Five Strands of Fictionality

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Although both were published in 1975, Alice Walker’s “In Search of Zora Neale Hurston” and Andy Warhol’s *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* could not, at first glance, be less alike. Walker’s search for Zora Neale Hurston is a quest for an authentic folk culture suppressed by racist literary and ethnographic powers; Warhol’s “philosophy” is a celebration of mass media and the easy acceptance of the stereotypes of American life. And yet, for all their differences, both are engaged in the project of defining the American imaginary, of understanding the models and images that give shape to contemporary life. In the process of responding to such media images, these two essays represent an attempt to define the uses of invented stories that break sharply from the particular mid-1950s literary culture that I have discussed in the previous chapter. John Barth’s definition of fiction as myth reflects, I argued in chapter 1, a hegemonic position that is shaped directly by the academic status quo—particularly the previous decade’s existentialist psychoanalysis. At the end of that chapter, however, I noted attempts to break from this traditional
genealogy and the literary institutions on which it depends—especially Toni Morrison’s interest in folklore. Morrison suggests that alternatives to mythic fictionality need not come from within literary and academic institutions. Walker and Warhol—although in very different ways—struggle to think about the use of the fictional that responds to the challenges of contemporary media culture by looking outside of literary institutions for inspiration. As a result, the definition of fictionality that we see here will function in contemporary culture in a very different way, and will launch from a different point of departure.

What is especially interesting about both Warhol and Walker is that they both take positions more distinctly outside of the institutions with which they are involved (art and literature, respectively) than Barth did. Where Barth participated in institutional occasions at every turn, Warhol and Walker hold their respective institutions at arm’s length. And yet, at the same time, Warhol and Walker are fundamentally still involved with those institutions. Indeed, for all of the satire of artistic institutions implicit in Warhol’s work, no artist depended more on artistic institutions, nor can there be much doubt that Warhol’s work has become part of our standard histories of contemporary art. Likewise, balanced against her critique of how American literary culture has neglected Hurston is the fact that Walker herself has achieved all the honors and recognition that come with literary success. Both Warhol and Walker have achieved their place within their respective institutions precisely because they so wholeheartedly criticized and in the process rejuvenated them. In particular, Walker’s search has become a model for a whole generation of writers and critics, for whom the rediscovery of suppressed writing by women and minorities is the paradigmatic responsibility of socially engaged literary history. Walker’s essay provides some of the groundwork for the revisionist literary history embodied in the *Heath Anthology of American Literature*. Indeed, in recovering neglected texts and placing them alongside the traditional “masterpieces” of American writing, the *Heath* has set the tone for the teaching of American literature in the university classroom for the last decade. Even the more traditional *Norton Anthology of American Literature* has begun to look like the *Heath* in its more recent editions. The *Heath*’s principal editor, Paul Lauter, describes the goals of such an anthology as “a broad platform in this process of canon change, a kind of still point in the changing cultural world, from which future departures will undoubtedly be made. Such volumes force on us very different conceptions of American literary and cultural history, simply in order to account for the existence, much less the characteristics, of such texts.”

fictionality that circulates within the folkloric framework departs from the model of postmodernism that I discussed in the previous chapter. We can see this simply by examining the works that anthologies like the *Heath* include. Jeffrey Nealon notes that the *Heath*’s goal of including a wide range of contemporary texts and of rejecting any particular universal standards paradoxically ignores particular postmodernist texts that challenge those standards not on the basis of ethnicity or gender but through poststructuralist theory of language. “The diversity hailed by the *Heath Anthology,*” Nealon remarks, “then, seems to rest in opening up a kind of epiphanic white experience to many other groups. What is diversified here are the groups who can legitimately express a similar experience of personal feeling.” As Nealon rightly notes, defining fictionality as an archive of cultural resources and forms is no less artificial than defining it as the kind of psychoanalytically informed existentialist myth that provided Barth’s model in the previous chapter.

The appeal to such neglected texts embodied in Walker’s essay and the *Heath Anthology* has a complex if not contradictory relationship to literary institutions. In an essay a few years later, Walker describes her search for Hurston as the product of a need for source material for her own writing: “I became aware of my need of Zora Neale Hurston’s work some time before I knew her work existed. In late 1970 I was writing a story that required accurate material on voodoo practices among rural Southern blacks of the thirties; there seemed none available that I could trust.” Hurston represents for Walker such an archive of material from which her own writing can be developed. In the years that have followed Walker’s essays, just this sort of definition of fiction as the product of folk materials has emerged within popular and academic culture. Indeed, Ann duCille has defined “hurstonism” as a crucial experience of discovery and identification by a generation of writers interested in African American studies. Others have described the battle to claim Hurston’s legacy; as Michele Wallace asks, “Who owns Zora Neale Hurston?” This makes Warhol and Walker different from the writers that I will discuss in later chapters, who reject literary institutions in a stronger way (without implying a positive direction for reform) or who simply stand out-

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side of the institutions altogether. They are, in this regard, the first step away from the most conventional understanding of fictionality that I described in the previous chapter.

Although we might follow Morrison's use of folklore as a way to grasp this strand of contemporary fictionality, it seems to me that Walker's intervention in the American literature canon offers a more useful window into contemporary literary culture. Walker represents a particularly interesting point of intersection between the creative and the critical wings of the literary institution, and their meeting in her essay on Hurston has had a more direct impact on literary criticism and canonicity. In this chapter, I would like to suggest that we can gain perspective on Walker's definition of fiction by comparing it to Warhol's Philosophy. Warhol reflects many of the same concerns that Walker expresses, but his broader interest in media and social performance allows us to extend Walker's insights to our national narratives in general.

Walker’s Lies

Walker’s brief essay describes her journey to Hurston's hometown of Eatonville in 1973 to find her grave and mark it with a tombstone. In essence, Walker is juxtaposing two stories in this essay. The first is obviously the search for Hurston's tomb and the exploration of contemporary Eatonville, many of whose citizens have no knowledge of Hurston's life or writings. The second, which becomes clearer and more explicit in her essay “Zora Neale Hurston: A Cautionary Tale and a Partisan View,” two years later, is a narrative about Hurston's disappearance from the literary canon and the need to reevaluate her writing. In Walker's earlier essay, this future use of Hurston is almost entirely in the background; why Walker wants to find Hurston is allowed to remain vague. Indeed, the larger purpose of the journey is implied only in the quotations that Walker inserts without commentary between sections of the narrative. Some of these quotations come from Hurston's contemporaries; others reflect the responses of Walker's own contemporary students and scholars, who frequently comment on the elusive nature of Hurston's biography or the problems of her reception. Over the course of the essay, it becomes clear that Walker wants to sort out this biography and overcome the prejudice that pushed Hurston to the margins of African American literature.

Walker combines these two narratives using the story of the journey to accomplish the goal of correcting Hurston's critical neglect. The story itself does not explain the origins of Walker's interest in Hurston. Nor does it
discuss in any detail the task of getting to Eatonville. Nearly all of the narrative concerns Walker’s encounters with the citizens of Eatonville. These encounters fall into one of two types. The first functions as a testimonial to the way that Hurston has been neglected as an important figure in twentieth-century writing. Walker travels, for example, to the house that Hurston lived in only to discover that the young people who live in the house across the street know nothing about Hurston:

I go up to them to explain. “Did you know Zora Hurston used to live right across from you?” I ask.

“Who?” They stare at me blankly, then become curiously attentive, as if they think I made the name up. They are both Afroed and he is somberly dashikied.

I suddenly feel frail and exhausted. “It’s too long a story,” I say. . . .

This exchange comes late in the narrative, and is clearly meant to instance Hurston’s neglect as well as the task of resuscitating her reputation. The other type of encounter that Walker describes concerns meetings with people who had firsthand experience with Hurston in the past. She meets Mathilda Moseley, who appears in one of Hurston’s books, as well as the daughter of the director of the funeral home that buried Hurston. Both provide apparently misleading information about the circumstances of Hurston’s burial. All this seems to be cleared up when Walker meets Dr. Benton, who knew Hurston personally and seems to explain the actual conditions of her death and burial. The nature and order of Walker’s encounters mirrors the structure of her narrative as a whole. The narrative gradually unpacks Hurston’s life, pealing away indifference and misconceptions and progressing to those with personal knowledge who set the record straight.

Walker’s narrative, then, is organized around a series of personal encounters that determine the trajectory for her quest to understand Hurston’s life and death. What interests me in particular in this story is the way that Walker takes on a fictional identity to collect information. Walker introduces herself to Eatonville and all of the people that she meets as Hurston’s illegitimate niece. Late in the essay Walker reflects on the ethics of her lie when talking to Benton: “I hate myself for lying to him. Still, I ask myself, would I have gotten this far toward getting the headstone and finding out about Zora Hurston’s last days without telling my lie? Actually, I probably would have. But I don’t like taking chances that could get me stranded in central Florida” (110). Walker’s remark is strange because it so obviously calls into the question

the whole structure of her story. In the process, Walker encourages us to consider the importance of this central lie to the journey and her narrative of it as a whole. Although the issue may seem tangential at first, in fact the idea of lying to get to the truth is, as I suggested in the introduction, the central one in fiction. And since Walker is recovering Hurston not primarily for the sake of the folklore that she offers but as source material for the writing of fiction, the lies that Walker tells are not irrelevant to her story but rather a foundational issue.

Walker’s lies follow a trajectory linked to her quest to discover the truth of Hurston’s life and burial. Walker opens her story by describing the simplicity and usefulness of her lie: “Because I don’t wish to inspire foot-dragging in people who might know something about Zora they’re not sure they should tell, I have decided on a simple, but I feel profoundly useful, lie” (95). Walker’s lie here is a fiction in the most traditional sense: it is an invention deployed to get at some other truth. It also, however, raises some questions about Walker’s project as a whole. From Walker’s essay published four years later, we know that Hurston’s writing represents authenticity and, especially, a kind of belonging that Walker is eager to recapture. Walker’s mini-narrative of her discovery of Hurston’s work leads her to “test” it on her relatives, “who are such typical black Americans they are useful for every sort of political, cultural, or economic survey” (84). Finding Hurston’s stories well received by her relatives, Walker goes on to describe the “perfection” of these stories: “For what Zora’s book did was this: it gave them back all the stories they had forgotten or of which they had grown ashamed (told to us years ago by our parents and grandparents—not one of whom could not tell a story to make you weep, or laugh) and showed how marvelous, and, indeed, priceless they are” (84–85). Precisely what makes Hurston’s writing priceless is its ability to provide an archive of lost materials. Because this archive represents the basis for a community that may not even recognize itself as such, reading Hurston’s work provides a moment of recognition on the part of Walker’s family. Although she can see them as statistically average, it is only through the reading of Hurston’s folktales that they are able to recognize themselves as members of this community. Indeed, this question of recognition is essential to Hurston’s own problematic place within African American history. Hazel Carby suggests that Hurston is “a central figure in the cultural struggle among black intellectuals to define exactly who the people were that were going to become the representatives of the folk.”

Walker’s essay, lying about her ancestry is a way to get at the truth of this folk culture.

For a while, Walker grows into this fictitious identity. In the middle of the story she lies for a second time but feels more comfortable: “By this time I am, of course, completely into being Zora’s niece, and the lie comes with perfect naturalness to my lips. Besides, as far as I’m concerned, she is my aunt—and that of all black people as well” (102). Walker’s acceptance of this identity may seem perfectly natural. As her comments on group recognition in her later essay suggest, the kind of imagined relation that Walker describes is precisely what her quest to Eatonville is all about. On further reflection, however, Eatonville itself functions as a deeply problematic site for her rediscovered community. It is precisely this community’s not-knowing—its unfamiliarity with Hurston—that makes the lie necessary. And yet, this trip is obviously necessary to Walker. It is not enough to have discovered Hurston’s writing and to have constructed a community around those stories by sharing them with friends and family; Walker demands, instead, the true discovery of the actual grave of Hurston. Such a discovery is an exemplary act of archival foundation—the establishment of a reference point from which future work and thinking can be charted. In Archive Fever, Derrida argues that the creation of the archive is always the foundation upon which future work is based. Derrida describes the archive as “a pledge, and like every pledge, a token of the future.” The archive functions as a pledge to the future by defining and granting legitimacy to a certain resource for future work: the archive presupposes “not the originary arkhē but the nomological arkhē of the law, of institution, of domiciliation, of filiation” (95). This is why, I think, Walker’s response to Benton is so much a break from the way that her fictitious identity has functioned in the rest of the story. It is here for the first time that Walker expresses regret: “I hate myself for lying to him.” In part, Walker’s sense of guilt arises from the kindness that Benton shows: he “comes to [her] rescue” and defends her when she claims that she is illegitimate (110). But what seems to be more the source of Walker’s guilt is that Benton clearly represents the truth that she has been seeking in the story. It is he who explains what seem to be the real circumstances of Huston’s death and burial, and who dismisses the other accounts that Walker has gathered as fictions; he asks “indignantly,” “Where did you get that story from?” (110). Benton calls on Walker to discard fictions for the sake of truth.

Walker’s ambiguous relationship with the fictions that she creates in this

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story says a great deal about the dynamics of fictionality as a site of cultural and discursive struggle. I have argued that the use of fictionality always reflects an institutional framework and the disciplinary practices that make those invented stories acceptable and useful. Walker’s search for Hurston dramatizes just this movement into legitimacy. At first, Walker describes herself as without a context for understanding Hurston and without a community that knows what to do with her writings and life. In such a situation, fiction is impossible, and lies are a necessary evil designed to get at the truth. As Walker begins to develop a community around Hurston’s life in the figure of Benton, truth becomes possible but lies are likewise more shameful. We might recall Michael Riffaterre’s link between fiction and genre that I quoted in the introduction: “The only reason that the phrase ‘fictional truth’ is not an oxymoron, as ‘fictitious truth’ would be, is that fiction is a genre whereas lies are not. Being a genre, it rests on conventions, of which the first and perhaps only one is that fiction specifically, but not always explicitly, excludes the intention to deceive.” We might say that once Hurston has been recovered as a source and a fictionality based on these materials is possible, the lie told to make those materials available seems scandalous. And yet, it should go without saying, Walker’s ambiguous relationship to the lies that she tells is not some accidental quality of her style of writing; it is, rather, the very thing that makes Hurston’s writing so important to her. The very folkloric archive that Walker is trying to develop in her search for Hurston’s grave is entangled with ironies of lying and truth seeking that reflect the issue of fictionality.

The legitimacy that blossoms around Walker’s quest arises not from the development of a traditional discipline or even institution. Although Walker does, indeed, mark Hurston’s grave with a symbol of social legitimacy and biographical facticity, the story ends not by constituting a discipline for studying Hurston or even a method of accounting for her life. Instead, Walker has simply accomplished the task of marking a reference point for her own work, and in particular of identifying the existence of a certain body of materials. This is a significant departure from the types of legitimation that I described


10. In Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), Philip Fisher describes literary works whose original cultural effects are difficult to grasp because of how effectively they have transformed the cultural landscape: “The simple argument of this book is that within the 19th-century American novel, cultural work of this fundamental kind was often done by exactly those popular forms that from a later perspective, that of 20th-century modernism, have seemed the weakest features of 19th-century cultural life” (5). I am describing something of the same sort of difficult-to-grasp emergence of fictionality in Walker’s writing.
in the previous chapter. Instead of arguing for a canon in relation to current literary culture, Walker inaugurates an archive from which future work can proceed.\textsuperscript{11} The contrast to Barth’s understanding of fictionality is striking: where Barth imagined fiction as a kind of mythical transcendence of its occasion, Walker sees an archival moment whose consummation is all in the future. In the context of Walker’s very different relationship to traditional literary disciplines, it is no accident that the voice of truth that shames her fictions is embodied in a doctor; the opposition between traditional disciplinary authority and some other form of knowing is at the heart of Walker’s essay.

Walker anticipates the discussion of the archive and canon that will develop in the next two decades in literary criticism. The starting point that she describes seems to be different from a simple canon—a collection of resources that are also a guide to study, a general structure for a discipline. In his article for \textit{Critical Terms for Literary Study}, John Guillory notes that the canon is traditionally defined according to rule or measurement.\textsuperscript{12} By focusing on the issue of judgment and exclusion, contemporary debates about the canon have depended upon a very specific and limited way of framing our use of prior writing materials. In his discussion of canon theory, Paul Lauter notes that the \textit{Heath} tries to provide “materials” for answering questions about the formation of the canon,\textsuperscript{13} but ultimately falls back in one way or another on the task of “reconstructing” the canon.\textsuperscript{14} Although Walker does not articulate the theory behind her interest in Hurston, it seems clear that

\textsuperscript{11.} A good example of this inauguration of the archive is provided by Joseph Tabbi, in his discussion of preserving materials for the future study of electronic literature, “Toward a Semantic Literary Web: Setting a Direction for the Electronic Literature Organization’s Directory” (http://eliterature.org/pad/swl.html). Tabbi notes that any attempt to create a body of research material will necessarily involve including some and excluding other works, “Promoters of e-literature should avoid sounding too disappointed about the ‘loss’ of established works of e-lit whose platforms now are outdated.” Instead, he emphasizes the importance of the founding act itself: “The recovery is itself a social and political act, since the only sure criterion for a work’s importance is that someone, some group, cares enough to recognize and recover the work. This is a collective critical act that, like the recognition and reproduction of works by the dead, goes on after an author has completed a work.”


\textsuperscript{13.} Lauter, \textit{Canons and Contexts}, 162.

\textsuperscript{14.} Although Lauter sees \textit{Reconstructing American Literary History} (ed. Sacvan Bercovitch [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986]) as ultimately conservative, he also concludes his discussion by asserting the continuing role of canons in academic study: “canons are socially constructed by people and in history . . . they have always changed and can be changed . . . they are deeply shaped by institutions and the material conditions under which writing is produced and consumed” (169).
hers is a story of an archive rather than a canon, and that the differences between the two have not been appreciated. If, as Derrida suggests, the very nature of the archive is to promise futurity rather than the dependence on the past that a canon implies, appeals to an archive model of fictionality side-step the traditional structure of canons and truth legitimation. The degree to which such appeals really do break from disciplinary structures will be considered in the remainder of this chapter. In particular, we must account for the very structure of Walker’s story: Why is the trip to Eatonville itself so important? Why work to find the actual grave of Hurston? In discussing the appeal of Hurston to later critics and writers, Hazel Carby has associated Hurston’s writing with a certain colonial imagination that links traveler and explorer in “the romantic discovery by the writer of people and places unknown to the reader.”

It is clear that Walker finds this site of discovery to be a principal attraction in Hurston’s writing, extending Hurston’s travels to become the very place of discovery and repository in Eatonville. Such a journey problematically leads Walker into the series of lies that she tells, but it also seems essential to the foundation of the Hurston archive and the promise of future writing. And yet, nothing in our models for fiction explain why the physical act of travel would be necessary to found such an archive. As I argued in the introduction, models of fictionality traditionally emphasize thought experiments and hypothetical conditions. This is especially the case with the sorts of “semi-fictions” like classifications that Hans Vaihinger associates with institutions. If Walker believes that the act of travel to a starting point is important to her use of Hurston for her own fiction, it seems that such an act marks the point at which her understanding of fictionality most clearly departs from traditional disciplinary definitions. It is the work of the physical journey that Andy Warhol helps to explain.

**Warhol at Work**

*The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* would seem an unlikely place to look for a theory of fiction, much less a commentary on Alice Walker’s earnest attempt to understand the shared folklore of African American culture. Warhol’s explicit rejection of struggles against stereotypes or social norms seems miles away from Walker: “I always go after the easiest thing, because if it’s the easiest, for me it’s usually the best.” While Warhol’s tone throughout this

book is tongue-in-cheek, there can be no doubt that he takes a very different approach to the American imaginary. Like Walker, Warhol is fundamentally concerned with imagining American society. Warhol describes a vision of America with him as president: “We can start the country over from scratch. We can get the Indians back on the reservations making rugs and hunting for turquoise. . . . Can you see the Blue Room with Campbell's Soup Cans all over the walls? Because that's what Foreign Heads of State should see, Campbell Soup Cans and Elizabeth Taylor and Marilyn Monroe. That’s America. That’s what should be in the White House. And you would serve Dolly Madison ice cream. A, see yourself as others see you.”

Warhol’s description of America is striking because it addresses a topic very similar to what Walker struggles with: how do we recognize ourselves as part of American culture? While Warhol asks us to see ourselves as others see us, Walker quite explicitly asks her family to see themselves as Hurston sees them. Both likewise imagine community by delving into the past—Walker into the life of Hurston, Warhol into the absurd past of a pristine America inhabited only by television Indians and pop culture icons. Warhol’s image of the American imaginary, however, is not part of some particularly literary activity but rather part of mundane social life. In other words, Warhol’s account of imagining American culture moves from the restricted economy of Walker’s essay on literature to the general economy of life in contemporary media culture.

Warhol opens his Philosophy by introducing the issue of social connections and cultural models that are such a fundamental part of his account of being an American. He describes the problems that arise from the fantasies that people develop around the future, especially around romance. Warhol notes in his discussion of love that “[p]eople have so many problems with love,” and goes on to suggest that “[t]here should be courses on beauty and love and sex” (43). Warhol reconsiders, however: “But then I think, maybe it works out just as well that nobody takes you out of the dark about it, because if you really knew the whole story, you wouldn’t have anything to think about or fantasize about for the rest of your life, and you might go crazy, having nothing to think about, since life is getting longer, anyway, leaving so much time after puberty to have sex in” (43). Warhol’s approach to fantasy is exemplified by this passage; it is both a source of personal suffering as well as a compensation for the meaninglessness of life. Warhol locates these fantasies both in individual personal histories as well as in broad cultural images. He notes that “[w]ith everything changing so fast, you don’t have a chance of

17. Ibid., 15. This passage occurs in dialogue between A (Warhol) and B and is attributed to B. Although not spoken by the Warhol voice, it seems that the general characterization of American culture is consistent with Warhol’s view.
finding your fantasy image intact by the time you’re ready for it. What about all the little boys who used to have fantasies about girls in beautiful lace bras and silk slips?” (52). Fantasies develop out of general cultural mores and media images, even though they leave individual and potentially quirky marks on people. By turning to the issue of desire, Warhol approaches contemporary culture and media exclusions in a fundamentally different way than Walker.

And yet Warhol’s focus on desire in identification draws our attention to undercurrents in Walker’s search for the archive. Derrida’s discussion of the archive places desire at its heart.

The trouble de l’archive stems from a mal d’archive. We are en mal d’archive: in need of archives. Listening to the French idiom, and in it the attribute en mal de, to be en mal d’archive can mean something else than to suffer from a sickness, from a trouble or from what the noun mal might name. It is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away. It is to run after the archive, even if there’s too much of it, right where something in it anarchives itself. It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, and irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement.18

The passion for something that slips away is clearly evident in Warhol’s discussion of media images, but is also clear in Walker’s search for Hurston’s grave. Although Walker suggests that reading Hurston is a means of identifying with a group, the relationship between desire and identification—especially of Walker’s own desire for Hurston’s life story—is curiously neglected in her essay. And yet, clearly here is a story of passion that drives Walker beyond all boundaries of polite truth telling. Warhol’s interest in desire and identification seems to me to be a way that we can understand the passion of Walker’s own nostalgic quest for Hurston’s grave and thus what drives our interest in archives in general.

Warhol is both attracted to and repelled by social fantasies. As he writes, “People’s fantasies are what give them problems. If you didn’t have fantasies you wouldn’t have problems because you’d just take whatever was there. But then you wouldn’t have romance, because romance is finding your fantasy in people who don’t have it” (55). Elsewhere, Warhol is even more forceful in arguing that fantasies are not a matter of finding a partner who matches your

desire but rather of projecting desires in a fundamentally unstable way: “So today, if you see a person who looks like your teenage fantasy walking down the street, it’s probably not your fantasy, but someone who had the same fantasy as you and decided instead of getting it or being it, to look like it, and so he went to the store and bought the look that you both like. So forget it” (53). Warhol describes social space so suffused by fantasies that individuals are left with only two choices: searching for their fantasies in others or imitating their fantasies in their own appearance. Very little room remains for simple identity or desire; rather, desire is always desire for a representation. Precisely this need for representation runs throughout Walker’s search for Hurston—who, as we have seen, promises to allow for group identification in a way that Walker’s friends and relatives immediately recognize. Indeed, it is precisely the representative quality of Hurston that lures Walker into telling lies about herself; I have already quoted Walker’s remark that “as far as I’m concerned, she is my aunt—and that of all black people as well.” Such a justification reads a historical figure symbolically and clearly substitutes for Hurston’s literal identity a meaning very much invested in Walker’s own need for a model.

Warhol, then, raises important questions about the simple narrative of discovery and identification that Walker offers us. The desire for identification that Walker wears so explicitly in her essay is shown to be a far from simple goal by Warhol. Warhol’s central model for sexual fantasies is drag performance. He gives the following example:

In Women in Revolt, Jackie Curtis ad-libbed one of the best lines of disillusionment with sex when he-as-she, portraying a virgin schoolteacher from Bayonne, New Jersey, was forced to give oral gratification—a blow-job—to Mr. America. After gagging and somehow finishing up, poor Jackie can’t figure out if she’s had sex or not—“This can’t be what millions of girls commit suicide over when their boyfriends leave them. . . .” Jackie was acting out the puzzled thoughts so many people have when they realize sex is hard work just like everything else. (55)

This passage connects gender performance to the cultural and individual fantasies that I have already discussed. Sex represents for Warhol the point at which fantasies give way to the simple effort of work, of necessarily performing sexually. This performance is both a matter of the physical sexual act as well as the broader performance of gender and social identity. Warhol explains that good performers “are all-inclusive recorders, because they can mimic emotions as well as speech and looks and atmosphere—they’re more
inclusive than tape recordings or videotapes or novels. Good performers can somehow record complete experiences and people and situations and then pull out these recordings when they need them” (82). Although Warhol seems to feel that performance as a kind of work is most evident in explicitly physical acts, this passage makes clear that for him work is diffuse within social identity. A few pages later he offers what I take to be a general comment on this broad definition of work: “I suppose I have a really loose interpretation of ‘work,’ because I think that just being alive is so much work at something you don’t always want to do. Being born is like being kidnapped. And then sold into slavery. People are working every minute. The machinery is always going. Even when you sleep” (96). Living, as Warhol says, is work. By this he seems to mean the work of performing social identities and fantasies; this work is always at odds with the fantasies built up by television and print media.

Warhol is not concerned with particular literary institutions. Nonetheless, his interest in the work of social performance should remind us of the emphasis on literary practice, of the disciplinary *habitus*, against which Walker’s quest for an archive struggles. In trying to unpack the nature of desire and identification within a media environment, Warhol is obviously encouraging us to think about how our practices are structured. But it is also clear that Warhol’s understanding of practice emphasizes not the conventions that give that shape but the work that it requires. Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of the *habitus*, which provides the theory for so much recent work on literary institutions, is ultimately structuralist in nature—speaking of fields, structures, and formulae. Bourdieu describes the *habitus* in *The Logic of Practice*:

> The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively “regulated” and “regular” without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor.\(^\text{19}\)

While Warhol is clearly also interested in the ways that actions are shaped unconsciously, his emphasis is less on the “structuring structures” than the effort that goes into practice. In this, it seems, Warhol offers an important supplement to the ways that we usually think about social performance—a supplement that will help to link fictionality and the civil imaginary.

Throughout *Philosophy* Warhol offers himself and his industrially inspired art as a kind of return to work and debunking of aesthetic “auras.” Warhol defines himself as doing a kind of “business art”: “Business art is the step that comes after Art. I started as a commercial artist, and I want to finish as a business artist. After I did the thing called ‘art’ or whatever it’s called, I went into business art. I wanted to be an Art Businessman, or a Business Artist. Being good at business is the most fascinating kind of art” (92). Although Warhol is playing on a number of different senses of the word *artist* here, what seems most important is that he wants to pull emphasis in art away from aesthetic principles and back towards a calculus of simple production and work. Warhol tells the following story: “When Picasso died I read in a magazine that he had made four thousand masterpieces in his lifetime and I thought, ‘Gee, I could do that in a day.’ You see, the way I do them, with my technique, I really thought I could do four thousand in a day. And they’d all be masterpieces because they’d all be the same painting” (148). It turns out, as Warhol relays, he was unable to complete the four thousand paintings in a single day. Although he is clearly parodying clichés about what makes a masterpiece and why it is important that a particular work be unique, what seems especially important in this story is Warhol’s insistence on returning artistic creation to work and production. Warhol concludes his discussion of fame earlier in the book: “So you should always have a product that’s not just ‘you.’ An actress should count up her plays and movies and a model should count up her photographs and a writer should count up his words and an artist should count up his pictures so you always know exactly what you’re worth, and you don’t get stuck thinking your product is you and your fame, and your aura” (86).

In emphasizing the principle of work which runs contrary to the aura of fame, Warhol rejects the basis for much of the recent work on artistic institutions. Indeed, the issue that launched my discussion of Warhol in particular is the problem of the disciplinary structure of knowledge, a problem invoked by Walker’s essay. For Warhol, work is an alternative to the social conventions that usually define the value of art. In particular, Warhol is proposing an alternative to the language of “cultural capital,” which accepts the aura as a principal value in artworlds. Warhol’s insistence on the gross work of artistic projection—on “business art”—is in fact a much stronger rejection of
traditional ways of thinking about the value of art based on symbolic capital. Here’s Bourdieu’s definition of the “two economic logics” of art:

These fields are the site of the antagonistic coexistence of two modes of production and circulation obeying inverse logics. At one pole, there is the anti-“economic” economy of pure art. Founded on the obligatory recognition of the values of disinterestedness and on the denegation of the “economy” (of the “commercial”) and of “economic” profit (in the short term), it privileges production and its specific necessities, the outcome of any autonomous history. This production, which can acknowledge no other demand than one it can generate itself, but only in the long term, is oriented to the accumulation of symbolic capital, a kind of “economic” capital denied but recognized, and hence legitimate—a veritable credit, and capable of assuring, under certain conditions and in the long term, “economic” profits. At the other pole, there is the “economic” logic of the literary and artistic industries which, since they make the trade in cultural goods just another trade, confer priority on distribution, on immediate and temporary success, measured for example by the print run, and which are content to adjust themselves to the pre-existing demand of a clientele.20

Warhol’s rejection of the aura is a rejection of the economy of symbolic capital. What he offers instead is a return to the principle of work, which is closer to the “immediate and temporary” demands of the art industry. Warhol’s interest in work, however, attends more closely to the very material nature of production rather than to abstract demands like print runs and distribution. In this sense, Warhol’s understanding of art has more in common with Evan Watkins’s discussion of “work time” in English departments than with traditional analyses of discipline and institution. Watkins argues that the disciplinary structure of English can be studied not only as a collection of ideologies and practices but also as a much more material structure of work: “In this context, it matters less how you were taught Romantic poetry say—what socialization or countersocialization of expectations took place—than what grade you got at the end of the process. Thus so far from an abstraction, labor force seems appropriate enough to designate the activities of a large body of people who in the gross number terms of grades generate over and over, like the intellectual ‘assembly line’ to which it’s often been compared, the discriminations on which economic opportunity in part depends.”21

In *Philosophy*, Warhol implies that his own relentlessly mundane films are ways of exposing the machinery of social performance, the work of everyday life. Warhol explains:

What I was actually trying to do in my early movies was show how people can meet other people and what they can do and what they can say to each other. That was the whole idea: two people getting acquainted. And then when you saw it and you saw the sheer simplicity of it, you learned what it was all about. Those movies showed you how some people act and react with other people. They were like actual sociological “For instance”s. They were like documentaries, and if you thought it could apply to you, it was an example, and if it didn’t apply to you, at least it was a documentary, it could apply to someone you knew and it could clear up some questions you had about them. (48)

The description in this passage of what people “can do” seems to me another way of referring to the work of social performance. Warhol claims that his films achieve a documentary quality by making this work evident. It should be clear that Warhol has nothing in mind that would normally be considered sociological in the sense of providing an average experience. Such definitions of average experience depend heavily on the kinds of disciplinary conventions that we have already noted both Warhol and Walker seek to avoid. Instead the interest here is on the act or the mechanics of the performance. Warhol’s description of *Tub Girls* makes the effort of the performance clear: “In *Tub Girls*, for example, the girls had to take baths with people in tubs, and they learned how to take baths with other people. While we were doing *Tub Girls*. They met in a tub. And the girl would have to carry her tub to the next person she’d have to take a bath with, so she’d put her tub under her arm and carry her tub” (48). Warhol’s interest here is not in some kind of average way of taking baths, nor is the lesson (how to take baths with other people) likely to be of much practical relevance. Instead what seems to be interesting is the effort and mechanics of the task: what kind of tub to use (“We used a clear plastic tub”) and how it is carried from bath to bath.

When Warhol chooses to focus on the work of social performance rather than on the structures that give it shape, he is anticipating the direction of American studies in the last decade. What Warhol does especially well is to link social performance to the objects that circulate within the American imaginary. Both are themes important to contemporary literary criticism,
but the connection between these seem to be inadequately explained outside of Warhol’s interest in work. We can see a general movement over the last decade from an interest in American “ideology” towards an idea of the American imaginary based on social practices. This is the way that Lauren Berlant describes the functioning of the “national symbolic” in Hawthorne’s writing, which works to interpellate the reader into a national subject position; Hawthorne’s project is “reconstructing the individual reader into a communal/national subject.” Berlant describes the national symbolic not just as a set of beliefs but as a set of objects linked to cultural practices: “America’ is an assumed relation, an explication of ongoing collective practices, and also an occasion for exploring what it means that national subjects already share not just a history, or a political allegiance, but a set of forms and the affect that makes these forms meaningful” (4). This interest in the imagined objects of American society is an essential component of Warhol’s interest in the work of performance and the key to the importance of his way of thinking about society. When Simon During discusses the concept of the “civil imaginary,” he captures just this sense of the social whole:

The civil Imaginary is an attempt to order what Steele calls “the uncontrollable jumble of Persons and Things” in that society. Thus its purpose is in part ethical in the Foucauldian sense. It produces representations of manners, taste, behaviour, utterances for imitation by individual lives. Its sphere is secular—that is, not religiously enthusiastic. It is not political (it relies on what Habermas has called the modern split between politics and ethics), it is not dominated by the old caste system, not determined by classical and Renaissance virtu. Its prime value is a sociability which cannot be expressed in terms of moral laws.

During distinguishes between what we would normally think of ideology—abstract principles and moral laws—and the “jumble” of objects that make up society. Such objects order behavior in subtle ways.

Those objects have a degree of materiality that seems to me to be an important supplement to theories of social practice. In this regard, we might place Warhol’s interest in the work of social performance in the context of Judith Butler’s discussion of materiality in gender performance. In particular, Warhol and Butler share an emphasis on the effort that social categories


demand. Butler, after all, opens *Bodies That Matter* by invoking the need for reiterating gender categories:

“[S]ex” not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce—demarcate, circulate, differentiate—the bodies it controls. Thus, “sex” is a regulatory ideal whose materialization is compelled, and this materialization takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices. In other words, “sex” is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materializes “sex” and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms.  

Like Warhol’s *Philosophy*, this passage veers from a simpler and more familiar interest in social norms to attend to the work of performance that they demand. Perhaps more importantly for my analysis of the American imaginary in Warhol’s writing, Butler likewise links this work to materialization. The objects of the social imaginary owe their materiality to this work. Thinking about American culture comprising such objects constantly involved with work reflects the archive rather than a discipline: where the archive emphasizes the work that it promises, the discipline implies a set of definitions and structures. The objects of the social imaginary, which have no existence outside of the social behaviors that constantly materialize them, capture this more sophisticated sense of how American social identity is shaped.

**Accidental Lies and Becoming Fictional**

How does this understanding of the American social imaginary lead to a theory of fictionality? Consider Warhol’s appeal to the “leftover,” which is a point at which the place of objects within a whole social space ultimately raises questions about truth and lying. Warhol begins by noting, “I always like to work on leftovers, doing the leftover things. Things that were discarded, that everybody knew were no good.” Warhol gives an example:

When I see an old Esther Williams movie and a hundred girls are jumping off their swings, I think of what the auditions must have been like and about all the takes where maybe one girl didn’t have the nerve to jump when she was supposed to, and I think about her left over on the swing. So that take of the scene was a leftover on the editing-room floor—an out-take—and the girl was probably a leftover at that point—she was probably fired—so the whole scene is much funnier than the real scene where everything went right, and the girl who didn’t jump is the star of the out-take. (93)

Warhol concludes by connecting this leftover scene to the issue of waste and productivity: “I’m not saying that popular taste is bad so that what’s left over from the bad taste is good: I’m saying that what’s left over is probably bad, but if you can take it and make it good or at least interesting, then you’re not wasting as much as you would otherwise” (93). The “interesting” scene seems to me to echo Warhol’s idea of mechanical, documentary scenes in films like Tub Girls. The leftover reminds us of the work of the original scene—the fact that all the actresses had to perform the scene just right, and that there were many chances to mess up. The outtake leftover, like the monotonous “documentary” about mundane actions, points out the mechanics of everyday performance.

When Warhol raises the issue of productivity and excess he connects his discussion of the leftover to his treatment of social space in Philosophy. One point at which this book explicitly discusses media is when Warhol claims that individuals can extend themselves beyond their own personal space: “Before media there used to be a physical limit on how much space one person could take up by themselves. People, I think, are the only things that know how to take up more space than the space they’re actually in, because with media, you can sit back and still let yourself fill up space on records, in the movies, most exclusively on the telephone and least exclusively on television” (146). Warhol’s description of media as a way of allowing people to take up more space than they would physically reflects his thinking about space as a medium for personal connections. His first chapter, in fact, opens by introducing the issue of this sort of social relation: “At a certain point in my life, in the late 50s, I began to feel that I was picking up problems from the people I knew” (21). He goes on to suggest that “these problems of friends were spreading themselves onto me like germs” (21). This observation becomes the occasion for Warhol to think about his own childhood and his love of solitude. He concludes the story by explaining that he escaped his friends’ problems by buying a television: “I kept the TV on all the time, especially while people were telling me their problems, and the television I found to
be just diverting enough so the problems people told me didn’t really affect me any more. It was like some kind of magic” (24). Media here embody the power of individuals to extend their influence beyond its physical limits, but they also make personal connection seem less real. Television describes a kind of social relationship that lacks the immediacy that so troubles Warhol. Media fill up all available space, making it impossible for the “germs” of friends’ problems to infect Warhol. At the same time, however, Warhol describes the beauty of empty space: “When I look at things, I always see the space they occupy. I always want the space to reappear, to make a comeback, because it’s lost space when there’s something in it. If I see a chair in a beautiful space, no matter how beautiful the chair is, it can never be as beautiful to me as the plain space” (144). Warhol concludes that “[e]verything in your closet should have an expiration date on it the way milk and bread and magazines and newspapers do, and once something passes its expiration date, you should throw it out” (145). Warhol understands his own artistic practice as filling space: “An artist is somebody who produces things that people don’t need to have but that he—for some reason—thinks it would be a good idea to give them” (144). Warhol goes on to state the paradox more directly: “So on the one hand I really believe in empty spaces, but on the other hand, because I’m still making some art, I’m still making junk for people to put in their spaces that I believe should be empty” (144). Warhol’s economy of artistic production as creating objects that fill up space is obviously connected to his understanding of the leftover as something recycled; reusing leftovers seems to be a way of decreasing the space used up by his art.

Warhol suggests that space must either be empty or uncomfortably full. Ironically, space can seem empty despite being filled with media images so long as those images create the feeling of the flat uniformity that he suggests helped him escape the “germs” of his friends problems. Warhol associates uniformity with mass-produced objects like Coca-Cola. Slavoj Žižek has remarked about the curious immateriality of a product like Coke, since, it is “surplus-enjoyment personified”: “It is no surprise that Coke was first introduced as a medicine—its strange taste does not seem to provide any particular satisfaction; it is not directly pleasing and endearing; however, it is precisely as such, as transcending any immediate use-value . . . that Coke functions as a direct embodiment of ‘it’: of the pure surplus of enjoyment over standard satisfactions.” Žižek goes on to make this connection to materiality explicit: “when, some years ago, the advertising slogan for Coke

was ‘Coke is it!’ we should note its thorough ambiguity: ‘that’s it’ precisely in so far as that’s never actually it, precisely in so far as every satisfaction opens up a gap of ‘I want more!’” (22). Warhol is similarly interested in the nature of the real within American social space. Warhol remarks, “What’s great about this country is that America started the tradition where the richest consumers buy essentially the same things as the poorest. You can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you can know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke, too. A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better Coke than the one the bum on the corner is drinking” (100–101). America is a place of uniformity, in which mass articles are identical. This uniformity produces a space that appears uncluttered.

In evoking such abstract, consumerist space, Warhol describes a landscape that will be familiar from Baudrillardian postmodernism. Warhol’s embrace of flat space is not a symptom so much as a response to the postmodern media environment. Warhol’s fondness for television and his interest in the leftover seem to inoculate him against the “germs” of others’ problems but in very different ways. Both work to ease the conflict between fantasy and social work or performance. In television, this resolution is a matter of simply anaesthetizing performance—allowing the media to distract us from the roles that we perform. Leftover art, conversely, foregrounds the conflict between work and fantasy. One of Warhol’s goals both in Philosophy as well as in his painting and filmmaking is revealing what he calls the “machinery” of media. In thinking about his own death in the context of full and empty spaces, Warhol remarks, “The worst thing that could happen to you after the end of your time would be to be embalmed and laid up in a pyramid. I’m repulsed when I think about the Egyptians taking each organ and embalming it separately in its own receptacle. I want my machinery to disappear” (113). The disappearance of machinery is linked in Warhol’s discussion to the reuse of leftover materials; thus, exploiting the unused clears space. Using leftover materials and clearing space works against the flat uniformity of contemporary media, but in the process it reveals at least for a time the very personal “machinery” of individual lives. Leftovers, in other words, for all that they aspire to empty space, threaten to entangle us back into the individual connections that contain the “germs” of others’ problems.

There is a great deal of similarity between Warhol’s appeal to the leftover and Walker’s search for the archive. Both rely on disorganized and neglected materials for new artistic work, and both must reject standard artistic practices whose rules dictate that these materials should be ignored. The institutional neglect of these materials means that art based on the leftover will always seem to be a kind of misunderstanding, a mistake. A few pages after his discussion of the leftover Warhol claims that he likes to be misunderstood by the people he works with: “Something that I look for in an associate is a certain amount of misunderstanding of what I’m trying to do” (99). Warhol explains: “If people never misunderstand you, and if they do everything exactly the way you tell them to, they’re just transmitters of your ideas, and you get bored with that. But when you work with people who misunderstand you, instead of getting transmissions you get transmutations, and that’s much more interesting in the long run” (99). Warhol’s language in this passage picks up on metaphors of media. A bad associate is one who functions essentially like a medium in much the same way that modern media allow individuals to take up more space than they could physically. In misunderstanding, however, this logic of space and the media is transformed; associates are not simply ways of allowing Warhol to extend himself in space. The use of the leftover, likewise, makes sense according to such a logic. While a traditional artist extends him- or herself into space by creating things that people don’t want but that the artist thinks they should have, an artist of the leftover works with already existing materials. Such leftovers likewise seem to work by transmutation; as Warhol remarks, a buffoon of the original scene is the star of the outtake. Warhol is describing something similar to the way that Walker manipulates the situation to misrepresent herself to those that she visits, as when she allows the claim that “as far as I’m concerned, she is my aunt—and that of all black people as well” to be taken literally by the people that she meets. Both willfully ignore the original context of the statement—the way that Walker’s audience will understand her claim to be Hurston’s niece—and instead put it to some new use. These lies, we should note, are quite clearly the result of an intentional effort—work—on the part of both Walker and Warhol. Indeed, accidental misuse becomes possible for Warhol only in the context of artistic production, where he searches for material for new projects rather than in everyday viewing. Warhol is not interested in misunderstanding by those who view or buy his art as much as misunderstandings by those who are helping him to make it. Likewise, Walker’s lies emerge in the course of her investigation as she adopts an identity that explains her task. The fanciful explanation that Hurston is the aunt “of all black people” is made possible only because the more literal (but untrue)
explanation of her relationship is accepted by her interviewees to explain the job that she has undertaken.

These “accidental” interventions into an archive of neglected material occur on the boundary of artistic activity. Indeed, both Walker and Warhol self-consciously adopt a marginal position in relation to their subject matter and legitimate practices. In particular, Warhol’s leftover art stands on the very edge of these institutions, marking the point at which we can see those institutions and their expectations at work. This is why a film like *Tub Girls* seems to be a misunderstanding of the conventions of the documentary. In the introduction I have suggested that the issue of fictionality reveals the functioning of disciplines and institutional boundaries. In Warhol’s accidental lies we have the clearest articulation yet of the way that these fictions can point back to these boundaries, making them seem contingent and always susceptible to misunderstanding. Warhol’s leftover art, in other words, is always on the cusp of entering into convention, much as Walker’s discovered archive marks the point at which a field of study is being defined for the future. Both writers describe what we could call, to adopt a Deleuzian formulation, the *becoming-fictional* of the work, the point at which something mechanical begins to give way to a future where fiction can be used more directly.

The example in Warhol makes this point clearly: the mistake (the girl who didn’t jump) simply tells a different story. It is only in the comparison between the legitimate and illegitimate forms of artistic work that we can see what he has done to these leftovers. Indeed, it is only in the gap between one narrative and the other that the archive is visible at all.

I would suggest that the focus on objects that I have noted in Warhol is already a step towards a theory of *becoming-fictional*, and that this understanding of fictionality is contained—although not really articulated by critics—in the concept of the social imaginary. This position of *becoming-fictional* means that fiction is just on the cusp of emerging into an acceptable

27. Although Deleuze and Guattari’s description of “becoming” is well known and captures the sense of a threshold phenomenon, the instability that they associate with such becoming is not something that I want to emphasize here. Thus in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (trans. Brian Massumi [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987]) Deleuze and Guattari describe interest in becoming as marking “the thresholds through which an idea passes, the journeys it takes that change its nature or object” (235) but also suggest that becoming involves a multiplicity whose transformation is ongoing: “Since its variations and dimensions are immanent to it, it amounts to the same thing to say that each multiplicity is already composed of heterogeneous terms in symbiosis, and that a multiplicity is continually transforming itself into a sting of other multiplicities, according to its thresholds and doors” (249). In the case of Warhol and Walker, however, I have described more an interest in one particular, fixed threshold, whose function as a transition point does specific institutional work rather than giving way to an endless series of new multiplicities.
discourse and that we can see the mechanical effort and tenuous boundaries that are exposed in the process. When Benedict Anderson refers to “imagined communities” in his influential book of the same name, he is obviously drawing on a notion of the fictional; in fact, many of his principal examples of the imagined community are provided by novels. For him, what makes a community “imagined” is that there are no objective reasons for the connections between individuals. Describing the modern newspaper, Anderson remarks, “Why are these events so juxtaposed? What connects them to each other? Not sheer caprice. Yet obviously most of them happen independently, without the actors being aware of each other or of what the others are up to. The arbitrariness of their inclusion and juxtaposition (a later edition will substitute a baseball triumph for Mitterrand) shows that the linkage between them is imagined.”

The imagined connections that make up the nation transcend causal or strictly logical linkages; they are always on the cusp of capriciousness, and always retain a haze of appearing to be excessive, unnecessary, and on some level arbitrary. Some postcolonial critics have resisted Anderson’s account of the modern nation as based on too neat and stable an understanding of a horizontal national space. Homi Bhabha’s attention to crossing national borders and to national margins in “DissemiNation” is probably the best known of these critiques. In place of Anderson’s image of the defined nation, Bhabha offers an image of constant and incomplete national writing in the concept of the performative:

The performative intervenes in the sovereignty of the nation’s self-genera-
tion by casting a shadow between the people as “image” and its signification as a differentiating sign of Self, distinct from the Other or the Outside. In place of the polarity of a prefigurative self-generating nation itself and extrinsic Other nations, the performative introduces a temporality of the “in-between” through the “gap” or “emptiness” of the signifier and that punctuates linguistic difference. The boundary that marks the nation’s selfhood interrupts the self-generating time of national production with a space of representation that threatens binary division with its difference.

Although Bhabha’s emphasis on boundaries and self-division certainly is a change in tone from Anderson’s account, even there we can see an emphasis on the rituals of daily citizenship embodied in the reading of the fictional

newspaper. Bhabha’s description of the performative clearly echoes Warhol’s leftover art. Both appear to be excessive and unnecessary—accidental. The performative for Bhabha is precisely what is necessary to the nation but does not simply go without saying. It is on the boundary between social order and individual action. In this regard, it will remind us of Warhol’s description of a social space that becomes personalized when we break from uniform media objects to emphasize the leftover. Both represent the activity of imagining on the boundary between the acceptable and the misunderstood; in other words, both are instances of becoming-fictional.

In treating the social imaginary as a fiction just on the cusp of emerging, then, Warhol is emphasizing the effort that goes into producing it; it is not a social structure so much as a constantly produced ontology. As Warhol has suggested, the stuff of American society is always the basis upon which the work of social performance is accomplished. Warhol’s interest in the objects of the American imaginary in one sense simply exposes the institutional boundaries that define art and social conventions. But these objects also have a materiality that constantly reasserts itself. This is why the physical journey to Hurston’s gravesite, and the very concrete act of erecting a gravestone, is central to her story of the discovery of a folkloric archive; this archive, she claims, will then make her own literary writing possible. Both are acts that direct us back to the raw “stuff” of this folklore. Such materiality is, it seems to me, the very basis of the archive, which always seems to be more physical than the disciplines that spring up around it. Recognizing this materiality helps us to understand why the lie that is the basis of the journey is so problematic for her essay. Her quest for the archival point is the attempt to create the condition of fiction. It is a point of becoming-fictional. That is, the archive is a point that balances between a space outside of the institutions of writing and the future, productive deploying of the fictional. We see much the same thing in Warhol, where the mechanical lie points back to the work of making art possible. Warhol’s Philosophy is not an artistic theory built on institutional roles, nor is it a kind of Duchampian parody of the art world. It is, instead, an articulation of the way that conditions are opened up for artistic production.

Walker and Warhol capture the understanding of fictionality implicit but unspoken by the Heath and critics working under the banner of the construction of an archive of writing by those excluded from more traditional canons. This threshold position and gesture towards the future is one that recurs frequently in recent work on American culture. In the collection The Futures of American Studies (2002), Donald Pease and Robyn Wiegman foreground the issue of futurity by starting from a 1979 essay that foretells
the future of American studies: “Insofar as the essays here deliver the future mutations of American studies from a past mode of representation in which it was incubating, they transform the defensive strategies expressive of Wise’s future fears into the portals through which alternative futures will have entered American studies.”

Walker, likewise, has shown us that creating an archive is a way of promising a future; such archives balance themselves on the cusp between origin and discipline. Derrida captures this balance when he describes the archive as a mechanical chore. The “impression” of the archive is technical, mechanical; it is, he says, “that re-producible, iterable, and conservative production of memory . . . that objectivizable storage called the archive.”

If modern nations in some sense have always depended on this peculiar understanding of becoming-fictional, it is only as this model for fictionality has been adopted by both critics and writers that we can speak about it becoming one of the strands of contemporary fictionality.
