people do not include room for meaning made by autists themselves. Yergeau asks "but how to be a persuading body when one's body has been storied as unpersuasive, as inhuman and deadly?" (*Authoring Autism* 6).

In this case, many scholars, myself included, rely to some extent on Bernstein's "stories" and scholarship about Weiner's embodied experiences and cognitive processes. He was her close friend and her colleague. While the rhetoric of compulsory able-bodiedness consistently attempts to erase neurodivergent voices, Yergeau proposes pushing back against the othering of neurodivergent ways of being—this includes recognizing and valuing autistic self-narration.

Bernstein's comments also point to the fear that neurodivergent art is not worth reading, or if it is, we must label it "genius" instead of mad, to satisfy our own aesthetic nervousness because isn't madness contagious, as early American readers of Joyce's *Ulysses* feared? Bernstein continues to frame Hannah as the heroic person with disabilities that Jay Dolmage identifies as a frequent stereotype: the overcomer—a disabled person who compensates for their illness or impairment with a "gift," (*Disability Rhetoric* 39). Bernstein asserts that "Hannah Weiner's work is not a product of her illness but an heroic triumph in the face of it. Her personal courage in refusing to succumb to what often must have been unbearable fear induced by her illness, her persis-



tence in writing in spite of her disabilities, is one of the legacies of her work” (“Hannah Weiner” n.p.).

Joelle McSweeney critiques this framing. She notes that “time and again Weiner deliberately resists attempts by well-meaning friends and critics to normalize her experience or separate her aesthetics from her clairvoyance (often in order to assign her political bona fides)” (“Disabled Texts” 130). McSweeney intimately connects Weiner’s schizophrenia and clairvoyance, identifying her writing style as a disabled one, but maintaining that this doesn’t reduce the quality of her innovation. Finally, she says that Bernstein’s heroic positioning of Weiner “seems like special pleading. Weiner’s work is her clairvoyance. Her aesthetic process is indistinguishable from the fact that she ‘sees words,’ a fact she insists on graphically both on the page and in the front matter of every published ‘clair-style’ work” (“Disabled Texts” 132).

Still, outright classifying Weiner’s work as a text written by a schizophrenic person is complicated, especially because she intentionally refused that mediation. Yergeau discusses how autistic people muddy the process of diagnosis disclosure through community or cultural narratives, dismissing pathologized or medicalized channels of diagnosis when they don’t work for them in favour of cultural markers of disability. Yergeau says that “this focus on culture is particularly neuroqueer: it diverts attention from discourses that might otherwise seek to pathologize or intervene in the lives of autistic people, in many ways shattering the aims of diagnostic process itself” (*Authoring Autism* 161). As I explained in Chapter 1, “neuroqueer” refers to coalitions between neurodivergent and queer bodies, and shared nosological histories. Neuroqueer “fucks with rhetoric” (Yergeau *Authoring Autism* 92) by carving out space for autistic rhetors to be both fully autistic and fully rhetorical. Another option is producing a “counter-diagnosis”

which “doesn’t entirely discount diagnosis, but it also doesn’t affirm diagnosis” (*Authoring Autism* 161). This is similar to a queer coming-out story, which positions personal disclosure above prescribed norms. Yergeau calls it “coming aut” (*Authoring Autism* 162), and suggests that self-diagnoses have rhetorical power. A self-diagnosis (for the self, by the self) can be both an assertion and acceptance of identity.

#### 4.3 Self-Diagnostic Constellations: The Politics of cultural diagnoses:

Beginning their self-diagnostic process by “self-identify[ing]” with schizophrenia, Yergeau learned to lean into the process of identification, eventually shifting to “become” autistic as they realized that autism used to be considered a symptom under the umbrella classification of schizophrenia (*Authoring Autism* 168). Diagnoses are dynamic, they can shift over time: “diagnoses are never end points, despite paradoxically asserting themselves as such” (Yergeau *Authoring Autism* 168). This statement is supported as historians track diagnostic classifications back through time. Categories like autism and schizophrenia overlap; ADHD is layered over encephalitis; hysteria and complex PTSD share commonalities. This dissertation has so far engaged with the socio-culturally and literarily constructed divisions of cognitive disability, tracking the dynamism of diagnostic classification as psychological and neurobiological knowledge increases. Weiner’s refusal to fit herself artistically into clinically imposed nosological boundaries illuminates how messy and imprecise these diagnostic categories can be: instead, she comes out as clairvoyant.

Self-diagnosis helps make these boundaries between identities slippery and permeable, but can also leave the person feeling bereft and vulnerable. I echo Miele Rodas’ uncertainty in

existing in self-diagnosis “with/out” the community. In a vulnerable moment of personal disentangling, Miele Rodas reveals that her journey of identification has led her to the “thresholds” of diagnosis, but not inside the boundaries of the neurodivergent community (24). She remains adjacent, sitting at the doorpost, in liminal space.

Miele Rodas asserts that the explorations that led to her adjacent “coming aut” (Yergeau *Authoring Autism* 162) were found in linguistic experiences that connected to familiar autistic traits: “I know the deep, deep delight of repetition, alliteration. Love the sound of that word: *llaves*, perspicacious, unremitting. My own speech, my writing is apostrophic, ejaculatory, interruptive” (24). The recognition of autistic expression in modernist literature also allowed her to recognize her own processing styles within these texts. Miele Rodas’ text is thus written using a “narrow, recursive, autistic focus” (24), employing autistic strategies to talk about autistic aesthetics in modernist poetry.

Recognizing oneself at this threshold can be both exciting and lonely, but much of Miele Rodas' understanding of how she could situate herself within the autistic community comes from making meaning linguistically. She allies herself to autistic cognitive experiences through non-normative language. While I don't suggest that conceptual poetry will diagnose a reader, it allows for reader's genuine reactions to a text, and produces a space where this affect can be examined and assemblages re-imagined. As a writer also at the threshold of neurodivergent communities, the recognition I feel when reading a text with a neurodivergent aesthetic is electric. I recall the utter joy I had hearing the beginning lines of the Washerwoman section of *FW*. Adjacency or living at the threshold of access is valuable, as long as a reader allows these ways of reading to deconstruct the rigid boundaries around normative and desired linguistic processes.

However, even as Bernstein suggests that we're all a bit crazy, (at this i echo Weiner in saying "oh for Heaven's sake, Charles!" ["LINEbreak" 152]), he also diagnoses Weiner's writing as different, although he is likely unaware of it. He says that her writing has a "flatter tone" (Bernstein "LINEbreak" 148). One possible symptom of schizophrenia is "flat affect," which refers to someone outwardly exhibiting a lack of emotion, or displaying a mismatched emotion to the situation. Bernstein suggests her writing is "flatter" because it lacks temporal connections—"there's no beginning, middle, or end. It just continues on. And also there's a lot of very ordinary material. A lot of things that might be considered trivial, where nothing is happening" ("LINEbreak" 148). Weiner responds that this is due to the diaristic quality of her clair-style.

As I proposed, this chapter's central concern is the *CP* because these poems are usually viewed as radically different from the *Clairvoyant Journal*, but it was published only a year before Weiner started experiencing schizophrenic symptoms. The *Code Poems* are mechanically structured with the *ICOS* code and then the meaning, while Weiner's clair-style writing is informal, interruptive and loose over the page. The journal is diaristic and personal, while the *Code Poems* are general, meant to apply to or be used by anyone on the open seas.

However, Bernstein's above comment could be applied to the *Code Poems* as well, since the majority of the poems in the book don't exhibit narrative, or describe events, other than "RJ Romeo and Juliet." The *ICOS* is intended to share essential amounts of information, and to ask and answer questions. It is written for the transportation of "ordinary" material, and the way Weiner constructs many of these poems is aesthetically repetitive. In "QGB A OR AN" she vacillates between synonyms and antonyms, including "QGF some," "QGM nothing," "QGL every," "QGP much," and "QGR Not so much. Less," ending the

poem with the questions “QHR Why?” and “QHS How?” (Weiner *CP* 22). Nothing happens throughout the poem.

Similarly, these poems employ different voices, like her clair-writing to a certain extent, but more orderly. While not as structurally interruptive as the *Fast*, “DSJ Persons Indicated Present Their Compliments to” (Weiner *CP* 21) has elements of conversation: “ZJQ Will you write? / ZLH Yes, I will / WRY Will you stay or wait? / HUG Yes, I can” (Weiner *CP* 21).

There are aesthetic similarities between the two kinds of writing, but Weiner’s schizophrenia or lack thereof is usually only discussed regarding the *CJ*. There has not been substantial scholarship on her own schizophrenic methodologies, or her potentially schizophrenic/clairvoyant identity in reference to these works, which were not published collectively in manuscript form until 1982. This is curious to me. Though she wrote the *Code Poems* before her visions began, it is unknown whether she was experiencing symptoms of schizophrenia at that time, though as her introduction to the poems points out, she was interested in how using schizophrenic thought practices alter reading and writing strategies (Weiner “Trans-Space Communication” 1). She offers schizophrenia as a reading value for critics.

It is true, as Yergeau points out, that diagnoses are not “end points” (168), but describe moments in time. Likewise, calling a diagnosis a starting point is also difficult. One might say that for the diagnostic process “there’s no beginning, middle, or end. It just continues on” (Bernstein “LINEbreak” 148). Therefore, this chapter finds schizophrenic value in the *Code Poems*, even though they appear “before” her diagnosis, and I consider how certain criticisms or observations made of the *CJ* might be applied to Weiner’s earlier work. This is important because of

the slipperiness of this diagnosis and her counter diagnosis. Regardless of Weiner's own intentions for her writing, critics frequently read schizophrenia into it, like the ghost in the machine, or intentionally out of it, like Bernstein, or critic Sean Braune, who insists that "I will not belabor her schizophrenia, because I feel that a more interesting account of her experience of language is material and extreme, and develops an implicit theory of the limits of a living and lively language" ("Hannah Weiner" n.p.).

Regardless, the enmeshing of aesthetic and clinical practice is relevant to discussions of schizophrenia. Schizophrenia as a mental illness/cognitive disability is nearly as slippery and inaccessible as conceptual poetry, and has often been just as recursively and linguistically created. Refusing to look at Weiner's schizophrenia in order to just focus on the aesthetic elements of her text, as Bernstein and Braune suggest, negates the potential benefits of recognizing schizophrenic voice as an aesthetic quality.

Keiran McNally's "A Critical History of Schizophrenia" tracks the intertwined historical and linguistic developments of the concept of schizophrenia. Originally an extension of dementia praecox (premature dementia that caused the sufferer to endure episodes of madness), schizophrenia became its own diagnosis in 1908 based on the work of Swiss Psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler. The term referred to a group of symptoms of which the most prevalent was the "splitting of the psychic functions" (Bleuler in McNally, 3). McNally catalogues various groups of symptoms that were supposedly associated with this new disease, including: "loosening of associations, non sequitur thinking, autism, perseveration, echopraxia (imitation of movement), echolalia (repetition of words), blocking of thought" and many others (4).

These were only the symptoms theorized by Bleuler; various other psychiatrists added their voices to the list after that, to the extent that “during this century, hundreds of abnormalities had been reported in *groups* of individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia. Almost no organ or brain region had been left unimplicated at one stage or another” (emphasis in original McNally 6). Schizophrenia was also deeply entangled with language. McNally asserts that “Twentieth-century schizophrenia, for all its perceived objectivity, was first and foremost linguistically encoded... For most of the twentieth century, an absence of clear biological markers meant that language played a dominant role in schizophrenia conceptualization” (14). This persists late into the 20th century—in 1997 Timothy J. Crow published a paper on schizophrenia and language speciation entitled: “Is schizophrenia the price that *Homo Sapiens* pay for language?” As I have discussed throughout this dissertation, language pathology, literary works, and mental/moral fitness are frequently intimately connected.

McNally takes the reader through the uncertainty that the diagnosis of “schizophrenia” contains. As with many other disorders, eugenicists pinned on schizophrenia the moral ills of western society. Over-diagnosed communities included LGTBQ+ people, Black folk, and women; it even surpassed hysteria, which had been primarily a female disease. The diagnosis lead to incarceration, brutal medical methods including lobotomies, and forced sterilization in countries that had active eugenics movements. Different races were classed as being more susceptible to the disease, including African Americans, Indigenous peoples, Nordic people, and Jewish people (McNally 138-139). McNally states that “ultimately, in conjunction with the support and contribution of numerous other psychiatrists, such beliefs anticipated and constituted part of the intellectual apparatus underpinning the holocaust” (137). “Schizophrenia” McNally

asserts, “was a flexible concept” (145); a “*less precise nosological fiction* than the fictional, logical tool of nosology itself” (emphasis in original 151). As a flexible concept, schizophrenia was a scapegoat for various modern and postmodern concerns, a catch-all diagnosis for linguistic difference.

It’s no wonder that after WWII, the 1950s began to see an increase of anti-psychiatry movements. Psychiatrists David Cooper and RD Laing were at the forefront of this movement, though they wouldn’t refer to themselves as anti-psychiatric. Laing and Cooper diagnosed schizophrenia as an encompassing category for social ills that existed in a capitalist society: “what now found expression—and as exemplified in R.D. Laing’s *Politics of Experience*—was the notion that the mad are sometimes *more sane* than the normal” (emphasis in original McNally 156). In 1967 Laing asserted that the label usually came before the actual diagnosis—someone experiencing something a doctor didn’t understand could be classified as schizophrenic. McNally says that “Laing noted ‘the cracked mind of the schizophrenic may *let in* light which does not enter the intact mind of many sane people whose minds are closed’... Laing felt the schizophrenic ceased to be schizophrenic when he met someone by whom he felt understood” (157).

Laing’s idea that it is preferable to be mad, or that cognitive disabilities were also assets, with the “mad” acting as prophets or mediums was also present in twentieth century literary theories. As I outlined in previous chapters, Modernist writers and theorists also found literary value in neurodivergent language markers. André Breton of the Surrealists praised the “mentally ill,” schizophrenics among them, for their “honest” spontaneous work (K. Conley 132). Michael Davidson illustrates how “cognitive disability fuelled a good deal of modernist innovation. Psy-



chological categories that became popular during the early twentieth century— hysteria, anxiety, paranoia, neurasthenia, melancholia, the uncanny—dominate modernist works” (66). The presence of cognitive disabilities in modernist works was an essential aesthetic of the period, and not always used negatively. Davidson suggests that “we need to distinguish between the ‘degenerate’ thesis—mental deficiency as a sign of cultural decay—and more utopian versions theorized in the avant-garde” (67). Instead of degeneration, he says, “Surrealists and Dadaists celebrated madness as an alternative to rational, logical cognition” (67).

This notion prefigures CDS’ conception of the differences between the medical and social models of disability in which the social context is highly responsible for turning personal impairments into socially constructed disabilities, but can also be used to celebrate disability. For example, the Mad Pride movement began around the same time as the anti-psychiatry movements. However, while they didn’t reject the idea of mental illness totally, Laing’s anti-psychiatry movement was criticized for neglecting the actual lived mental health of its patients; they had “dehumanized schizophrenia by making it a sociological concept” (McNally 165), instead of attending to the very real psychological experiences of schizophrenics.

#### 4.4 Mad Pride: Taking Translation into their own Hands:

Judi Chamberlin, whose 1978 book “On Our Own: patient controlled alternatives to the mental health system” is understood by many as the origin of the Mad Pride movement, says that despite the angel of mercy label that Laing and other anti-psychiatric doctors adopted, the distinction between “sick” and “well” was not really in question. The patients that Laing encountered were used symbolically by Laing to support his position but still left “inside the mental

hospitals where he trained as a psychiatrist. Laing grants that what these ‘schizophrenics’ say has meaning, but only through his translations” (Chamberlin xiii).

Chamberlin’s text began the mental patients’ liberation movement, in which mad-identified scholars and activists advocated for significant changes in psychiatric treatment of people classified as insane—at the very least, they argued for diagnosed people to have a say in their treatment options. She asserts that “treatment” of patients who go “crazy” is not compassionate or kind, but is full of instances of “isolation and contempt” (Chamberlin xiii). As Bradley Lewis outlines, advocates of Mad Pride “shared common experiences of being treated with disrespect, disregard, and discrimination at the hands of psychiatry. Many also suffered from unjustified confinement, verbal and physical abuse, and exclusion from treatment planning” (“A Mad Fight” 341).

While Weiner was not, as far as scholars know, active in Mad Pride movements, she does do her own “translation” work in the *Clairvoyant Journal*, and in her *Code Poems*. She does not rely on someone else to translate the words and visions she receives, but mediates them herself, giving them meaning, which was often a tiring experience. In a letter she wrote to Bernadette Mayer, Weiner states that she stands in the gap between the “normal” reader and the receiving plane where she must OBEY CHARLEMAGNE—Mayer says Weiner “did what she did so that we don’t have to” (in Bernstein “Hannah Weiner” n.p.), and this could be painful. Her friends and colleagues say that her visions were tiring and that she experienced significant pain (Bernstein; Donovan) due to the visions’ overwhelming sensory input. Durgin asserts that “Weiner’s ‘avant-garde journalism’ shouldn’t be read at the expense of the very *real* suffering she endured” (“Psychosocial Disability” 133). He outlines this suffering as: “symptoms of extreme paranoia, debili-

tating psychosomatic complications to her sciatic and variously medicated body, not to mention enormous pressure to enable her creative production through the fetishization of the madwoman persona that her frequent lucidity, delicious sense of humor and upbeat personality betrayed” (Durgin “Psychosocial Disability” 133).

For her *Clairvoyant Journal*, Weiner translates the content of her visions, which often directly transcribed words on objects in brilliant colours. The structure of three voices in the *CJ* (two of her silent teachers, and hers) interrupt each other, talk over each other, and she records it all. Her *CJ* is a direct translation of her neurodivergent experiences, whether a product of schizophrenia or, as she phrases it, a precognitive mediative superconscious (Weiner in Truitt 4).

The *Code Poems*, likewise, use Weiner’s translations of the *ICOS*, as she reassembles phrases for personal meaning beyond a “system developed for communication at distance and across language boundaries to facilitate trade and commerce” (Leahy 76). The maritime flag signalling systems that evolved into the *ICOS* were historically begun by French, and then English seamen, and were used by the English to communicate between ships as early as the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. Eventually, these systems became internationalized, and translated into many different languages, but the main versions used and updated were still British and American using English until the early 1930s (*ICOS* 1969, iii).

The poem “BEA AM. I AM” (Weiner *CP* 23) uses the impersonal code personally, beginning with a firm statement of identity in the title: “AM. I AM” (*CP* 23) though this is the last certain line in the poem until the final two lines. As the poem continues, Weiner immediately interrogates that initial statement in the first three lines: “BEC Am I? / BED Am I not? / BEF Am I to?” (*CP* 23). The questions about identity begin with thoughts of “being” and

move to “doing”—is the writer “to” what? They suggest that a stable identity is not clear, and that definitions around what a person is, or isn’t, is uncertain.

Similarly, the uncertainty around what schizophrenia actually was beyond whatever symptoms a psychiatrist wanted to connect it to abated somewhat when studies began to show neurological correlations with schizophrenic symptoms, but even up to the DSM-III diagnostic criteria was not agreed upon by clinicians. One such debate was around the inclusion of “thought disorder” as a symptom, as this was, according to various nosologists, either far too difficult to effectively pin down, or very obviously present in most cases. However, the promise of future research compelled psychiatrists to keep the concept of schizophrenia alive; the idea that someone in the future would find biological and genetic information that explains the disorder kept the diagnostic categories around (McNally 205). This places the concept of schizophrenia on an interesting timeline—a disorder that is waiting to be actualized, but is still present.

In “BEA AM. I AM” the questions Weiner asks also jump temporally, wondering about past and future existence, collapsing time in the present space of the poem: “COT Was I? ...BHC Shall, or Will I be?” (23). Weiner plays with this colonial language by including a “jump to the side” as she uses the code to question a “whole” personhood instead of communicate as it is intended: with an immutable idea of who is speaking. Weiner also shifts between the singular and plural: “CSQ Where am I (or, are we)?...BHG Shall, or Will we be?” (CP 23). The repetition of the “to be” verb emphasizes the voice’s (or voices’) existence, but Weiner refuses to add further details. The attempts to locate a certain, individuated self in the code are frustrated, as are readers who are subjected to repetitive questions without many distinguishing changes. Weiner’s translation of the code destructs its neat linearity, and introduces

elements of divergent thinking.

As the third decade of the 21st century begins, physicians and researchers have a firmer understanding of the neurophysiological connections with schizophrenia symptoms, though as Kamens suggests, scholarship is still waiting on more research to justify current conceptions of schizophrenia: “Although *DSM-5* does not identify an underlying or overarching disturbance, the implicit presumption is that explanatory biological substrates will eventually be discovered through research based on its diagnostic taxa” (204). Kamens asserts that the disorder is still othered in psychiatry, and that in order to normalize it, clinicians and the general public should come to see schizophrenia as a valid human experience, as “persons diagnosed with schizophrenia can live in recovery and that psychotic experiences as such do not prevent people from leading fulfilling, self-actualized lives” (206).

There is a temptation to read “BEA AM. I AM” with its multiplication of voices and fracturing of stable identity, as “classically schizophrenic”; the sort of schizophrenia that is often displayed in media, that is, as evidence of a mind “splitting,” or the “splitting of the psychic functions” (Bleuler in McNally 3). Weiner assembles the code into a format that offers the readers evidence of a divided mind, before she “officially” (again, starting points are as tenuous as endpoints) began to experience schizophrenic symptoms. And indeed the nature of the *ICOS* supports this division, since it is synecdochic; each “I” or “we” identifies a ship or a fleet of ships, crewed by many people.

Multiple voices are present both in this work, and in works that are written using her clair-style, which is why the *CJ* are more often associated with Weiner’s disorder. Yet she does not represent herself as a clairvoyant teacher for the *CP*, suggesting explicitly that the poems

were written with techniques she was using to investigate schizophrenic aesthetic value. Perhaps a text containing schizophrenic voice might today be used to deconstruct how schizophrenia became such a heterogeneous disorder as I illustrated above; like “BEA AM. I AM” (Weiner *CP* 23) the disorder does not have a stable identity. Perhaps there are more ways to read this poem. I will come back to this briefly in my next section.

I read Weiner’s writing of the *Code Poems* as writing at the threshold of disability, as Miele Rodas conceptualizes it. Neither firmly schizophrenic, nor decidedly not, but with schizophrenic aesthetic markers. Weiner also wrote at the threshold of different postmodern poetic movements. Durgin refers to her along with Jackson Mac Low as the “prescient elders of Language Writing” (“Psychosocial Disability” 145), although by her own admission she did not fully fit in. Her ambiguous status prompts Durgin to refer to her as a “crucial bridge between New York School and Language Writing” although he says “her major works are finally irreducible to the agreed tendencies of either” (“Psychosocial” 145).

Scholarly hesitancy to fit Weiner fully into any given category prompts Durgin to position her as an example of post-ableist or “psychosocial” poetics which depends on “recognition” over representation; lived experience is not autonomous but socially interdependent, and there are many cultural factors that act on an individual, physically and cognitively. He defines psychosocial formulation “as the axis where a cognitive diagnosis intersects with the lived experiences of a person; a ‘none-of-the-above option in the diagnostic pantheon” (138).<sup>7</sup> This sort of impairment disturbs neat clinical boxes, but also experiential boxes; for example, to return to the

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<sup>7</sup> For a thorough discussion of “psychosocial poetics,” see Durgin’s “Psychosocial Disability and Post-Ableist Poetics: The ‘Case’ of Hannah Weiner’s Clairvoyant Journal” (2008).

concept of self-diagnosis, Miele Rodas' adjacency of self-diagnosis, or writing at the threshold of disability might exemplify psychosocial formulation. Her perception of herself as autistic or autistic-adjacent does not fulfill traditional diagnostic criteria, and would likely not present the same in all situations.

Reading Weiner through a psychosocial lens considers her overlapping identity categories. The social implications of her time period should allow us to move forward without separating her from her clairvoyance or diagnosis while being critical about how both have been constructed. Like Stein, who maintains that instead of a dearth of consciousness signalling hysteria she has an "xcess of consciousness," (in Meyer 141), Weiner insists that she has a "developed superconscious mind which has precognitive, clairvoyant powers" (in Truitt, 4). Both these women insist they possess an excess instead of a "lack," and no wonder; as Meyer said of Stein, and it applies here as well, any attempt to discredit her writing "was, however innocently, an attempt on her life and on her life's work" (145). It is understandable that Weiner might have had difficulty accepting and working with a diagnosis of schizophrenia. Considering her self-diagnosis as an example of such psychosocial processes produces a space wherein readers can consider schizophrenic value in her writing beyond classic tropes.

For instance, though the media likes to suggest differently, not all schizophrenic experiences are negative. Sass describes an increase of phenomenological psychopathology research on subjective experiences in fields of schizophrenic research. He explains that scholarship on schizophrenia has historically been limited in its understanding of people's experiences. As Chamberlain pointed out: experiences are often "translated" by scientists and clinicians. Sass notes that many medical professionals still accept "what are, in scientific terms, extremely vague and po-

tentially misleading characterizations, often involving defect and deficit assumptions that do little more than register the absence of a norm” (Sass 165). Phenomenological psychopathology seeks to understand people’s subjective experiences of their conditions, including “the subtle ways in which a patient’s orientation or attitude, partly under his/her control, can impact the nature of delusions, hallucinations or ‘thought disorder’” (Sass 165).

For example, in a 2015 study done by T. M. Luhrmann et al., the researchers interviewed people who met inclusion criteria for schizophrenia and reported hearing voices from the US, India, and Ghana. In general, people from India and Ghana reported experiencing richer and more positive connections to their voices. The implications of this study also suggest that “it is possible to improve a person’s relationship with their voices by teaching them to name their voices, to respect their voices and to interact with them, and that doing so reduces the voice’s caustic quality” (44). Weiner’s writing offers multiple examples of these positive connections.

#### 4.5 Powerful Witness: Paw the astrally projected polar bear

I read Weiner’s insistence on clairvoyance and her generally positive relationship with her voices and astral projections as a reclamation of personal power over her diagnosis as a person who experiences visions. I am charmed by her description of Paw the polar bear, Weiner’s silent teacher who sleeps in a bed in Weiner’s forehead, drives a limo, and invented astral traveller’s cheques on his European vacation to pay for it (Bernstein and Weiner "LINEbreak" 154). Paw is, however an “astral of someone else” (Bernstein and Weiner "LINEbreak"154) and Weiner says that she sees him and her other visions because she is “Indian-trained” as a teacher.



She connects her visions to Indigenous culture—“Indian elders see, or so I’ve been told. So I seem to have a very strong visual capacity” (Bernstein and Weiner “LINEbreak” 154). Weiner was also an involved activist in the Indigenous rights movement, saying “I’ve been with Indians for twenty years. And not only with the people who are the medicine people, some of whom’ve become healers, but also with some of whom’re in the American Indian Movement” (Bernstein and Weiner “LINEbreak” 164). Although when she begins to speak about this at the end of the interview with Bernstein, she’s cut off mid-sentence, just as she is about to get into her political commitments (oh for Heaven’s sake, Charles!)

I don’t read Weiner as appropriating aspects of Indigenous culture, which is more of a question now than it was in the 80s and 90s, but as a person who is constructing alliances. Weiner’s support of Indigenous activism is unfortunately beyond the scope of my project, except to acknowledge again the overlapping spheres (and psychosocial processes) of eugenic influence—both North American Indigenous and Jewish populations were thought to be more prone to schizophrenia and racial dysgenic practices in North America significantly impacted Indigenous peoples. One could also wonder if, as a Jewish woman, Weiner herself experienced the medical racism associated with the “susceptibility” towards schizophrenia Jewish people were reported to have (McNally 138-139).

New scholarship that explores how people diagnosed with schizophrenia can live positive and productive lives has been predicated by Mad Pride activists who assert that they have the power to make decisions over their treatment and their lives, and reject clinical attempts to remove their autonomy. Mad Pride activists “believe mainstream psychiatry over exaggerates psy-

chic pathology and over enforces psychic conformity in the guise of diagnostic labeling and treatment—which all too often comes in the form of forced or manipulated hospitalizations, restraints, seclusions, and medications” (B. Lewis 339). Chamberlain headed the “mental patients’ liberation movement” which insists on compassion and autonomy. In her book she holds “the conviction that we *must* set up our own alternatives, because nothing that currently exists or is proposed fundamentally alters the unequal power relationships that are at the heart of the present mental health system. Power, not illness or treatment, is what the system is all about (xiii).

Weiner’s insistence on her voices and visions allying her with Indigenous communities can be read as a positive and connected experience of schizophrenia, an example of the type of self-advocacy that the Mad Pride movement celebrated even though Weiner likely wouldn’t place herself in this movement. Goldman connects Weiner’s support of Indigenous movements with her own understanding of power differentials. She says that “Weiner was an ardent proponent of the American Indian Movement, but she found, in a sense parallel to her own situation, that to be a witness *for* is also to be a witness *against*: simply to use an officially recognized language is already to be implicated in the structures of power, to exploit alterity as it is rendered recognizable” (123). Weiner’s language, whether in the *CP* or the *CJ* or her later writings, is blatantly intended to be subversive, even as she recognizes, and weaponizes her “implications” in structures of power.

“Neurodiversity” emerged from such activist critiques of psychiatric and nosological systems as a way to dismantle power structures. The term was first coined in 1998 by disability scholar Judy Singer in her sociology dissertation. She used it initially to argue that autism is a

natural neurological difference, and that thinking about the different ways brains are formed can have positive political and experiential effects. Neurodiversity according to Singer is a political term that reflects neurobiological biodiversity—we are all neurodiverse because no human cognitive experience is identical to someone else's. Biodiversity describes how each species within an environment has its own essential role, and each of these roles must be valued and protected “irrespective of their perceived utility or attractiveness to humans” (Singer “Neurodiversity in the future” n.p.). Similarly, neurodiversity expresses that because each human cognitive experience is unique, every person's psychology is important for a balanced and thriving social environment.

Within this neurodiversity, however, there are still variations and hierarchies of cognitive experiences. While the term implies a level playing field, neurodiversity doesn't mean that all neurotypes or cognitive experiences are privileged the same way. Even as Durgin suggests that a psychosocial lens will support readings that move beyond essentialist identity politics to recognizing all people as ideologically constructed, it is still important to consider how one is implicated in such power structures. Singer has since moved on to terms that denote a power imbalance between NT and ND people, like “NeuroDominant/ Neuromarginalised, or NeuroMajority/ Neurominority” (“Neurodiversity: it's political” n.p.). People with neurotypical cognitive experiences make up the neuromajority in most societies while neurodivergent people are generally the neurominority. While it is true these terms still are “simplifying binaries” they highlight a “power imbalance between social classes, not individual pathology. And that one group is *acting* on another group” (Singer “Neurodiversity: it's political” n.p.). This power imbalance, even in subtle ways, is the impetus for this dissertation.

#### 4.6 An Aside: Tangled threads, river rocks, thresholds

I want to briefly acknowledge my own implications in systems of power, my own interdependencies, the thresholds I am standing before, and how these intersections produce methodological questions for this chapter. In this dissertation I have situated myself as ADHD or ADHD adjacent, and in the writing of each chapter I have deliberately illustrated my own process of “coming to know” (Yergeau *Authoring Autism* 160)—my own psychosocial process, my own self-diagnostic work. Chapter 1 highlighted disturbance, nervousness, and familiarity—the beginning of a self-diagnosis. The acknowledgement that something in my brain is “different.”

In my second chapter I outlined non-normative readings as something a reader may be prodded into by a cognitive style of writing, or something produced by desire—a desire for disability. My own cognitive processing style is most obvious in Chapter Three. In this chapter I recognized ADHD aesthetic value in Stein’s work because of my personal familiarity with the topic, which also helped clarify my own reading methodologies. I have been transparent about my own movement through this dissertation; a methodology that builds chapter by chapter as if I am leaping from one oblong, uneven rock to the next across a creek, like I used to do as a child catching frogs.

If each chapter is one of these metaphorical rocks, one might assume that Chapter Four is the final rock from which I can easily step to the far bank, a summation of reading for neurodivergent value in the experimental texts I have chosen; a final step that ends my journey across the river. However, it does not wrap up so neatly (it rarely does). The rocks are slippery, and sometimes I move too fast, I hit a dead end and must retrace my steps, or I slip and get wet. In-

stead of a neat river crossing, a jump to the side, possibly with damp consequences and scholarly uncertainty.

As I do not share a personal, intimate knowledge of schizophrenic voice, I question whether identifying schizophrenic reading value in Weiner's *Code Poems* is something I can effectively do, and conversely I wonder if I am valuing too highly the clinical officiousness of diagnoses, even as I question nosological processes. In even seeking schizophrenic voice, does using this "officially recognized language" (Goldman 123) implicate me in clinical and medicalized power structures that are inescapably oppressive? For my own life, does seeking any sort of diagnosis at all put me at odds with Weiner, whose thorough resistance to diagnoses pushed her to explore new "states of consciousness" ("Trans-Space Communication" 2)?

Durkin's psychosocial poetics seem to negate such concerns, as he suggests that such poetics are post-ableist in that they conceive of an individual as always interdependent, relying on other voices and experiences and they do not require a "personal self-referentiality" (Post-Ableist 170) that depends on intimate experiential knowledge of a particular disability. Further, reductive or essentialist views of identity that gatekeep scholarship have been complicated by CDT scholars' criticisms of identity categories. Durkin references Lennard J. Davis' ideas of "dismodernism" to support his view.

For Davis, postmodernism, which still focused on a complete human subject, should give way to ideas of "dismodernism," which begins by acknowledging that identity categories are dynamic, complicated, and less complete than they once were thought to be, especially in the wake of criticism for the Human Genome Project. He traces many of these postmodern ideas of the human back to eugenic thought—every identity that doesn't fall under white, cisgender, straight,

middle-class, able-bodied male “deviates” from the normal, and is seen as defective. In a “dis-modernist mode,” Davis explains, “the ideal is not a hypostatization of the normal (that is, dominant) subject, but aims to create a new category based on the partial, incomplete subject whose realization is not autonomy and independence but dependency and interdependence” (“The End of Identity Politics” 241). The subject is always incomplete and interconnected, both readers and writers. It may be this “dismodernist mode” that readers can identify in “BEA AM. I AM” (Weiner *CP* 23). Moving beyond identity politics could mean that the “fractured” schizophrenic voice in this text does not point to a “split mind” that must be repaired, but an interdependent subjectivity. The end line of this poem reads: “BGY Let us be” (Weiner *CP* 23), entangling the original uncertain “I” with a clear communal request.

Davis proposes that “It is too easy to say, ‘We’re all disabled.’ But it is possible to say that we are all disabled by injustice and oppression of various kinds. We are all nonstandard, and it is under that standard that we should be able to found the dismodernist ethic” (“The End of Identity Politics” 241). Davis does acknowledge though that the struggle of “various identities to escape oppression based on their category of oppression” (“The End of Identity Politics” 241) is not over. Therefore, it is still valuable to recognize that neurodiversity, while seemingly a helpful idea, is still implicated in oppression.

Thus, while I have highlighted throughout this dissertation that both neurotypical and neurodivergent people can produce readings that illuminate critical neurodivergent voice and value in texts, I am still wary of my own entanglements. I recall Miele Rodas’ formulation of autistic aesthetics as a “thread” that readers can follow throughout the text—this reminds me of

Ariadne's thread that takes Theseus through the labyrinth (the labyrinth created by Daedalus, the classical artist, and his son Icarus, who also appears in James Joyce's writings. While he is not present in *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce's character Stephen Dedalus is featured in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses* and is both Daedalus and the son of Daedalus: the prototypic romantic artist, destined to fail as his soul attempts to escape the nets thrown at it). The thread through the labyrinth is also the tangled thread of excessive complication for Gertrude Stein which one may find joy in disentangling instead of cutting, or merely existing entangled which I talked about last chapter.

The thread of neurodivergent expressive practices is similar: leading the reader through a piece, liable to be tangled, but there is productivity in the option of sitting on the floor in the dark of the labyrinth, sorting out the strands. However, such readings, such untanglings, or entanglings that ask readers to consider their own cognitive limits and biases, are personal as well as professional. This dissertation is intent on moving through the potential labyrinth of experimental, inaccessible poetry slowly, acknowledging that threads become snarled, knotted, and providing space for neurodivergence to be desired.

Implicit in acknowledging that I am tangled up (that I have questions about whether I can provide an appropriately scholarly reading for this chapter, that my own writing is a mix of messy metaphors, of rocks and twine that I attempt to make sense of with long run on sentences) is privilege. I am writing this dissertation at a moment where I *can* say that I am being driven crazy and have my work taken seriously, where I can include my own affect in my methodologies. While I may be a part of a neurominority, I am here writing about my identity, in and through my non-standard body, at the threshold, recognizing my dependence on the intellectual

work of disabled writers. Further, without a formal diagnosis, I still quietly profit from neurotypical status, even as I wrestle to succeed, let alone flourish, within the standards of “normal” productivity.

I am still working down the length of the thread. I am still calculating my next leap. However, the story ends differently here. In this one the monstrously incomplete body in the labyrinth lives. The rocks, while slippery, are cool on my bare summer feet, and the creek shallow enough that if I fall in, I can stand instead of being swept away.

#### 4.7 Overwhelming Repetition in the *Code Poems*:

I return to Weiner’s experimental aesthetics, and the stupefaction of myself and my colleague while trying to decode the *Code Poems*. Like Stein whose excess of consciousness made it difficult for some readers to engage with her writing, a writer with a “superconsciousness” obviously diverges from her contemporaries, as Durgin’s reference to her “madwoman persona” (133) indicates, and readers struggle to understand her way of writing using normative reading strategies. Several authors and teachers like to talk about how their students read, or refuse to read, Weiner’s work and their subsequent inevitable frustration. I recall the ire of my colleague and I jabbing at our keyboards, struggling to crack Weiner’s code, and those poems are considered the most easily comprehensive of her pieces.

Thom Donovan relates that his students, when asked in a cybernetics and writing class to compose journal entries in the fashion of *CJ*, were unable to imitate her work. Maria Damon has a more in-depth discussion of her students’ frustrations. Her students, she says, feel “traumatized” by such texts: “They ask me angrily why I made them read this, or they say, ‘Why would



anyone write such a book.' They've described her as a 'writer without a voice'" (n.p), though of course, Weiner would argue that she is mediating several voices, including her own; an excess instead of a lack.

The reactions described by Damon are similar to reader reactions I have already explored in response to *Finnegans Wake* and *Tender Buttons*, for example that engaging with *Finnegans Wake* seems impossible, since it "cannot be read by any individual normally constituted" (James Joyce: The Critical Heritage..., Vol. 2, 494). Likewise *Tender Buttons* is "the torment of an egg-beaten brain," (Diepeveen 199). Damon blatantly lays it out: "My students find Weiner's texts traumatic not because they think them over their heads, like Hegel or Stein, but because it's 'crazy' and pointless" (n.p). Again, these reactions are in response to her *CJ*, but I suggest reactions to the Code Poems may be similar, though not as frequently recorded. One of the first emotions the reader associates with the *Code Poems* (i nearly wrote "cope") may be exhaustion. All my discussions of readings are based on how I have experienced the *CP*, (confusion, and then a feeling of community—like Weiner invited me in to create poetry with her instead of watching) but I imagine the overstimulation for the audience while sitting and watching the Coast Guard wave flags in Central Park.

Of course, there are differences between listening to Weiner read the poems while they are being performed and reading them with the reference close by, and I can only speak to the second. This exhaustion, or repetitive overwhelm occurs as attentive readers engage the poems through the frustrating experience of following the code back to the *ICOS* text. After realizing that I was using the incorrect referent I found one that worked more consistently, yet still the code that Weiner offers is still never perfect. Since she uses the original version of *ICOS* and two

updates, one British and one American, suggesting that every single *ICOS* signifier is going to match precisely to Weiner's code is an impossibility. We are still working with user error and as readers we can only process so much, even the (hyper-attentive) reader who might go back and forth between the poems and different versions of the code. This frustration is the heart of the stickiness of the code—handed something that should be consistently understandable, for “all sending and receiving” (Weiner “Trans-Space Communication” 1) there is still a jump to the side that occasionally lands the reader somewhere they didn't expect.

For example, in my decoding of “RJ          Romeo and Juliet,” many of the poems references to the code match up, but some do not. While for Weiner “NWC” has Juliet asking Romeo: “Have you a proper certificate of competency?” (*CP* 9) the American *ICOS* (1909) has this correspond to: “NWC: NOTHING BUT GALES OF WIND” (444).

How might one read this change? Is this user error? I only have access to one iteration of the *ICOS*, and if I looked up the British version would it be different? Is it an intentional “mutation” of the code? Might this be a comment on Romeo's competency? That his assertions are nothing but empty air? Are we meant to apply it to the lines above NWC, which have Juliet responding that she engages in “lay days” (9) at “every opportunity” (9), to have the reader question her bold sexual claims? This line is one example of only a few that I found, and likely would not have found had I not looked up nearly every code (I say nearly because there are still a few that I missed when I look back over my work). The ambiguity inherent in this decoding occurs because of the numbing repetitive work, but is also affected by a distrust of the communication system itself: what might I be missing if I don't exhaustively decode?

Readers will remember that in Chapter 3, I outlined how Stein also faces criticism for her

repetition, or her permutations, as Perloff calls them (“Poetic License” 152). Perloff suggests that Stein constructed a “broad compositional field” that prevents “closure” (“Poetic License” 152). This repetition, as Paul Stephens proposes, forces the audience into cognitive spaces of hyper-attentiveness, or as Linda Stone describes it, a state of “continuous partial attention,” (50). Similarly, the amount of work required to check each code in the *CP* also prevents closure for the reader. Later in Stephens’ text, he lists Weiner among John Cage, Bern Porter, and Bernadette Mayer as one of the poets who take an “*informatic turn* away from the New American and concrete poetry of the 1950s and early 1960s toward a poetry increasingly concerned with informatic motifs, found materials, and the exhaustive recording of everyday experience” (emphasis in original 109).

Stephens suggests that Weiner’s journals use an “overdetermined aesthetic” (132)—a space of continually interrupted voices that fill the page and the reader with noise, and in which “voices take on a mediated and overlapping interdependence” (132). The “interdependence” of the *Clairvoyant Journal* and their many voices, written in a diaristic, confessional style that exhaustively relates Weiner’s day to day actions is overwhelming, and disconcerting to the reader because it displays, as Davis points out, the “incompleteness” of subjectivity (“The End of Identity Politics” 241). Stephens says that Weiner’s clair-style “is able to reveal, as well as to overcome, the limitations of the single brain working in isolation” (127). He compares Weiner’s poem *The Zero One* from 1985 to a radio station buzzing with white noise which dissolves into combinations of numbers and letters as a “garbled transmission” (Stephens 132). For Stephens, Weiner’s work, especially her clairvoyant writing “describes the experience of being inundated with information in all its forms” (132).

I argue this example of overcoming brain limitations, or as Barber-Stetson might describe, the boundaries of cognitive capacities, is present in the *Code Poems* as well, though as with most scholarship on Weiner, Stephens doesn't include the *CP* in his criticism. For example, Weiner's untitled visual poem on p. 14 of the *CP* has 90 flag signs in a 9 x 10 square, and is not colourized, which complicates the reader's ability to consistently understand her signals.

There is no written text in this poem; the reader is confronted with a wall of symbols to decipher. Further, without colour, it is easy to confuse symbols. For example, the first symbol is a flag with a cross in the middle. If the flag had a yellow cross with a red background, it would stand for R, Romeo; with a blue cross and a white background it would stand for X, X-Ray (*ICOS 2*). Similarly, there are flags that uncoloured could stand for K, Kilo, or H, Hotel; M, Mike, or V, Victor; and P, Papa, or S, Sierra (*ICOS 2*). Each possible pair appears many times over the poem. The reader has many decisions to make—the multiple options for decoding make the process overwhelming, as there are many possible permutations of this poem. The reader ends up being uncertain of any meaning.

Interestingly, while both Stein and Weiner employ repetition, Bernstein insists that *Tender Buttons* is not code meant to be cracked (*A Poetics* 143), but the existence of the code as code in Weiner's poems demands the reader decode it. Weiner relates that "the most useful thing for me here, in the code, is the understanding of the equivalents: one kind of signal may equally be substituted for another with the exact same meaning. It then becomes very clear when a different, nonlinear thinking appears, as in 'knight's thinking' (schizophrenic thinking)" ("Trans-Space Communication" 1). After being primed by the concept of knight's thinking, I looked up every code given expecting a divergence. I expected the inevitable literal failure of the referent, instead

of what most scholars recognize as Weiner's intention: calling attention to the materiality of the system. While there were encoded errors, the doubleness of reading each code twice becomes repetitive, and alienating to the reader, but once begun, I had a difficult time taking the code at face value.

While the code may not seem at first glance to be a "garbled transmission" like *The Zero One*, the repetitive and sometimes ambiguous activity of decoding thus produces noisy interferences in the reading process. I use the definition of noise that Marjorie Perloff attributes to Michel Serres in *Radical Artifice: Writing poetry in the age of media*. Noise is anything that interferes with communication, though Perloff suggests noise is both disruptive of, and essential to communication, at the level of literal writing on a page, dysfluencies or interruptions in speech, and in the technical aspects of communicating (Perloff *Radical Artifice* 15). Perloff describes "noise as unanticipated excess, as siren's song" (*Radical Artifice* 16). Fittingly, Weiner's introduction to the *CP* informs the reader that one method of sound signalling for the code includes sirens. Perloff outlines how such interferences in communication estrange the product, especially in methods of transmitting that move huge amounts of information. This makes receivers or audiences "[play] a greatly enlarged role in the processing of the text" (Perloff *Radical Artifice* 16). For example, not all Weiner's codes will be exact matches, but the reader may be compelled to check each one, therefore reading each line twice. Even if or when there are interferences or divergences, the question remains as to how one can or should read them. As the reader is prompted into a specific interpretive mode, they have choices to make that change the meaning of the poem.

As I explored in the above example, the reader could infer that since the poem on p. 14 is

two pages after “RJ Romeo and Juliet” in Weiner’s collection, and the 3rd flag in the first line is Juliet, that Romeo would be the obvious choice to start the poem. However, the reader must also consider the meaning of the flags. “R, Romeo” decoded means “‘received’ or ‘I have received your last signal’” (*ICOS* 21), while “X, X-Ray” means “Stop carrying out your intentions and watch for my signals” (*ICOS* 22). A confident reader could choose R to begin the poem in affirmative—they and the author are on the same page. However, the ghost of X haunts this possibility. If taken as a direct communication from Weiner, it could disrupt the idea that the reader should intentionally choose a specific reading for the ambiguous flags. Then again, the reader is already watching for signals; the problem is that there are too many.

Weiner anticipated this enlarged role for readers. Stephens notes that in “Trans-Space Communication” Weiner “directly situate[s] her writing in the context of information overload” (127) by acknowledging that the amount of information available to the present-day person has increased, and will continue to increase over the subsequent decade. She questions what effect this has and will have on the “neural circuits of the brain,” asking: “is this a mutant? Is this a quantum jump to a different energy level? Is there a new form of communication to accommodate these changes?” (“Trans-Space Communication” 2).

The potential for “mutation” in systems of communication, or in neurological ways of processing that Weiner anticipates is ironically fulfilled in my (a neurodivergent, millennial PhD student with the entire internet and ChatGPT at my disposal) distrustful, exhausting reading of the *Code Poems*. My decoding process, instead of sitting on the grass in Central Park watching lights flicker in morse code, and brightly coloured flags flutter while listening to Weiner’s voice, rather involves the constant blue light of my laptop screen as I CTRL+F the codes from semi-

searchable PDFs. Even the referents she uses, the iterations of the *ICOS*, have since been updated with even more information. The work that I must do to process the message I believe her to be sending is rich with excess (though she did anticipate it). Like the background noise in the "LINEbreak" interview between Weiner and Bernstein in 1995, there are multiple options available.

#### 4.8 Constructing Artifice: Doubting (Non-)Linear Brains at Work:

Such noisy processes move conceptually away from the authentic, "everyday speech" of late 19th and early 20th century poetics. While, as Perloff points out, for poets like T.S. Eliot "*artificial* is a derogatory term because it implies that *words* can somehow be detached from *things*" (*Radical Artifice* 30), Weiner draws the reader's attention to the construction of the code, to the materiality of words themselves *as things* (things like lights, flags, and discrete units of letters). The *Code Poems* self-reflexively acknowledge the "artifice" of the system they are written in, as well as their own existence, if one will understand "artifice" as Perloff uses it: a "recognition that a poem or painting or performance text is a *made thing*—contrived, constructed, chosen—and that its reading is also a construction on the part of its audience" (*Radical Artifice*, 28). Since Judith Goldman has already authored a thorough reading of the *Code Poems*' self-referential materiality in "Hannah=hannaH: Politics, Ethics, and Clairvoyance in the Work of Hannah Weiner," I will rely on her critique and focus instead on potential audience reactions to the made thing, the "construction" that they get to take part in as readers.

Over the course of this dissertation I have been engaging with some of the things that Bernstein suggests impermeable or inaccessible conceptual texts are, and also *do* to the reader. He says that "*impermeability* suggests artifice, boredom, exaggeration, attention scattering, dis-

traction” (*A Poetics* 29). He goes on to list, among other aspects of impermeability: “doubt, noise, resistance” (Bernstein *A Poetics* 30). Finally, Bernstein proposes that “Absorptive & antiabsorptive / works both require artifice, but the former may hide / this while the latter may flaunt / it” (*A Poetics* 30).

In Chapter 3 I explored how poems from *Tender Buttons* could be “attention scattering” or induce distraction. In this chapter, I have been considering how Weiner’s construction of the *Code Poems* as artifice incorporates the readers’ efforts to engage with the texts, and how noisy interferences in communication—possibly the “unanticipated excess” (Perloff *Radical Artifice* 16) of Weiner’s “superconscious” (in Truitt 4) jumping in—can produce doubt, and resistance on the part of the reader.

For example, I consider Damon’s students. She relates that: “Weiner’s inability or unwillingness to screen out any stimulus or to exclude anything from her writing has the effect on readers (my students at least) of a kind of numbing reading process...the demands on the reader’s attention are enormous, and the experience is often articulated (to me by students) as frustration, boredom, or alienation (‘I couldn’t relate’)” (n.p). The overwhelm of voices and information turns Damon’s students off with its “numbing” reading experience. As usual, this readerly resistance is a direct response to Weiner’s clairvoyant work, not her *Code Poems*, but I argue that the *CJ* and the *CP* share some of these characteristics, including demands on the readers’ attention, and numbing repetition. While the *CJ* overwhelms the reader with multiple voices, the *CP* also embrace these multiple voices, which can push out Weiner’s own authorial voice.

For example, in the poem “CME THE” (Weiner *CP* 28) the incredibly specific encoded instructions that Weiner appropriates from the *ICOS* are divorced from their original con-



text and contain blank gaps, because of their short questions or instructions. They are meant to connect audience and author directly as they are navigation instructions from one vessel to another. However, instead of helping to navigate and process the noise of information, the clean cut of the code leaves too much space for interpretation. Weiner plays with this intentionally in which every line ends with a blank; sometimes a question mark, sometimes no punctuation:

“BEN Are or is the \_\_\_\_? / BFE Be the \_\_\_\_” (CP 28).

Goldman looks at the “blanks” in Weiner’s writing, specifically in the *CJ*, saying that for Weiner “the spaces, like the text indefinitely postponing the edge of the page, further indicate that the borders of her poems are indeterminate. Thus, the blanks within Weiner’s page are also *writing*” (138). In the *Code Poems*, these minimal clues contain vast spaces for the reader to fill in the blanks with their own ideas about what is happening. The rigidity of the encoded poetic statements leave so much space for messiness, and human error. The poem “RAT CAN (ABLE TO)” (Weiner CP 24) functions similarly: “CSB He, She, It, or \_\_\_\_, can be / CSR They, or \_\_\_\_s, can be” (Weiner CP 24).

Filling in these blanks is a personal exercise. I suggest one might consider the blanks in such a text as a personal tool of self-reflection—if I approach the text expecting non-linearity, what does this say about the cognitive styles that my mind gravitates towards? If I re-introduce the neurodivergent hypothetical reader, does my expectation of, or even desire for, a “jump to the side,” an encoded disruption, remind me that I may have something in common with the schizophrenic value Weiner has theoretically imbued the text with? What siren song am I responding to? This could be a reminder also that these clinical categories are not discrete, as Remi Yergeau has shared; their self-identification shifted from schizophrenia to autism, which was previously

subsumed under the umbrella label of schizophrenia (*Authoring Autism* 168). Because several cognitive disabilities are characterized by chaotic cognition or divergent thinking, my ADHD cognitive processing style may feel at home with non-linearity, although the signals were sent across time and space from a schizophrenic or clairvoyant brain. Weiner asks for a reader who chooses to acknowledge an incomplete self, as they may be more open to the interdependence that is necessary for reading with such notice.

Both Damon and I recognize noise, doubt, and resistance as antiabsorptive modes that complicate normative linear reading techniques. However, Damon argues that Weiner's writing exhibits these qualities because it is a text born of trauma—traumatized and traumatizing, and difficult to understand in all of its disorganization or disruption. Damon says trauma-texts that feature “rupture and unreadability traumatize coherence, that is, they traumatize the normative reading experience; they resist it, cripple it, mutilate it, liberate it” (n.p.), and that such texts disrupt or disorganize the reader, causing panic or anger when they try to read it. Damon categorizes the *CJ* as a trauma-text because, as she says, Weiner has experienced overlapping traumas. For example: “the trauma of being a Jewish American woman living from 1926-1997, the trauma of everyday life under the conditions of postmodernity, the trauma of being and/or being considered (by others) a mentally ill person, and the trauma of being and/or being considered (by oneself) a mystic” (n.p.). In Damon's opinion, these multiplied overlapping traumas explode into Weiner's writing, transforming her work into a text that “traumatizes normative reading expectations” (n.p.). Damon does find value in some ways this “un-understandability” (Kamens 204) affects readers, but also suggests that readers should “develop some tools to normalize it” (n.p.).

The concept that a text can traumatize readers is more extreme than Quayson's and Siebers' assertions that disabled art engages an audience's affect and causes them to experience disruption, nervousness, and an awareness of disability that they'd often rather not feel. I am interested in how Damon applies these propositions of trauma to the expressive practices of the text itself. While this is beyond the scope of this chapter to look deeper into, and beyond the biographical information that I have accessible for Weiner's life, I want to highlight again the connections made between the Holocaust, eugenics programs and the contributions to those horrors that schizophrenia scholarship supported.

(Damon calls her "Hannah" frequently, and it's odd to see your own name in writing without all of the signifiers that you attach to it. i know my name is a Jewish name, but i don't know if i have Jewish family. One offshoot of my family tree is German and Scandinavian, but there are severed branches here. My father's uncle used to travel for work in the late 60s and whenever he ended the day bored in a hotel room he'd pick up the phone book and dial his last name: Hartzman. He'd talk to whoever answered, asking them who they were, what their life was like, where they came from. He tells the story of finding his own name—Leslie Hartzman [though Leslie is his middle name, his first name was Melfred, does this ruin the experiment?]-and dialling. The Les who picked up the phone talked to him for ten minutes before nationality came up. He was Jewish. "I'm German," my uncle said, and in the retelling he chuckles.

“The conversation didn’t go much farther after that.” After this he stopped calling, and started looking at his ancestry. Gaps appeared—previously ironclad code began to unravel unto sticky uncertainty. Most German Jews dropped the second “n” in the traditionally spelled “Hartmann.” Poet John Perrault recalls how one of Weiner’s Street Works performances was “arranging to meet the other Hannah Weiner in the phone book. The other Hannah Weiner was a psychologist or a psychoanalyst and they met on 57th street” [8]. i was named Hannah [two n’s]—God’s grace to the Israelites—and when i was six a Rabbi told me i was pronouncing my name incorrectly.)

I suggest that disability studies would be extremely beneficial to Damon’s reading, because she begins with a curative or “normalizing” framework, while her reading would be better supported by the intention to disrupt compulsory ablebodiedness instead of maintain it. However, Damon makes an excellent point about the manner in which the “traumatizing” texts disturb readers—the reactions of anger, doubt, and numbness are familiar. Finally, I want to consider how the reactions that readers might experience as a result of antiabsorptive techniques might be used to co-construct texts that make linear normative reading difficult.

Queer Jewish-Canadian poet Syd Zolf in their short essay “Recognizing Mad Affects Beyond Page and Screen” considers the roles that anger and confusion can play in reading poetry. In their writing they say that they have a “particular desire to use form to generate what [they] call ‘mad affects’ in the reading event, which could mean that the reader gets mad at [them] while

trying to decipher sometimes indecipherable language and/or gets mad at the world and/or goes a little mad” (209). I want to end this chapter (and this dissertation, barring my conclusion) with Zolf’s “mad affects” because their theoretical commitments explicitly address the after-effects of eugenics. Zolf’s second book of poetry, *Janey’s Arcadia*, uses machine generated found poetry to illuminate Canada’s “‘social hygienists,’ who engaged in eugenics practices to ‘purify’ the North American white race” (211).

Zolf’s work is intended to be jarring and “sticky” (210). They say: “I want readers to cling to my work, willingly or unwillingly, through affect—disgust, anger, shame, frustration, perhaps even the surprise and release of laughter. Circulating affects as discursive relations can produce *ec-stasy*—subjects shifting beside and beyond themselves in spite of themselves” (Zolf. 211). This sort of work has the reader looking at their own identities and complicities. Zolf asserts that they accomplish these goals by using digital processes that encouraging glitching—“I aim to make *more* noise....this noise, or dirtying up of the text, disrupts traditional reading practices, linguistically materializing awkward, unsettling feelings in relation to the text” (212). Zolf intentionally draws the reader’s attention to the awkward constructedness of the text, to both the artificial nature of the found poetry, and the destructive constructedness of pseudoscientific eugenic theories. Like Joyce’s unapologetically anti-eugenic construction of Shem which parodies his critics denigrating descriptions of him, Zolf offers the reader the chance to access one’s “defective, I mean detective, tendencies” (210) through their frustrating and confusing work, a way to push back against systems that one should be outraged by.

#### 4.9 Defective or Mutant Tendencies: Gender as an Error Message:

In suggesting that an increased amount of information may require schizophrenic strate-

gies to navigate beyond the apparent immediate and straightforward direction of the code, Weiner asks for someone who is willing to experience madness on all the levels that Zolf prods a reader into—for the reader to use their “defective” tendencies. One might experience anger at an inability to achieve certainty while reading, anger at injustice: “EDQ      Any chance of war? / ODV    Good chance / IKF    No chance of peace” (Weiner *CP* 12); anger at the possible presence of “madness” in a text that also has the reader hearing voices: the voice of Weiner haunts the code, the “systemic purity” (Goldman 126) of the code haunts the reader. Outrage that the response to madness over the last two centuries has been coercion, control, institutionalization, sterilization, and murder. Weiner’s code asks for a mutation towards interdependence and away from oppression, and this may require new neural pathways.

However, Zolf hopes that with this anger may come the “surprise and release of laughter” (211). Mark Leahy looks at the appropriated navigation instructions for merchant ships as “disrupting the market,” saying that the “RJ      Romeo and Juliet” poem brings out how funny the “possibilities of misunderstanding” (75) are, especially for a code that was intended to be absolutely clear internationally. In the *CP* “an impersonal system for unambiguous exchange between trading and naval vessels is warped so that it generates emotions and affects. These inappropriate utterances or misreadings of purpose muddy the open water between emotional affective and abstract commercial systems” (Leahy 75). The metaphors that both Zolf and Leahy use for introducing affect are intriguingly “impure”—Zolf uses “noise” to “dirty” up their texts (212), Leahy says that Weiner’s noisy misreadings “muddy the waters” (75). At the same time as the ambiguity or messiness present in some Code Poems is frustrating, Weiner uses it to deconstruct the supposed “purity” of the system by showing that uncertainty already exists within the system. Many

of her encoded instructions highlight the fluidity of gender, number, location, presence, and time.

For example, the last poem “CSQ Where am I (or, are we)?” (Weiner *CP* 29) asks repeatedly for location while the response consistently deflects: “WJV Somewhere...DQR Anywhere...MJC Everywhere” (Weiner *CP* 29). Goldman comments on this fluidity, saying that “Gender becomes a code for code and additionally a code for the intrinsic failure of code to carry a stable meaning: gender is an error message” (128). Encoded gender becomes complicated as well in “RPJ WANT MEN” (Weiner *CP* 15) and “CHW Pirates” (Weiner *CP* 19). “WANT MEN” runs through a long list of positions of labour that end with the word “men” and then asks in the middle of the poem: “MDK have you men enough” leading to the statement: “NSX he, or she is full of men” (15). The queer moment of being “full of men” is followed later in “CHW Pirates” in which the speaker(s) are “plundered by a pirate” armed with “long guns” (19). The pirate with phallic long guns, is gendered “she,” while the ungendered speaker, who has “no long guns” asserts in the last line that they are “a complete wreck” (Weiner *CP* 19). Goldman states that Weiner uses the code self-reflexively to “alienate the media of communication rather than to reinforce their transparency or clarity” (126).

Like Zolf, Weiner also “dirties” up the text by introducing mechanical smut. Romeo and Juliet have a technical and very communicative sexual encounter, the pirate plunders suggestively, the writer may be full of men, making “the smooth flow of commerce sticky and sweaty” (Leahy 76). Weiner’s work fucks with the rhetorical system (Yergeau 92) that limits the possible ways that bodies can exist in the world, or that frames some bodies as rhetors, and some as defective. With a schizophrenic jump to the side, Weiner uses the code to reject its own supposedly stable categories and offer unanticipated excess. In doing so, she uses neurodivergent

aesthetics that interdependently make meaning. She will not abandon the reader, but remain by them.



## **Conclusion:**

### 5.1 The Body Going in Many Different Directions at Once:

I am not certain that this is the far bank of the river.

As I indicated in my last chapter, the process of writing this dissertation has been daunting and transcendent; full of mis-steps, and clarifying moments. One rock forward, one unexpected splash. Over the course of this dissertation, I have intended to explicitly identify neurodivergent reading value in *Finnegans Wake*, *Tender Buttons*, and the *Code Poems*, by means of my own neurodivergent modes, practices, and reading techniques. I encountered two primary difficulties: firstly, how to ensure that while developing neurodivergent readings, I was not establishing these readings as purely metaphorical, while erasing the frequently painful embodied experiences of cognitively disabled people.

For example, at the University of Waterloo, the accommodation office offers neurodivergent students some accommodations. These may look like more time while writing exams, quiet spaces in which to do work, note-takers, and technologies oriented towards specific disability needs. These can be helpful for students. Jay Dolmage points out however, that there is still immense work to be done, specifically in English classrooms, to ensure that neurodivergent students experience the same equitable learning support as neurotypical ones. Beyond the fact that accessing these accommodations is substantially difficult in the first place, requiring an official diagnosis which may take years and thousands of dollars to get, Dolmage highlights that disability in the university sphere is not desired, but something to be handled, mitigated, and erased, if possible (“Mapping Composition” 19).

This assessment is supported by the name of UW’s accommodation office: “AccessAbili-

ty.” The invitation for the neurodivergent student to access accommodations that will allow “normative” ability displays how physical or cognitive access to a space is oriented towards neurotypical, not neurodivergent or disabled, students. The condition of entry is “fixing” the disability. This “method of fixing disability focuses on patterns of the ‘typical’ and the ‘natural,’ implying that disability is neither” (Dolmage “Mapping Composition” 19).

Dolmage refers to this type of access as the “retrofit”—like a ramp added to a building afterwards, the retrofit acknowledges that the space wasn’t made for the disabled person, or with them in mind. This doesn’t mean it’s not important that they have access, but that this access must be added later and often has problems. To be clear, what I am critiquing in the term “AccessAbility” is a rhetorical choice that belies a mindset of compulsory able-bodiedness. I am not suggesting that university accommodations do not help physically or cognitively disabled students succeed in academic spaces. They do, but this success is still within a framework that seeks to transform disability into “ability.”

While it may seem like I am focusing on minutia in highlighting the name of UW’s accommodations office, linguistic framing matters. Inclusive accommodating strategies still rely on mitigating disability instead of positioning disabled embodiment as valuable. As Dolmage states, “to value ability through something like the demand to overcome disability...there is also an implicit belief that being disabled is negative and to be avoided at all costs” (*Academic Ableism* 8). Dolmage asserts that “making space for others” within an academic community “does not deny their difference but affirms a shared connection based on this difference” (“Mapping Composition” 25). The rhetoric of compulsory able-bodiedness does not affirm this difference, but dismisses it instead of recognizing value in it, though disability activists are consistently advocating

for more futures and presents that privilege and welcome disability.

Sometimes these values are hidden and embedded, other times they are more overt. For example, at a conference some years ago, I watched one of my professors offer a poignant and personal paper on how difficult it was to receive accommodations from the university as an Autistic and ADHD academic, while the power flickered off and on three times, disrupting her presentation. After she sat down, the very next presenter read a paper that discredited popular notions that vaccines cause Autism. However, he still began with the assumption that if possible, Autism should be eradicated. He began with the premise that the speaker who went before him would ideally not exist.

I tell this story to illustrate one example of neurodivergent grief even in “progressive” academic spaces, and to reiterate that I do not wish to be the cause of such grief. My project has thus attempted to sketch out how readings that use neurodivergence metaphorically can emerge from neurodivergent bodies, or neurotypical bodies that privilege divergence over strict categories of normality. How entangled these processes often are is due to the fact that aesthetics in art, according to Siebers, tracks bodily sensations in audiences.

Chapter 1 illustrates how the aesthetic nervousness Joyce’s readers may have felt could be due to his firm resistance to dysgenic norms that were popular at the time. In Chapter 2, I ground my understanding of disfluency in St. Pierre and Eagle’s work that describes how divergent reading could emerge out of material practices of divergent hearing. My third Chapter relies on my own embodied readings of *TB*, translating my material experiences into relevant ways of textual processing. Finally, Chapter 4 emphasizes the importance of Weiner’s personal counter-diagnosis, while at the same time valuing her suggestion that schizophrenic thought practices

might be important ways of subverting strict linear strategies of processing information. All of these chapters engage with scholarship written by disabled writers. I have sought to illustrate some of the ways that the bodies of writers have been implicated through their writing and writing processes.

## 5.2 This Dissertation Going in Many Different Directions at Once:

My second intersecting dilemma was how to write this project in an “academic” form: how to effectively corral my tangential, spiral, circular writing style into a comprehensible dissertation, without contravening my intention to write visibly neurodivergently. I struggled with how to effectively develop a material methodology that could also interpret symbolic disability aesthetic value. For helping me walk these wet rocks I have been indebted to Yergeau, who states that *Authoring Autism* is a “fucking academic book” (62) and who perseverates frequently in their chapters: “fuck, just like Gerald Ford” (62).

Untangling all of these threads took much longer than I hoped it would. The demands of writing this dissertation have helped to me understand and push my cognitive limits in ways I didn’t expect. These demands forced me to acknowledge standards of productivity that my body was unable to meet, and pushed me to accept the boundaries of my own self-conceptions, to paradoxically lean in to a project that was rubbing me raw.

Michael Davidson uses Emily Dickinson’s “I felt a cleaving in my brain” to illustrate the distance that sometimes occurs between the ideal that we advocate for and the lived reality of disabled people. Davidson talks about the titular “cleaving” as an example of the splitting or “fissures” of negative affect that naturally inhabit disabled lives and disability life writing: “cleav-

ings...are constitutive aspects of the disability experience” (Davidson 178). Cleavings illustrate the reality of multiple disappointments, even while oriented towards desiring disability. Davidson explains: “In many disability memoirs, pivotal moments of negative affect often interrupt narratives that are otherwise inspiring testimonies to endurance and triumph” (177). This negative affect is not intended to overwhelm, but offers a space intimate with both joy and pain. He asserts “I am not saying that disability studies needs to return to a model of dependence and *pathos* but to acknowledge the lived experiences of loss, frustration, pain, and embarrassment in a politics of gain” (Davidson 178). A politics of grief in the midst of success. “Cleaving” acknowledges the space between hope and messy lived reality. Both can be true at once. It is also intimately connected to personal narration, writing one’s own story, as Davidson affirms: testimony, a word with faithful overtones.

Thus, I understand my dissertation as my own “Slow Professing” (Barber-Stetson 160) through the heuristic of “cleaving.” The definitions are paradoxical. The OED lists multiple meanings for “cleave, verb”: to split, to “part or divide with a cutting blow,” to penetrate, to fissure (*OED* “Cleave” v1). However, simultaneously “cleave” means: to adhere to, “to cling or hold fast to,” “to abide” (*OED* “Cleave” v2).

darlin, you gotta

let me

know /

should i stay or

should i go?

The word is useful, and has kept appearing. I find it in an email exchange between Nicole Markotić and Michael Davidson in their contribution to the anthology *Towards. Some. Air.* Markotić’s understanding of Davidson’s use of “cleave” in their correspondence is “the word or body going in many directions at once...the body not as a static thing, but as motion, turmoil, protest” (*Towards. Some. Air* 77). She quotes from queer contemporary poet Susan Holbrook, who tells a story of “taking the C-train in Calgary, and reading the signs warning ‘Look Both Ways for Trains’ as ‘Look Both Ways for Trans’ when she was working on poetry and translation” (*Towards. Some. Air* 77). Markotić calls this “bidirectional...if not tri-directional” perception (*Towards. Some. Air* 77). The body that is cleaving is the body in/as motion, going in several different directions at once; a body that is becoming and, to return to Yergeau’s notion, never really arriving at a stopping place.

Bernstein also uses the term “cleave” to discuss the continuum of impermeable and antiabsorptive strategies he describes. He says that “the absorbed & unabsorbed cleave / since *cleave* means both to divide / & to hold together” (*A Poetics* 23). This paradox allows antiabsorptive or inaccessible texts, as Bernstein has argued, to hold “contradictory logics” (*A Poetics* 22): to be both unreadable and infinitely readable, depending on how one approaches them.

The language of ‘cleave’ is also associated with desire—to penetrate and to hold fast: “AI I will not abandon you, I will stay by you” (Weiner *CP* 11); the siren song, the desire for disability. In identifying this dissertation as multi-directional (in constant motion, turmoil, protest), Davidson and Markotić’s conceptions of “cleave” allow me to look “both ways” and to have these ways ultimately joined to each other: material and metaphor, within communities of disability, and without, learning how to cut my writing down to size, into shape, and simultaneously

to hold my processes tenderly, to refuse to entirely abandon my embodiment as an author at thresholds. It is an affective designation—the desire to hold fast to something painful.

Finally, I reiterate that navigating neurodivergent aesthetics is beneficial for neurodivergent readers who might see their own cognitive styles both reflected in a text and acknowledged as valid ways of understanding these texts. I argue is also beneficial for neurotypical readers whose own processing styles have been limited by normative reading styles. In this dissertation I have been primarily concerned with neurodivergent readers of conceptual texts, because I have proposed that this is an area of scholarship that has been lacking. Further, I have argued the way we talk about texts matters. “Inaccessible” masterpieces are framed as readable only by those who can “access ability” and the very highest ability, at that (a man of tenure rare, as Knowles says.)

In this dissertation I have sought to show that valuable and cogent modes of reading may be identified in cognitive processing styles that have been categorized as “un-academic,” either by omission or intentional dismissal. I have demonstrated practices of disruption, distortion, and disturbance to honour the ongoing labour of neurodivergent activists and scholars. We are unexpected rivers carving out resisting rock. We are here until the “rending of the rocks” (*FW* 169.24), despite dysgenic attempts at our nonexistence. We are “stars” that “are worlds” (Stein “Portraits and Repetition” 289); “BGY      Let us be” (Weiner *CP* 23).

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