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Narrating the Financialized Landscape: The Novels of Taylor Brady

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Introduction: Suburban Holes, or Finance & Ruin

Taylor Brady's two novels, *Microclimates* and *Occupational Treatment*, are hybrid works of hypertrophic narration cross-hatched with passages of lyric verse, at once full-throated and broken.¹ Situated in relation to the built environment of South Florida whose cycles of financialization could be felt long before the subprime collapse of 2007, the novels perform self-consciously in the manner of a *Bildungsroman* as they recount the constitution of their narrator's subjectivity, "an inevitable history poised to birth a subject," like an inverted ouroboros delivering its own head.² Emerging as a bastard child of Language Writing's critique of narrative (Lyn Hejinian's *My Life*) and New Narrative's embrace of storytelling (Robert Glück's *Jack the Modernist*), Brady's novels pursue a rigorous critique of subjective plenitude without disowning the excesses of narrative in a critical effort to grasp, in the words of the narrator, "my full relation to my time."³ Drawing on poet's theatre and critical theory, economic analysis and procedural constraint, cartographic plotting and musicological echolocation, the work's conceptual, thematic, and formal horizons are dynamic, and they traverse resources as varied as the socio-aesthetics of Sun Ra's Afrofuturism and Rosa Luxemburg's analyses of crisis and accumulation, among a thick reservoir of cultural allusion. Most significant here is the way both *Microclimates* and *Occupational Treatment* find a model in the maximalist prose of Marcel Proust to whose sentences, in the Kilmartin and Moncrieff translation of the first two volumes of *In Search of Lost Time*, Brady apprentices himself often with remarkable fidelity. Indeed, one question that will orient my reading of the novels concerns the enriched semantic resonance of "lost time" in an era of financialization beginning in the mid-1970s whose mystifications can be characterized by "the deferred temporality of financial speculation," when buying power in the present becomes increasingly drawn "from the profits of future labor," to borrow Annie McClanahan's phrasing in "Investing in

the Future: Late Capitalism's End of History.”⁴ This is a period when the stretches of suburban development that occupy the ambient surround of Brady's novels seem to fulfill Robert Smithson's prescient predication of “ruins in reverse” in his “Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey.” Alluding to “all the new construction that would eventually be built” throughout the suburban expanse of Passaic, New Jersey in 1967, and with an acute sensitivity to temporal contradiction, Smithson writes, “This is the opposite of the ‘romantic ruin’ because the buildings don't *fall* into ruin *after* they are built but rather *rise* into ruin before they are built.”⁵ For Smithson, this “ruin” has an aura of something eternal about it — “a clumsy eternity,” he calls it — as if he were already able to sense how the present had been, or would become, subsumed by a deferred crisis lurking in the wings, “a present already abandoned” to a state of emergency as tomorrow becomes nothing more than an extension of today.⁶

This allusion to Smithson's “Tour of the Monuments of Passaic” isn't gratuitous. To the contrary, Smithson's narration of his adventurous day exploring the Passaic suburbs constructs an allegorical figure — if not an entire theory of allegory — that informs my reading of *Microclimates* and *Occupational Treatment*. “Passaic seems full of ‘holes,’” Smithson writes, “and those holes in a sense are the monumental vacancies that define, without trying, the memory-traces of an abandoned set of futures.”⁷ And just a bit further on he continues, “Passaic has no center — it was instead a typical abyss or an ordinary void.”⁸ As if self-consciously echoing this dimension of Smithson's tour of Passaic, Brady's tour of the suburbs of Tampa is replete with thematic holes and formal voids, as well as its own “empty horizons of futurity.”⁹ For example, one of *Microclimates*' earliest moments offers a rich illustration of precisely this sort of disjunction:

“Teach the boy to read in reverse,” Grandma Violet burst in, the bugle of her voice interrupting with a call to arms these projections of narrative time onto a wall as yet unbuilt but wholly real, “and he'll know better where you're coming from, what long-demolished drywall is still punctured by the tack that holds your overexposed yearbook pic.”¹⁰

Here, the convergence of a future wall “as yet unbuilt but wholly real” and the “long-demolished drywall” upon which the narrator's photo hangs, cuts a dialectical figure of compressed time where the present's potential converges with the future's exhaustion in the figure of a single puncture. This is the time through which desire and memory float on material labor — the construction and demolition of housing — so that the seemingly insignificant hole made by that tack becomes an affective point of intensity and the figural location of the work's narration. This is one way in which Brady's novels theorize a relation to time, about which it's useful to think in terms of allegory.

For Paul de Man, allegory sustains a narrative of its own disjunction over time. More specifically, allegory maintains a “distance in relation to its own origin” and “it establishes its language in the void of this temporal difference.”¹¹ While de Man never pressed his theory of allegory into the critical practice of historical materialism, Walter Benjamin, to whom de Man is indebted, understood all too well how allegory captures the estrangement from the real social relations informing everyday life. Accordingly, for Benjamin, the commodity form itself becomes quintessentially allegorical insofar as it is the bearer of precisely such a temporal disjunction, which obtains in the congealed time of wage labor and the mystified disparity between value and price. But beyond its allegorical intimations, or perhaps extending from them, Smithson’s tropological insight into the suburban void anticipates the sort of “temporal disjunction,” a form of space-time compression whereby “what passes for a future” folds back on the present creating a fold in time whose figuration is a characteristic feature of the discourse of financialization.¹² In *How Credit-Money Shapes the Economy: The United States in a Global System*, for example, Robert Guttman underscores “the real temporal disjuncture between intention, production, and consumption,” while Leigh Claire La Berge, in her essay “The Rules of Abstraction: Methods and Discourses of Finance,” analyzes how the “real” experience of such disjunctions — perceptually and phenomenologically — is often discursively represented as being “abstract.”¹³ La Berge begins by pointing to the way financial instruments “transform future value into present payment streams.” From the most banal (the credit card) to the more sophisticated (the derivative contract), she writes that such instruments “participate in this temporal displacement and recuperation, and they all are mediated by an expectation of future payment and future profit.”¹⁴ Following La Berge’s analysis, one question that will occupy my reading of Brady’s novels concerns the way literary form — itself a kind of allegory — might be said to materialize those so-called “abstractions” at whose proverbial heart one can sense such disjunctions.¹⁵

While owing a large debt to Fredric Jameson’s theorization of literary form as allegorical of an always-historically specific “political unconscious” whose impress a novel might bear, my approach here will diverge. With respect to Brady’s writing, I’ll be less interested in form as an archeological artifact of the social processes it unwittingly registers than I will be in how an intentionally “experimental” novel can become an active agent that willfully concretizes the stuff of historical consciousness — “something prehensile in the air whose form is ownership.”¹⁶ Unlike its canonical homologues, experimental writing offers a range of objects whose role exceeds that of representing what we know and in fact participates in the work of making those social processes cognizable. More specifically, I’m interested in showing how Brady’s fictions subjectivize otherwise obscure spatial displacements and temporal disjunctions, and how in doing so they arouse the aesthetic as a critical mode of self-conscious mediation between objective force and subjective experience. Thus the narrator’s

“full relation to my time” becomes cognizable through a specific form of literary expression, as both *Microclimates* and *Occupational Treatment* lend “concrete” shape to seemingly “abstract” socioeconomic processes. Moreover, it’s in the performance of becoming subjective — locally situated, embodied, and voiced — that the financialization of the built environment becomes available for narrator, writer, and reader alike. This is how I want to think about the novels as being theoreticians in their very praxis — to borrow a formulation from Marx’s early manuscripts — like sensory organs feeling, metabolizing, and ultimately concretizing something “whose form is ownership” in the spatiality of their architectures and the temporality of their sentences, thereby allowing us, in La Berge’s terms, “to deploy the language of abstract and concrete together,” while recognizing how “we ourselves are the subjects who do the concretizing.”¹⁷

Insofar as “financialization” assumes both abstract and concrete significations in La Berge’s analysis, a dialectical convergence of predicates that can be felt as “something prehensile in the air” in Brady’s novels, I want to pause to reflect on my use of this term — “financialization” — if only to preempt in advance the easy move that unwittingly collapses a concatenated set of related though disparate processes into a single concept prone to becoming a fetish or a metaphor, while still recognizing that such a concept may be necessary to enable any analysis of those processes. First, I want to distance my critical approach to Brady’s novels from a discourse of finance that reduces those processes to the merely semiotic, linguistic, or performative. While language has no doubt been profoundly affected by a range of epiphenomena mediated by forms of capital accumulation that go under the sign of “finance,” and while I do believe that experimental literary forms of poetry and prose are well-attuned to respond to its crises, it would be naive to argue as Franco Berardi does in *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance* that “only an act of language escaping the technical automatism of financial capitalism will make possible the emergence of a new life form.”¹⁸ The late nineteenth century offers plenty of evidence as to how a profit-driven print culture governed by the mass daily newspaper — and whose full-blown dominance accompanied the rise of new financial instruments under the Second Empire in France — aroused a range of counter-discursive practices, many of them literary, whose symbolic logic, one seemingly shared by Berardi, arguably exhausted itself by the turn of the century in the work of Mallarmé and Valéry.¹⁹ This doesn’t, however, exhaust the question of literature’s use — its *function* on the one hand, and its *promise* on the other — in relation to precisely those processes whose structures, at once material and affective, literary works might allow us to cognize as if for the first time. And this is the case I wish to make for Brady’s novels.

So what does “financialization” denote? Giovanni Arrighi’s by-now-familiar argument is that “financialization” can’t refer simply and specifically to a late-twentieth-century transition within global capitalism. This is so, Arrighi explains, because periods of financial expansion cycle across the whole history of capitalism,

and they generally signal an emerging shift in the geographic locus of hegemony, a process that “always occurs when the material expansion of productive forces reaches its limit.”²⁰ As this sort of expansion asserted itself in the 1970s and 1980s, it accompanied what David Harvey refers to as “flexible accumulation,” a new form of space-time compression associated with Post-Fordist production.²¹ In this particular instance of its appearance — arguably signaling the “autumn” of the current system — financialization is “characterized by the emergence of entirely new sectors of production, new ways of providing financial services, new markets, and, above all, greatly intensified rates of commercial technologies and organizational innovation.”²² According to Harvey, all this is developed inseparably with “the complete reorganization of the global financial system...the formation of a global stock market, of global commodity (even debt) futures markets, of currency and interest rate swaps, together with an accelerated geographical mobility of funds.”²³ While precipitating a total breakdown in boundaries between personal savings and consumer credit on one hand, and financial speculation on the other, Harvey goes on to refer to contemporary finance as “discounting time future into time present in baffling ways,” and he quotes the *Financial Times* saying as much: “Banking is quickly becoming indifferent to the constraints of time, place, and currency.”²⁴ Perhaps more significantly for my purposes here, La Berge emphasizes the medium of time as it is demarcated and structured by financial technologies. “What do a credit card, a derivative contract, a ten-year treasury bill, and a layaway account at JCPenney have in common?” she asks, and responds, “They all participate in this *temporal displacement* and recuperation, and they are all mediated by an expectation of future payment and future profit.”²⁵

Elaborating further on some salient features of late-twentieth-century finance, Harvey goes on to describe the way “industrial, merchant, and landed capital become so integrated into financial operations and structures that it becomes increasingly difficult to tell where commercial and industrial interests begin and strictly financial interests end.”²⁶ I find it compelling how this lack of distinction between qualitatively different interests echoes Karl Marx’s own observation in chapter ten of *Capital*, Volume 1, “The Working Day,” that “surplus labor and necessary labor are mingled together” in the very structure of the daily wage.²⁷ Indeed, the logic of “congelation” may well be operative from Marx’s concept of “abstract labor” all the way to financialization itself. This increasing lack of differentiation under the sign of finance is what Stan Davis and Christopher Meyer refer to enthusiastically with the title of their book, *Blur* — a condition in which capital and labor seem to lose their distinction as the promise of future labor is leveraged, yielding present debt. Critical of this concept, Randy Martin writes, “The blurred self is the securitized self, one who offers shares in future earnings to investors.”²⁸ Accordingly, “financialization does not simply blur boundaries so as to create seepage; it insinuates an orientation toward accounting and risk management into all domains of life.”²⁹

In both *Microclimates* and *Occupational Treatment*, whatever it is we might call financialization materializes in relation to the built environment in South Florida during the early to mid-Eighties when land speculation and real estate development get sutured to the ballooning of finance capital. In a particularly salient passage toward the conclusion of *Occupational Treatment*, Brady captures precisely this convergence:

but the tempo of walking is at no point exactly equal to the tempo of value, the less so as the landscape itself grows more and more saturated with capital and begins to pass through circuits that overlap but do not coincide with our own.³⁰

So while capital passes through “circuits that overlap but do not coincide with our own,” it saturates not only the self, as Martin argues, but also the landscape in the form of ground rent, infrastructure, and housing development. Especially with respect to South Florida, the link between ground rent and finance is nothing new to the current spate of crises. Indeed, as Robin Blackburn notes, Florida has been referred to as the epicenter of more than one collapse of speculative financial instruments based on property mortgages. Recalling Joseph Schumpeter’s *Business Cycles* (1939), Blackburn explains how, during the 1929 Great Crash, “the tumbling property prices in Florida precipitated the collapse of a speculative bubble centered on property bonds.” Moreover, he continues, “This time around [referring to the most recent subprime crisis] speculative financial instruments based on property mortgages have also collapsed — with Florida again an epicenter.”³¹ As its own form of enclosure — which most simply denotes the organization of private property and capital — finance maintains a residual tie, if not a living connection, to land enclosures and the accumulation by dispossession that those enclosures continue to generate, a dispossession, as historian Peter Linebaugh notes, “inseparable from terror and the destruction of independence and community.”³² Presciently anticipating the recent crisis — and channeling Blackburn’s remarks *avant la lettre*, Brady’s novelistic imagination senses and makes perceptible these inseparable links between the history of enclosures, city development, and contemporary finance. As the novels track “the course of our migration across the plains of redevelopment,” the writing self-consciously thematizes its own haunting awareness of enclosure. For example, the narration of a walk across those “plains of redevelopment” in *Occupational Treatment* yields “discrete and bounded units that constituted place by shifting uncontrollably through space” as well as “a horizon which neither approached nor receded but maintained about us an enclosure, proving once and for all that the denuded landscape was fully and expensively dressed.”³³ And in *Microclimates*, the “terror” of such enclosures in the South Florida landscape manifests as nothing less than race-based and class-based state violence:

against a landscape whose every feature was marked with terror — people could show you, for example, the oak tree whose largest limb had been part of the apparatus of the county’s last acknowledged lynching, only some ten years past, or the wall stained slightly down near the ground where the color of bricks went from red to brown, against which skinheads had broken open a kid’s head after a concert the summer before, or the interstate overpass, whose protective cover had become a permanent neighborhood everyone pointedly refused to acknowledge on their way to work — this turns out to be the most stupidly subjective detour of all.³⁴

The fullness of Brady’s narrator’s “relation to my time” is mediated by these “stupidly subjective detours” as their circuitous routes through landscapes at once exterior and interior enact the fullness of that relation. At one moment early in *Microclimates*, Brady stages this as a relation to historical ruin in a passage that reenacts Walter Benjamin’s “angel of history” caught in “a storm blowing from paradise...irresistibly propelling him toward the future toward which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward.”³⁵ In Brady’s passage, the narrator imagines himself caught in a wind with his own “outstretched and non-angelic fingers still rigid now ten years along with that inaugural red-faced squall.”³⁶ As he’s “blown backward towards that future by a hot wind from heaven, or if not heaven at least the not-yet-defunct port just past downtown,” Brady’s paragraph itself swells with the goods associated with the ongoing catastrophe of global trade, from the finished “discount sneakers, alphabet flashcards, and plastic dolls” to “phosphates, thick transparent plastics used to make cheap lenses and the wage-labor for which in some sooner future a vaguely-named later ‘we’ would inhabit the command to learn to be grateful in retrospect as if for the temperate bounty of the Gulf of Mexico itself.”³⁷ Benjamin’s aphoristic allusion to “one single catastrophe” whose singularity manifests in the visual image of “piling wreckage upon wreckage” becomes in Brady’s treatment the appearance of an immense collection of commodities to which the otherwise occulted presence of wage-labor — arguably the withdrawn cause of catastrophe — is returned.³⁸ The inclusion of wage-labor among a paradigmatic list of things accumulating like so much dead debris around the port is significant not only for what it contributes to the passage’s power of analysis, but for what this description contributes to an understanding of the lived experience of temporal disjunction wherein a collective subject responsive to a certain “command” to be grateful finds its location “in some sooner future” asynchronously disconnected with its own “later we.” The torqued syntax of this figure bears the impress of a certain temporal compression that has lost the compass of its own “common places,” the *topoi koinoi* Aristotle refers to as those rhetorical expressions that lend themselves to any situation and upon which so-called common sense depends. In his *Grammar of the Multitude*, Paolo Virno elaborates on Aristotle’s idea of the common places as “the most generally valid logical and

linguistic forms of all our discourse,” for example, the opposition of opposites: more and less, up and down, sooner and later.³⁹ In other words, the challenge to the common places of spatio-temporal orientation impacts Brady’s writing — both prosaically and prosodically — at the level of its connective tissue, its syntax, or the conventions by which common sense organizes itself linguistically.⁴⁰

The Desire for Narrative

Poised on the edge of an era defined by consumer credit defaults and collateralized debt obligations, when future earnings are already underwriting the present, Brady’s novels anatomize the “structures of feeling” and affective epiphenomena — the histories of particular bodies and selves — that accompany or resist the damage of crisis. In doing so, the prose of both *Microclimates* and *Occupational Treatment* makes the logic of intractable economic force legible, as Brady himself notes in “Narrative Occupation and Uneven Enclosure”: “part of the desire for narrative is the desire to produce precisely such an intelligible account.”⁴¹ Most significant, however, are the effects on a novel’s form when that desire exceeds what can in fact be rendered intelligible as narrative, or when the very material of narrative — as well as the temporal medium through which it moves — resists its own intelligibility. As Brady formulates it: “narrative fundamentally has to miss something of historical experience in order to render it narratable at all.”⁴² Indeed, as the novels aim to feel “the full relation to my time,” a relation inseparable from the local processes and global crises whose displacements make the narrating subject what it is, they can only strain the logic of narrativity, a logic that always involves a tension between the two axes of composition — the spatial axis of equivalence with its vertical pull toward dilation and the temporal axis of combination with its horizontal pull toward termination — while maintaining as its limit the wholesale displacement of the one onto the other, which in Roman Jakobson’s formulation constitutes the “poetic function,” and whereby narrativity would be minimized.⁴³

In so far as these processes and crises test the limits of narrative possibility itself, Brady’s novelistic form approaches that of non-narrative as the writing locates itself within a concatenated set of the often-illegible dynamics productive of capital’s accumulated dead labor, its concentration and trickle-down through South Florida’s suburban development tracts, its flows, blockages, and waste-producing apparatuses. With respect to non-narrative, Carla Harryman offers this useful précis in her introduction to a special feature of the *Journal of Narrative Theory* devoted to “Non/Narrative”:

The theoretical work of the socially engaged non/narrative text stems from its production of a crisis of understanding. Works that shift between genres disturb categorical frames, foregrounding language such that narrative seems to disappear. They radically break rules of story-telling to

stage a necessary disruption of asymmetrical power relations, the limits of knowledge, psychological, and social operations of recognition and misrecognition, the complex connections between private experience and larger social forces, and the cooperative construction of meaning. The radical formalism identified with nonnarrative is thus not a “mere formalism” within the sphere of the politically and aesthetically radical work. It is a strategy of intervention.⁴⁴

What Harryman refers to as a crisis of understanding might also be thought of as a crisis of representation wherein the relation between subjective perception and objective force becomes radically disjoined as the historical specificity of any socioeconomic event belies its overdetermination by a plurality of forces. And while narrative can never capture the fullness of such an event, it can make the expansive feeling of that fullness perceptible, if only in its negative outline, by performing a relation to its own receding horizon, enacting a dialectic of narrative and non-narrative characteristic of Brady’s novels as they leaven with that feeling.

With the sort of experimental precision one might otherwise attribute to the very forces the novels witness, Brady’s narrative desires to feel the shape of its own time by throwing the narrator’s past into relief against the ground of the present, which itself can’t be felt except insofar as it emerges against the ground of that past. First, there is the time of the narrator’s childhood and adolescence during a transitional period of capital accumulation arguably inaugurated in 1973 with the abandonment of the gold standard. Drawing on the work of Robert Brenner, Giovanni Arrighi, and Ernest Mandel, Joshua Clover offers this succinct précis of the period in his essay “*Retcon: Value and Temporality in Poetics*” (about which I will have more to say in what follows):

The *annus horribilis* of 1973 is identified in the United States especially with the end of the Long Boom following World War II; the first in a series of massive “oil shocks”; the final collapse of the Bretton Woods agreements setting the stage for increasing global trade and current account imbalances; the secular decline in industrial profitability and the departure from the Fordist mode of production; and, as consequence of these factors and more, the shift from industrial to finance capital as the center of gravity for the United States-centered regime of accumulation.⁴⁵

Brady himself draws attention to this historical periodization in “Narrative Occupation and Uneven Enclosure” when he writes,

My own recent narrative writing has attempted to articulate the various scales of experience in a working-class Florida suburban adolescence

in the late seventies and early eighties. As it happens, this experience coincides with a period in which the rolling wave of accumulation crises dating, for the sake of convenience, to 1974 begin to exert an exaggerated pressure on real estate, and the intensification of relations between social landscape and speculative capital becomes, for a certain class and region, a matter of direct experience. In my novel *Occupational Treatment*, this process culminates logically, and originates experientially, with a series of police raids on escheat zoning plats on the exurban fringe, which have until now been squatted by homeless families and used for various illicit pleasures and conflicts by young people housed in the surrounding low-rent neighborhoods.⁴⁶

“A matter of direct experience,” but of what? Perhaps of nothing more than the structures that mediate our experience. Just as “contact with the land” once connoted a more immediate experience of nature, one whose directness has seemingly eroded with modernization, the idea of making direct contact with the financialized landscape of monetized plots — like “a hand trailing absently along a blond cinderblock wall” — can still connote immediate contact with “universal experience” under contemporary conditions, only this is an experience — and a nature — entirely mediated by capital.⁴⁷ Often, however, Brady’s narrative will perform this sense of direct experience by way of more extravagant juxtapositions, “as if it were my existence in someone else’s mind, were it laid out as fine tissue from power plant to port to culvert to kumquat tree, and threaded through the chain-link in every kind of knot, would have been the membrane around the balloon payment, the final installment on the property.”⁴⁸ Thus does the South Floridian “vista full of property” manifest in both novels as “an excess of vacancy”: the plenitude of a void heavy with the body as it gets contracted by the logic and structure of state violence, identity, and ownership.⁴⁹

“Plot structure” means everything here, and it contains a residue of a so-called “universal experience” once associated with traditional storytelling. While de-emphasizing a generic fidelity to narrative plot, Brady’s writing deftly makes use of character and story; but whatever we might call “plot structure” in Brady’s novels appears as an effect of the irreconcilable temporalities that the writing formally negotiates: the phenomenological time of the body, for example, and the economic time of the market. With respect to the idea of “plot” as it might be heard as a homonymic pun, however, *Microclimates* and *Occupational Treatment* remain remarkably faithful as they map the subject’s relation to the social economy of unevenly developed plots — grids of cartographic measure, real estate, and ground rent, whose “plots” the novels regularly thematize in the form of strip malls, tract homes, vanished woods, as well as stories — all of which shape our experience of time, while harboring time’s socio-material substrate in exploitative structures like wage labor and credit debt. Thus, the novels arouse the tension between seemingly disparate structures of economic

force and experiential time as if this tension were its specific material.

Brady elaborates on these stakes while ramifying their implications in “Narrative Occupation and Uneven Enclosure,” in passages that also appear, slightly altered, in the pages of *Occupational Treatment*:

There are gaps in every world we build that substantialize our sense of time, so that the derealized features of a beloved character who died in a cruel afterthought cohere as a solid block like the hulk of a demolished television set whose vacuum, uncontained, becomes the exact shape of what must have happened to place us here precisely by subtracting itself from us in order to become a landscape across which we could imagine the drift of a merry band of saboteurs, terrorists, and intellectuals through our scenario which aimed, not at recovering the catastrophic occupation and fire, but at tracing precisely the tempo of an experience that missed it so as to address us as those who shall have come to be.⁵⁰

Like the tempo of walking and the tempo of value, the tempo of individual experience fails to coincide with the time of crisis against which it is set, and it is this gap in the world we’ve built that generates the tension we associate with narrative. Brady is quite up-front about this theorization of narrative in his writing. “I suppose this brings me to my minimum definition of what such a narrative might be,” he writes and immediately continues:

a verbal sequence whose temporality is placed in relation to the time-scale of some other sequence (of unseen events that structure the experience of a vanished plot of woods, for example), such that this relation is a problem, a rhythmic wheezing between metal scaffolding and dead signals in which there must be some sense of proportion. Of course, as persistent as the problem itself are the evasive protocols for shunting it into a premature resolution, or sidestepping it altogether, as one allows the deafening noise of the helicopter blades to fade back into the encompassing buzz of mosquitoes and that into the vague sticky pause in which one remembers the texture of summer as if through a coarse aluminum screen.⁵¹

This tension between what Brady refers to later in the same passage as “combative temporalities” has implications for an understanding of narrative form, and it realizes itself in the structure of Brady’s novelistic prose where the verbal sequencing that constitutes one’s narration of a personal history — memory, interlocution, analysis, recollection — is pressured by the more elusive temporality of “landscapes and built environments,” the terra firma of capital investment against which those verbal

sequences become audible as sound figures.⁵² “What I’m reaching for,” he goes on to write, “is a disposition of narrative that addresses this experience riven between two or more time-space scales, in the sense of knowing that to elaborate a track across a landscape is ultimately to impoverish or underdevelop some constituent of the vectoral multiplicity of possible developments it initially poses.”⁵³ Whereas realist fiction takes its “landscapes and environment as accomplished facts (i.e., with a view of history that irons out contradiction),” Brady’s approach to narrative aims to arouse the material of all those flattened contradictions, “to mark the tempo of the administered relation to place,” while self-reflexively acknowledging in itself a residue of “those strategies for make-believing away the divergence between the narrative of place and its historical occupation.”⁵⁴

Brady refers to this temporal dissonance as a kind of perennial “stutter” — not at all a gratuitous metaphor — whereby one’s utterance, at the level of its very embodiment, registers a “fault” that makes a dissonant relation palpable at the level of physical sensation itself, as the spatial axis of verbal selection fails to coincide with the temporal axis of its own sequencing. “Stuttering in this case would be the constant catching-up this stance necessitates, as the administrative consciousness is always having to adjust, like a bad dancer, to a reality that has shifted subtly away from it, even as its gesture is in part an attempt to efface its own recognition of that shift.”⁵⁵ This becoming-perceptible of otherwise unseen structures works like a phenomenology of natural history set against a backdrop of capital’s laundering machines, where the signs of force are impressed into the lived environment, then washed away or bleached. Brady’s narrative presences the invisibility of capital’s structural violence — “the displaced violence of foundation” — a violence that shapes our field of vision, so that “to see” the developed landscape in South Florida is to feel the effects of incoherent sites and the strain of seeing that incoherence coherently.⁵⁶ In this way, the novels themselves become kin to what Robert Smithson calls *nonsites* whereby submerged processes and dynamics become visible as if for the first time.⁵⁷ In short, the novels’ narrative preoccupations make the terms of a constitutive violence perceptible, even as that violence recedes, not into the historical horizon of visibility, but into an unspeakable zone of embodied life whose kernel contains “the sumptuous stuffs of our ability to recognize a common history in this place,” an ability to recognize and speak a common history that has become disabled, not by way of either prohibition or taboo, but as an effect of positive convention, the most banal and everyday.⁵⁸

Catastrophe and Structure

In the blurb that I wrote for the back cover of *Microclimates*, I referred to the novel as “an awesome construction committed to producing the vanishing moments of its own historical truth.” I wrote this while thinking about how the book materializes a negative imprint of a withdrawn catastrophe that challenges the very possibility of

narrative and around whose damaging effects the book organizes a vast architectural form. The first page of *Microclimates*, for example, presents a facsimile of a handwritten poem and this is captioned by a footnote attributed to the work's fictitious editors: "[Eds.] In the manuscript this space was occupied by a Polaroid photograph set between corners...Unfortunately, severe water damage — perhaps inflicted by the events narrated in pp. 63-73 — has rendered the photograph unrecognizable."⁵⁹ But the catastrophic cause of the work's damage remains at the limit of what the work itself can represent, so that when the reader turns to the noted pages — which of course one wants to do immediately in search of some narrative explanation for the effect that has already captured one's attention — they discover that these pages don't exist. Instead, one finds an inexplicable insertion of pages 235 to 245 where pages sixty-three to seventy-three ought to be, a mysteriously displaced supplement to this novel of 164 pages, and no mention of a flood. *Microclimates* goes on to assume a shape around this hole, which situates the work on the edge of its own narration, a threshold where the book becomes *ek-static* and fails to coincide with itself, turning on the axis of its dislocation. Thus the novel bears the impress of an occulted violence that shapes its local specificity, producing a material record of its own history together with an absence of any real evidence.

Occupational Treatment only deepens *Microclimates'* constructions as it finds its form around a series of blanks and voids, silences and vacancies, dead spots and holes, placeholders and apostrophes all of which mark a perennial crisis, leaving the figural stains of trauma everywhere unavailable for straight representation. For example, the novel opens with the line: "Here is the catalogue of the construction disasters I promised," a catalogue that later arrives at the boundary of the self's own narratability with a series of blank film stills in the novel's central section, "Production Notes for Occupation," where the writing works, in its own words, to recover from oblivion some "invisible event obscene relation," an event whose indeterminacy hangs on its being both psychosexual or socioeconomic, "an event whose exclusion from our experience first set in motion the series of forced equivalents by which we have staked out this miniature horizon."⁶⁰ In so far as it attempts to narrate the narrator's own formation as a subject, *Occupational Treatment* occupies the space of irrecoverable loss and foreclosed possibility, while locating itself in relation to capitalism's endless depredations and military occupations.

Within the shared framework of both novels, socio-aesthetic problems can be thought of in terms of time and vision as the writing shows our situation to be one in which the light that we depend on in order to see the world turns out to be the residual glare emitted by all our apparatuses of social production: military, industrial, sexual, urban, environmental, like the "night gases rising brightly from the bay," with which *Occupational Treatment* comes to a close.⁶¹ This underscores the aporia of vision wherein the writing situates itself. Here, "the sun has risen. And is false. Layer after unbearably bright layer. This is the opacity of light in the barrens of

architecture.”⁶² Melissa Dyne’s cover image for *Occupational Treatment* illustrates this idea exquisitely: the scene is one of a dark room in which the only light is the light emitted by a *camera obscura* projecting an inverted image of a desert motel and a pool on a blank wall. Karl Marx draws on the image produced by the *camera obscura* in his effort to describe the inversions in perception and cognition that structure ideological consciousness, and the rigor of Brady’s writing amounts to a counter-force commensurate to that structure. But this is a counter-force that refuses the consoling illusion that the ideological image can be simply overturned or corrected. By contrast, Brady’s work is painfully aware that it is the image-apparatus itself that generates the light enabling our vision in the first place.

As I pondered what this revelation might mean for the course of our migration across the plains of redevelopment, residual brightness continued to dazzle, in decorative shards that ate into the structure they purported to reveal, the picture I was beginning to reassemble of my location in the world, and for the second time in my life I was graced with a vision of dancers just behind the level blank of visibility...⁶³

Like the underdeveloped tract of suburban landscape, this blank is never neutral. Rather, it’s saturated with uneven relations of power so refined and thinned as to admit the illusion of its own transparency, except at those places of bodily contact where power thickens: for example, “I had so much skin, collapsing on me like an abandoned lean-to.”⁶⁴ This one extravagant simile offers a point of departure whereby Brady is able to create, through a series of substitutions or “forced equivalents,” an image of direct bodily contact with the stuff of suburban development: money and matter. Thus the passage moves from “so much skin” to “an abandoned lean-to” to “translucent drapery” to “fine tissue” only to resolve itself in “a membrane around the balloon payment” and “a tarp on that scale, stretched over the building materials.”⁶⁵

But this is only one of Brady’s compositional strategies. More specifically with respect to discursive structure, I want to quote Brady at some length here:

The bare chronicle of events gets at some of this, but I wonder about its obsessive worrying at the event status of state violence whose vanishing beneath the threshold of witness constitutes the perceptual field in which I have come to be conscious of any possible struggle against it, whether it creates the resonating space in which frequency spikes of allegory might break through the compression envelope, or whether it simply dissipates energy from that locale to create a dead spot, an impasse that can only give onto the cheap transcendence of an intuited “unknown world” that leads astray by a show of mere coincidences, thus bringing us full circle back to the skin movie I was trying to seduce you with,

before I realized I was seducing myself into position on the chair from which the question of impossible perspective first arose. Would it matter if I told you, for instance, that I am writing this while eavesdropping on county planning officials who are busy congratulating each other for their political maturity in grasping that the true function of land use policy is to follow along behind ‘market forces,’ or would that only become, given the contained space in which we conduct our interrogation, one more illegitimate device for amplifying the private twitching in my throat into a wall of sound that would fill in the unseemly gaps in my command of the composition’s unfolding? ⁶⁶

As is clear in this passage, Brady’s discursivity confounds the generic distributions of poetry, prose, and theory, as each mode of cognition participates in all the others. The writing consistently balances the paratactic sequencing of compositional units with the work of hypotactic subordination, whose excessive interpolations can barely be contained by the sentences that arouse them. These sentences often hold together by way of a barely perceptible splice or cut whose suture suggests a relation between seemingly incompatible elements — “an intuited ‘unknown world’” and a “skin movie,” for example, or “land-use policy” and “the private twitching in my throat” — whose combinatory logic hangs fire just beyond the threshold of common sense. Brady constantly elaborates on such ideas within the frame of the novels themselves, whose preoccupations with their own narrative endeavors become inseparable from the substance of the work:

The total effect is one of forward motion that continually falls back upon itself, maximal fullness of syntactical elaboration becoming an odd kind of lack, as if the world were to eject us in order to form itself in the image of our voices. ⁶⁷

Recalling the stutter, this auditory “image” intimates a formal allegory as it registers the breakdown of relation under a mode of production constantly reaching its own saturation. Thus, the paradigmatic (spatial) axis of selection — along which the vast array of commodities and financial instruments expands by suppressing any perception of time — fails to correspond with the syntagmatic (temporal) axis of combination, along which that same vast array is produced. In other words, spatial equivalence and temporal sequence become consequentially detached in such a way that cannot adequately account for its own “disjunction,” itself a formal figuration of crisis; and this crisis is constitutive of the so-called “narrative tension” that the novel itself can only fail to fully narrate. This particular use of spatial and temporal disjunction is just another characteristic feature of Brady’s method and it expresses

something critical about the subjective experience of value — what the ongoing crises of capital might actually *feel* like, not only in its effects (although that, too) but in its very structure — an experience at the displaced center of both *Microclimates* and *Occupational Treatment*, “the experience of a vanished plot of woods, for example.”⁶⁸

While it’s not the aim of this essay to offer a summary theory of value, it is nevertheless important to stress that value, as understood within a Marxian frame, is a social relation — or a set of social relations — in constant motion. As Marx explains in *Capital*, Volume 2: “Capital, as self-valorizing value...can only be grasped as a movement and not as a static thing.”⁶⁹ More than a positive figure, value poses the thorniest problem of economy, involving laboring bodies, wages, and commodities within a globalized situation where the price of those commodities — including the price of labor itself — hangs in a disjointed relation not only to the socially necessary labor time necessary to produce them, but to the financialized circuits through which the signs of value travel and change at remarkable speed, further mystifying those relations. Just as price can be said to occult the ontology of value — its production, circulation, and realization — in order to represent itself, so too might Brady’s prose have “to miss something of historical experience in order to render it narratable at all.”⁷⁰ And what it misses may well be the economic structure of the very landscape that grounds its own experience, something like “that displaced violence of foundation” that “vanishes beneath the threshold of witness.” Put another way, in its effort to express the objective conditions that inform its own history, Brady’s writing begins to sense the shape of those relations — between labor and commodity, use and exchange, production and circulation, consumption and waste — which are never fully present in the places they appear. This idea finds a conceptual handle in Marx’s analysis of capital as the spatialization of a temporal process:

As a whole, then, capital is simultaneously present, and spatially coexistent, in its various phases. But each part is constantly passing from one phase or functional form into another, and thus functions in all of them in turn. The forms are therefore fluid forms and the terms are mediated by their succession.⁷¹

(This idea will reappear in Brady’s notion of “being in more than one ‘once’ per place,” which I’ll discuss below.)

In its fidelity to the way the terms of value are mediated under conditions of late-late capitalism, Brady’s narrative achieves a certain capacity to feel its non-synchronicity with its own conditions of possibility:

So, a going forward while knowing that one has to go back, and knowing that going back remains a kind of forward motion that will not fully recover the initial lapse, playing both sides against a middle where any

thought of territory undoes itself through the force of its own capacity to replace whatever you might have been thinking of it with a forced decision that is not unlike love, or sleep. In this sense the contradictory nature of experience is not only translated back and forth between us into sequence, but more strongly traduced, by a method which pushes its infidelities to the forefront at every opportunity, our spasms of pleasure repeatedly taking leave of each other vanishing so deeply into our interiors that we become interchangeable with the velocity of change in the neighborhood of our exchange.⁷²

“Our exchange” is an effect of both the communication my sentence enables, and the parsing of space into plots. Similarly, narrative time can be felt as the tension between a freely floating present tense and “the occupation of this tract of land in a time before we awakened to it,” where land becomes the territory of exchangeable parcels, and time becomes “the occupations we now pursue across its surface.”⁷³ This phenomenology of time suggests the world of fiction, which for Brady is a world that has forgotten the contradictions of its own temporality even as it organizes itself around an “experience riven between two or more time scales.”⁷⁴ This definition of fiction is useful as it avows the material production of its own time-sense, even if the resulting narrative is unable to adequately account for it. Accordingly, the world of fiction and the world of finance bear some critical resemblance. Insofar as the time of capital accumulation is un-metaphorically the time through which narrative moves, this definition simply acknowledges what typically goes unrecognized in fiction even when fiction makes its familiar appeal to “realism,” which in its typical modes flattens the temporal contradictions constitutive of its own material. The subjective experience of this material — which may turn out to be nothing less than the social construction of time itself — is intimately related to the structure of debt, which draws for its sustenance on the future labor time of presently living bodies.

Time of Capital / Time of Narrative

In his essay “Autumn of the System: Poetry and Finance Capital,” Joshua Clover examines the implications of such contradictions in an effort to promote a return to poetry — “or at least non-narrative” — for Marxian-bent literary studies interested in the relation between finance capital and literature.⁷⁵ In doing so, he analyzes Marx’s formula for the production of surplus capital — $M-C-M'$ — a sequence in time whose logic of motion and change, Clover suggests, might appear to resemble that of narrative itself:

It is in this most basic of Marxian formulations (the “general formula of capital”), that one sees narrative’s most primitive relation on the logic of capitalism as opposed to other modes of production. For it is only under

capitalism that one begins with money which seeks to become more money rather than, for example, beginning with the commodities one uses in daily life and using money only to maintain a steady supply of these uses (C-M-C).⁷⁶

In his critique of Fredric Jameson's proposition that capitalism is a narrative category and can thus be best grasped through narrative structures, Clover argues that the dynamic movement constitutive of value may be in excess of — or fundamentally inassimilable to — what narrative can in fact represent, especially when M-C-M' is understood not as a simple temporal sequence but rather as "expansion beyond any limit."⁷⁷

Before considering this argument more specifically in relation to the difficulties posed by financialization, it's worth looking to Marx himself for a sense of how the space-time dynamics of capital's valorization and the production of surplus-value have always been much more complicated than the primary sequence M-C-M' suggests. In his discussion of "The Metamorphoses of Capital," Marx elaborates on these complications. "The independence of value," he writes,

in relation to the value-forming power, labor-power...is realized during the production process as exploitation of labor-power. But this independence does not reappear in the circuit in which money, commodity and elements of production are only alternating forms of the capital value in process.⁷⁸

Here, Marx is discussing the multiple circuits through which value moves and changes. Indeed, value is constituted precisely by that movement and change. These circuits of money, labor, and other elements (machinery, raw materials, etc.) are interdependent and move simultaneously as value alternates its forms among them. This implies that every analytic representation of capital can only be factitious, for in arresting any one moment in the process — any one appearance of independent value — one must miss other moments constitutively integral to the first but whose alternating forms may be spatially and temporally disjoined from it. Similarly, the realization of value, which appears independent of the process that generates it, is in fact inseparable from the exploitation of labor-power that constitutes that appearance. In short, the independence of any one moment in the process of value's valorization and realization is only an appearance, and the processual sequence may not be linear at all. And insofar as "capital is simultaneously present and spatially coexistent, in its various phases," it may resist narrative representation entirely.⁷⁹

The problem only gets more complicated under conditions of increasing financialization when the appearance of that earlier resemblance — between primary sequence and narrative structure — becomes more difficult to maintain. This enhanced difficulty is due to the fact that the temporal condition of finance capital is

one in which labor time — the commodity (C) that subtends the valorization process — only *appears* to have been subtracted from the production of value. Whereas the production of surplus value is governed by the exploitation of labor — “the value of which is measured in time,” Clover notes — financialized value appears to dispense with labor altogether (M–M') as if labor were no longer necessary for the valorization process. But as Clover is quick to clarify, “the financialized formula M–M' is in fact always the formula M–M' [C]. The labor commodity is not truly routed around.”⁸⁰ In other words, the appearance of accumulation that we see in finance — however fictitious the value associated with that accumulation might be — cannot occur without labor. The catch, however, is that the labor time upon which buying power in the present depends is “the labor time always to come.”⁸¹ “In so far as the time of the future arrives in the present,” Clover writes, “it is processed into its role in the order of current capital relations, taking the place of a largely foreclosed spatial expansion. Time is colonized as if it were space.”⁸² This temporal contradiction — this fold in time whereby the labor needed to materially substantiate the valorization of capital in the present cannot have taken place — can't be dissociated from the time of crisis and might even constitute its ontology.

I've chosen to tarry with Clover's analysis because I believe that it stimulates new critical energies in the interest of addressing contemporary literature under current financialized conditions while moving beyond the Jamesonian default to narrative. Indeed, Clover aims to rehabilitate *poetry* — “or at least non-narrative” — as a privileged object of critical focus insofar as it might better enable us to cognize something altogether elusive about contemporary experience — say, “my full relation to my time” — something normative narrative is unable to accommodate, let alone represent.⁸³ It's the caveat — “at least non-narrative” — that I want to underscore and pressure here in the interest of opening the tension between narrative and non-narrative, an opening Brady's handling of narrativity facilitates as it exploits the formal tension between its temporal and spatial axes, negotiating its own poetic function while approaching a limit “in what must have happened to place us here precisely by subtracting itself from us in order to become a landscape.”⁸⁴ Moreover, as labor-time becomes difficult to account for under the temporality of finance, the appearance of a coherent narrative syntax, one capable of representing the time through which any story moves, becomes difficult to maintain. Hence the appearance of holes in the present that have something fundamental to do with the social material of time and which Brady's narratives attempt to locate, embody, and substantialize, rendering the moment's contradictions in such a way that they might become available to sense and cognition, while foregrounding the strain on normative narrative structures to make the logic of financialized time available for apprehension. The stakes of the work may be the feeling of that limit — something missing from the present while simultaneously underwriting it — whose arousal allows something otherwise elusive to become available to experience.

The Time of the Sentence

Just what kind of sentence enables one to feel that limit? What kind of sentence can apprehend its own inadequacy when sensing something ungraspable within its own experience? This recalls Brady's use of Proust, whose sentences offer him an unworkable model. "This work," he writes,

exploits the capacity of English syntax to become lost or confused after a certain quantitative length is reached. Lack of declension allows sentences of an arbitrarily long extension to "forget themselves," so that even in a sentence where later parsing reveals a normative construction, the reader experiences modifiers sliding away from nouns and verbs, multiply embedded subordinate clauses breaking their subordination to the main clause.⁸⁵

This has everything to do with syntax, or the conventions governing the sequencing of linguistic units as they organize themselves in relation to a terminal period, at once deferred and anticipated. Brady's sentential syntax is constantly in the process of trying to stabilize its meaning from a horizon that can never quite be seen but can be tensely felt through a disorienting thicket of conjunction and subordination, a whole labyrinth of clauses. As the sentence approaches its limit, the volatility of its syntax becomes amplified, as if the sentence itself could feel the imminence of a terminal moment when the fiction of its own fixed relations can only belie its appearance of stability.⁸⁶ Syntax thus becomes a kind of social material, at once resistant and pliable, by which the writing recursively enacts a relation to relation itself, even as the very terms of relation, terms that the sentence longs indefatigably to feel, have been withdrawn into a structure of effects without a narratable cause.⁸⁷

But even this precision fails to account for the production notes secreted by the scenario, not as its interior, as in the familiar trope of the film within a film, but as its necessary and missing anterior, a place prior to the tempo of non-occurrence where the problem of missing time resolves into a paradox of space through the essential technique of an absent social mass for being in more than one 'once' per place, so that packets of life in excess of this body spread through our script and the scene of circular relation into which it calls us, making the question not the easy one of a founding absence, but the irrational numerical expression of our own reflections distributed among all the objects and territories we survey in the form of their non-reflective obverse, in which even the pain of a prior disappearance cannot stabilize around those whose dead labor or labor of dying our situation here assumed for *there is now the possibility of meeting*

*them again later on; they have ceased merely to be silhouetted against a horizon where we had been ready to suppose that we should never see them reappear.*⁸⁸

This sentence is exemplary not only for its form but for its thematization of its formal problem. Here, the displacement associated with the temporality of finance capital becomes legible as “the problem of missing time,” a problem whose tensions and contradictions can’t be contained by the familiar phrase according to which one might be in two places at once. Instead, the sentence transfigures the spatial paradox through semantic stress and syntactic torque to one of “being in more than one ‘once’ per place.” Brady’s turn of phrase estranges the cliché while enabling us to think about the phenomenon whereby a seeming absence — let’s say, of laboring bodies — becomes an uncontainable excess of effects “distributed among all the objects and territories we survey,” like an immense accumulation of commodities that spatializes the time of production, just as it temporalizes the space of relation. More than just the same fragment of labor time appearing simultaneously in multiple iterations at any one place, however, Brady’s figure complicates the idea even further as it imagines an “absent social mass,” like abstract labor power itself, whose socialization is only accessible in its numerical effects, turning “a founding absence” into an “irrational numerical expression of our own reflections,” while placing “ourselves” in relation with “the dead labor or labor dying our situation here assumed.” Even “the pain of prior disappearance” — the “missing time” of living labor — manifests in the present as the most unstable relation with “our situation.”

All this suggests the temporality of crisis whereby the present tense is suspended between “a place prior to the tempo of non-occurrence” — arguably a site of “accumulation by dispossession” that is foundational to, but missing from, capitalism’s empty time, what Brady refers to later in the passage as “our empty horizons of futurity” — and the future labor time contracted to the present like an infinite resource, a future into which we are at every moment “going forward while knowing that one has to go back, and knowing that going back remains a kind of forward motion that will not recover the initial lapse.”⁸⁹ This movement suggests the temporal structure of monetary debt, “the scene of circular relation into which we are called,” while also recalling an even more “prior” moment of dispossession: “Remember the school tour of the mid-state plantation,” the narrator continues later in the same passage, “how it explained in minute detail the domestic economies of timber harvest, stock raising, and corn cultivation, leaving out only the fact that all this production was carried out by slave labor.”⁹⁰ This is how the temporal disjunction associated with the time of finance harbors nothing less than displaced violence, as the narrator notes at the conclusion of the same passage:

What I mean, I think, is that no matter the critical eye with which we return to that day’s instructions, we must at least suspect that the

ideological distortion remains a more primary moment, linked as it was with an ensemble of panic, physical pain, and the free-floating sense that the surrounding adults were liars as often as not, so that not the revelation of the lie but the swelling of anticipation pointing to the place where it *would have come to be revealed* was molded into the flesh itself, and a series of broken gestures in the knives, guns, and bombs of such displaced violences is what has mounded up the dirt to make a seat for our simple facing off against each other in this clearing, a simplicity that must have cost a fortune.⁹¹

Brady's syntactically labile sentences measure its meanings in relation to an extratextual whole — a structure in excess of its effects — that exceeds any one sentence's reach and to which not even the novel's completed construction can adequately refer. At the same time, the whole to which the sentence accedes remains immanent to each unit's syntactical strain, weighing on the grammatical subject. Sentences thus generate an intense and tortuous pressure, whose gestural dimension translates tonally and critically in registers of affect, as if the sentence itself were suffering its contortions in an effort to make legible the conditions underwriting its own grammar, a kind of "financial grammar" governing our relations as subjects and objects by way of unseen transactions and processes. One can dip nearly anywhere in the novels to locate exemplary sentences like the following from *Microclimates* which thematizes the formal concerns I've been discussing:

Was this the same sort of memory in which was grounded Birdy's automatism as he phoned in his order with Tampa's first delivery-service Szechuan restaurant, just as he phoned in so many of his performances, not wanting to leave the zone marked off by his four cinderblock walls, within which was a fairly small margin for error and stage for action in his echo-location of himself, even as this predictability and constant predication were founded on an essential dislocation, both his own and others', that allowed him nonetheless to "hold the line" for the ring of his beloved Apostrophe, an instance of that predication, unpredictable with the static-electric burst of predication itself, that motivated a "sound like" stripped of self-similarity, a conduit for which he held the negative pole of a blank and always ready likeness, waiting all the while for the positive access and excess that would startle him as looked-for but unheard-of sound?⁹²

Rather than a melancholic attachment to lost time, which the Proustian sentence aims to recover within its own arresting spatialization of temporal movement whereby what is lost to the present becomes the pretext for the formal pleasures of seemingly

interminable dilations, Brady's sentences expand as they seek the structure of present time itself. In its effort to register the specific structure of time under intensifying processes of financialization, a structure immanent to its vast array of effects and which we are still in the process of apprehending, Brady's sentences dilate toward the horizon of a future from which the temporal resource of its own medium has been borrowed, a future which acts as a lender of an abstract surplus that becomes concrete in its effects, endowing the present by displacing its center of gravity. Both the structure of time and the structure of feeling that informs Brady's first-person singular subject — grammatically and thematically — are thus intimately related, and it is the nature of this relation that the writing aims to grasp as the sentence itself participates in a search, not of lost time, but rather “my full relation to my time,” or the present's temporal form. It's worth quoting one more emblematic sentence as a final illustration:

I understood that, while my entrance had made quite an effect, the effect was all there was, drifting free of the entering body that was its cause and masking even the fact of the entrance itself behind the bibliographical occasion to which it gave rise, or rather fall, converting the potential energy of the encounter to a cold lump of ballast, the battle having been fought, decided against me, and entered into the chronicle by the time I folded myself into a too-small child's rocking chair in a dark corner and prepared for the inevitable moment when one of the family would back into me and, thinking they had discovered some rare and valuable coincidence, offer to pay an inflated admission to the privileged affective states I carried in the air around my head as the sublimate of all the knowledge of the wide world I had managed to assemble for my own index, reading the travel section of the *Tampa Tribune*, its lavish far-right praise for the bucolic splendor and radical quiet of the pacified Honduran back country, while waiting for my no-frills student haircut.⁹³

Conclusion

In “Autumn of the System,” Clover writes, “Narrative is out there somewhere — but it is processed into structure before it can appear. Late capitalism's drive to plunder and hollow out the future cannot be understood as fundamentally narrative.... Narrative must exist as a potential exactly so that we can experience its very displacement — ...for it is this which grants access to globalization's process of structuration, its ineluctable transformation of one logic into the other.”⁹⁴ Similarly, one might say together with Clover that “value is” — “this is the ontology of capital as such” — but that it, too, is processed into structure before it can appear, the way Marx tells us on the first page of *Capital*, Volume 1 that capitalist wealth itself “appears as an immense collection of commodities.”⁹⁵ My questions, then, have attempted to take seriously

the promise of Brady's experimental approach to literary form *to feel* — in the very bowels of its sentential syntax — the structure of that appearance. Rather than mere resistance to the mystification of transparency characteristic of communicative norms, and rather than mere re-presentation of something already known, both *Microclimates* and *Occupational Treatment* enable cognitive access to the elusive structure of value as it has become immanent to the body of subjective experience itself. The strain that Brady's sentence manifests together with the displacements that result yield profound insight precisely through its effort to narrate. These are displacements whose formal and grammatical manifestations are mediated by the local and global displacements — interruptions, gaps, holes — that the novels themselves attempt to account for, but whose mediations threaten to elude cogent apprehension as quickly as they make themselves felt. Hence, the usefulness of the factitious arrest that narrative offers, even as that arrest draws attention to its own *factitiousness*, that is, to the “combative temporalities” it fails to contain.

At stake here, then, is the question of what an experimental novel can do in an effort to grasp the temporal displacements of financialized experience, the experience of no experience and the “empty horizons of futurity” that enclose it. What are the limits of narrative's capacity to sense, perceive, and cognize the dynamics, contradictions, and occulted relations that structure our contemporary crises? This is not necessarily a question of representation, but rather one of feeling, sensing, and perceiving the processes that shape our world — production, circulation, consumption — *as if for the first time* through a method of embodied subjectivization enabled by a radical approach to first person narration. As an extension of the very situation it attempts to narrate, Brady's novels perform what Clover refers to as “narrative's mediated dissolution into structure,” a structure whose relation to the novels' grammatical “I” becomes impossible to articulate fully insofar as that structure has already penetrated body, landscape, and utterance alike.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, the sentence acts as that relation's most precise instrument of registration — an exteriorization of the system's sensorium — and the placement of the subject within its grammatical and syntactic terms enables a reader to feel the structures that exceed it.

At the same time, it's important to recognize how the formal qualities of Brady's sentences simply amplify the most generic features characteristic of any sentence, which must, as a rule, balance its diachronic movement through time with its synchronic organization and the regulations imposed by the deferred grammatical period. Thus, whatever relation might inhere between the involuted syntax of Brady's prose and the violent deprecations of capital won't submit to an easy homology flattened by an equal sign, as if the temporal structure of a sentence's unfolding could map flushly onto an equivalent temporal structure of capital's valorization and realization. There is no such equivalence that isn't forced. Nevertheless, Brady's sentences distinguish themselves as their formal preoccupations map onto their thematic obsessions with temporal displacement enabling one to sense that structure

through something like a phenomenology of value.

In short, Brady's narratives bring the banalities of everyday life — “dinner had grown cold” — into relation with global processes whereby “some unheralded disaster” might at any moment have “swept away another bit of infrastructure.”⁹⁷ The novels achieve this by way of cutting a paradigmatic figure against which any banal particular might come into focus as a part of the inarticulate whole in which the seemingly trivial detail is embedded:

Once understood thus, the whole pattern cast my episodes in the shower, previously understood to be caught in the contradictory grip of private impulse and administrative reason, in the far more quotidian and public light of what I remained naïve enough to call civil society, making it clear that what I sought was the trace of recent history in the varying smells of urine atomizing and diffusing through the superheated steam that fogged the windows, mirroring exhalations of the streets themselves that evening as the rain let up, just in time for us to drag the TV out into the yard and gather round to watch a bit of wrestling.⁹⁸

No doubt, *Microclimates* and *Occupational Treatment* are inexhaustible, and without even touching on their incorporation of lyric verses whose persistent interruptions offer another formal horizon against which to measure the work's non-narrative limits, I have at least managed to skim the surface of the novels' depths with the hope of drawing attention to the promise they offer those of us committed not only to the formal possibilities of experimental literary form, but to what those possibilities are capable of showing us about our current situation.

Notes

1. Taylor Brady, *Microclimates* (San Francisco: Krupskaya, 2001), and Taylor Brady, *Occupational Treatment* (Berkeley: Atelos, 2006). This essay owes an immense debt of gratitude to Brian Whitener, whose critical engagement with the piece has been invaluable. Thanks, too, to Joshua Clover for invaluable feedback.
2. Brady, *Microclimates* 89.
3. *Microclimates* 15.
4. Annie McClanahan, “Investing in the Future,” *Journal of Cultural Economy* 6:1 (2013) 90.
5. Robert Smithson, “Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey,” *The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: U California P, 1996) 72.
6. Smithson, “Monuments” 73.
7. “Monuments” 72.
8. *ibid.*
9. Brady, *Treatment* 230.
10. *Microclimates* 15.
11. Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: U

- Minnesota P, 1983) 207.
12. "Monuments" 72.
 13. Robert Guttmann, *How Credit-Money Shapes the Economy: The United States in a Global System* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1994) 12, qtd., Leigh Claire La Berge, "The Rules of Abstraction: Methods and Discourses of Finance," *Radical History Review* 118 (Winter 2014) 95.
 14. La Berge, "Abstraction" 95.
 15. Sianne Ngai pursues the implications of La Berge's insight into abstraction in "Visceral Abstractions," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21:1 (January 2015): 33-63. I'm indebted to Ngai for pointing me toward La Berge's work.
 16. *Treatment* 245.
 17. "Abstraction" 101-102.
 18. Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance* (Los Angeles: Semiotext[e], 2012) 157.
 19. For an excellent analysis of the emergent hegemony of the profit-driven daily, see Richard Terdiman, "Newspaper Culture: Institutions of Discourse, Discourse of Institutions," *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985) 117-148.
 20. Giovanni Arrighi, "The Winding Paths of Capital," Interview with David Harvey, *New Left Review* 56 (March/April 2009) 71.
 21. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (London: Blackwell, 1989).
 22. Harvey, *Condition* 147.
 23. *Condition* 160-61.
 24. *Financial Times*, 8 May 1987, qtd. *Condition* 161.
 25. "Abstraction" 95, emphasis added.
 26. *Condition* 167. For an excellent discussion of "abstract labor," see Ngai's "Visceral Abstractions" (36-45).
 27. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume I, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1992) 346.
 28. Stan Davis and Christopher Meyer, *Blur: The Speed of Change in the Connected Economy* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1999), and Randy Martin, *The Financialization of Daily Life* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2002) 36.
 29. Martin, *Financialization* 43.
 30. *Treatment* 255.
 31. Robin Blackburn, "The Subprime Crisis," *New Left Review* 50 (March-April, 2008) 92-93.
 32. Peter Linebaugh, "Enclosures from the Bottom Up," *Stop Thief: The Commons, Enclosures and Resistance* (Oakland: PM Press, 2014) 142.
 33. *Treatment* 241-43.
 34. *Microclimates* 48.
 35. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1969) 258.
 36. *Microclimates* 15.
 37. *ibid.*
 38. Benjamin, "Theses" 258.
 39. Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude* (Los Angeles: Semiotext[e], 2004). "For Aristotle (*Rhetoric*, I,

2, 1358a) the *topoi koinoi* are the most generally valid logical and linguistic forms of all of our discourse (let us even say, the skeletal structure of it); they allow for the existence of every individual expression we use and they give structure to these expressions as well. Such ‘places’ are *common* because no one can do without them (from the refined orator to the drunkard who mumbles words hard to understand, from the business person to the politician)” (35-36).

40. For my treatment of the “common place” in Brady’s lyric verse, see Rob Halpern, “Sensing the Common Place: Taylor Brady’s Dialectical Lyric,” *On Contemporary Practice* (Brooklyn: Cuneiform, 2008) 57-72. Online at <http://static1.squarespace.com/static/52010d47e4boeefc5e9e9bfo/t/5286b73ae4bo16cod8315493/1384560442904/halpern+ON+brady.pdf>.
41. Taylor Brady, “Narrative Occupation and Uneven Enclosure,” *Biting the Error: Writers Explore Narrative*, eds. Mary Burger, Robert Glück, Camille Roy, and Gail Scott (Toronto: Coach House, 2004) 190.
42. *ibid.*
43. Roman Jakobson, “Linguistics and Poetics,” *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960). “The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination” (358).
44. Carla Harryman, “Introduction: Non/Narrative,” *Journal of Narrative Theory*, 41:1 (Spring 2011) 2. See, too, Barrett Watten, “Nonnarrative and the Construction of History,” *The Constructivist Moment: From Material Text to Cultural Poetics* (Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 2003).
45. Joshua Clover, “Retcon: Value and Temporality in Poetics,” *Representations* 126 (Spring 2014) 11.
46. Brady, “Narrative” 192. A variant appears in *Treatment*, 263. I’ve chosen to quote “Narrative Occupation” for its direct and reflexive reference to composing the novel.
47. *Treatment* 276.
48. *Treatment* 276-77.
49. *Treatment* 206, 74.
50. *Treatment* 228. For a slight variant, see “Narrative” 186.
51. *Treatment* 252. For a slight variant, see “Narrative” 189.
52. *ibid.*
53. *ibid.*
54. *ibid.*
55. *ibid.* For excellent explorations of the poetics of stuttering that extend and deepen Brady’s allusion, see Jordan Scott, *Blert* (Toronto: Coach House, 2008); Craig Dworkin, “The Stutter of Form,” *The Sound of Poetry/The Poetry of Sound*, ed. Marjorie Perloff and Craig Dworkin (Chicago: U Chicago P, 2007) 166-83; Gilles Deleuze, “He Stuttered,” *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1997).
56. *Treatment* 216.
57. According to the “Draft Proposal of the Nonsite Collective,” a collectively composed text and photocopied pamphlet to which Brady contributed, together with myself and others: “Sites may appear to be immediately accessible within the grid of mediated experience and representation — they may even be thoroughly mapped there — yet ‘site’ remains withdrawn from active social recognition. Like the subtracted center of coherent vision in Smithson’s *Enantiomorphic Chambers*, sites paradoxically *disappear*. Perhaps, sites can be thought of as quasi-voids in a catastrophic situation (the catastrophe of

vision ‘as the eyes / near wreck / to create / when they see’): while fused to the structure of that situation, sites remain themselves difficult to perceive through their structures and effects. Put differently, sites might refer to events or processes whose consequences can’t be admitted to vision without threatening the coherence of everything else that appears. Sites may be scenes of occulted disaster, or the most banal forms of ongoing social erosion. In short, sites present themselves as blindspots. Non-sites, by contrast, are invented, devised, artificial, and they bear the weight of their own visibility. In ‘A Provisional Theory of Non-Sites,’ Smithson refers to the non-site as ‘a three dimensional logical picture that is *abstract*, yet it *represents* an actual site A ‘logical picture’ differs from a natural or realistic picture in that it rarely looks like the thing it stands for. Unlike real sites, non-sites can be abandoned at any time, whenever they cease to be useful (say, for mobilizing attention)... Non-sites are logical pictures or narrations that are abstract, even as they aim to make the concrete dimension of real sites perceptible.” In this sense, I think of Brady’s novels as quasi-nonsites.

58. “Narrative” 185.
59. *Microclimates* 7.
60. *Treatment* 15, 119, 228.
61. *Treatment* 277.
62. *Treatment* 239.
63. *Treatment* 242.
64. *Treatment* 276-77.
65. *ibid.*
66. “Narrative” 185, *Treatment* 193-94.
67. *Treatment* 262.
68. *Treatment* 252.
69. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume 2, trans. David Fernbach (London: Penguin, 1978) 185.
70. “Narrative” 190.
71. *Capital*, Volume II 185.
72. *Treatment* 261.
73. “Narrative” 184.
74. “Narrative” 190.
75. Joshua Clover, “Autumn of the System: Poetry and Finance Capital,” *Journal of Narrative Theory* 41:1 (Spring 2011) 39.
76. “Autumn” 36.
77. *ibid.*
78. *Capital*, Volume 2, 185-86.
79. *ibid.*
80. “Autumn” 45.
81. *ibid.*
82. *ibid.* I am grateful here to Joshua Clover for his generous engagement and feedback through personal correspondence.
83. “Autumn” 39.
84. *Treatment* 228.

85. "Narrative" 191.
86. In his essay "Retcon," Joshua Clover's argument in part hangs on a reading of Clark Coolidge's collection of fragments, "From Notebooks" (1975-1982), among which he quotes the following:

I am moving in
opposite directions at once.
Like a sentence, when written, seems to
move backwards to complete its hold
on itself. The dialectic of forward
and reverse.

While I don't mean to suggest that Brady, although himself a close reader of Coolidge, took his cues from these same fragments, there is nevertheless an uncanny resonance between these lines and Brady's own "going forward while knowing that one has to go back, and knowing that going back remains a kind of forward motion that will not fully recover the initial lapse." Clark Coolidge, "From Notebooks (1975-1982)," *Code of Signals*, ed. Michael Palmer (Berkeley: North Atlantic, 1983) 174-75 (qtd. in Clover, *Retcon* 21).

87. The allusion to Althusser's theory of structural causality, whereby the structure of the social whole — something like a full relation to present time — can only be apprehended in its particular effects, ought not go unmentioned. Indeed, Brady acknowledges his debt to Althusser on the first page of *Microclimates* by way of an epigraph — "The characters of the time seem strangers to the characters of the lightning" — a sentence that appears in one of Althusser's few essays on aesthetics, "The 'Piccolo Teatro': Bertolazzi and Brecht Notes on a Materialist Theatre" (*For Marx*). Arguably, any Althusserian approach to history as a process without a subject is inadequate to our moment. And while Brady's novels aggressively rehabilitate a subject, this is not the agent of history, but rather the subject of its own narrations, themselves but a representation of history.
88. *Treatment* 228-29, emphasis original
89. *Treatment* 261.
90. *Treatment* 230.
91. *ibid.*
92. *Microclimates* 116.
93. *Treatment* 66-67.
94. "Autumn" 45, 47.
95. *Capital*, Volume I 125.
96. "Autumn" 48.
97. *Microclimates* 36.
98. *Microclimates* 37-38.