

AGAINST A “SYSTEM OF SOOTHING”:
POE’S DEVIANCE

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In many ways, Edgar Allan Poe is a reader's writer. His grotesque thrills provide a kind of pandering titillation that scholarly investigation often resists. Poe was not well-loved by many of his contemporary writers, nor by academics today; even scholars who clearly admire his work often express an underlying discomfort with either the work, his image, or the extant evidence of his support for institutions like slavery. Denying or eliding the conservative politics expressed in his imaginative work and his correspondence would be both irresponsible and incorrect. But the material is just too complex to abandon the parallel project of unearthing its countercultural scripts.

Poe's characters move through space in ways that radically question—and conceptually redefine—American violence. His textual corpus is insistently concerned about orders, spaces, and structures, and the taxonomic identifications they confer and protect. I see Poe's work as providing a kind of kinetic blueprint for moving in the world; or an interactive map: one that expresses spatial demarcations and offers the subject ideas for moving entirely beyond those demarcations. For Poe, the world's map must eventually be abandoned. In fact, in *Eureka* (1848), he argues for this abandonment as a cosmological inevitability. This paper explores the possibility of extrapolating Poe's kinetic cartography into a methodology that shows subjects how to move out of spaces that enclose them.

A substantial amount of scholarship on Poe is, in fact, implicitly or explicitly concerned with the way space and structure operates in his tales, poems, and criticism. Hubert Zapf writes that "Poe's texts characteristically stage the tensions between order and chaos" (65), citing the "dialectic of construction and destruction...[that] is the central aesthetic operation" of his work. John T. Irwin sees the effort at "understanding how an apparently exitless enclosure may be exited" (143) as part of Poe's larger thematic project, especially citing his use of locked rooms,

labyrinths, and other imprisoning spaces. Gerhard Hoffman explores “Poe’s use of setting as a spatial symbol” (1) that engenders a “mutual relationship between space and dweller” (2). Colin (Joan) Dayan recognizes in Poe “an exaggerated attachment to form and structure” (“Poetry” 414). Robert L. Carringer notes that in Poe “space is unstable” and identifies in his tales a “threat of being confronted with diminishing space” (21). Douglas Anderson sees space in Poe configured as “complex structures of containment” (110) wherein “vessels” (ships, bodies, rooms) harbor “nested messages” (111) that ever recede into themselves; Anderson doesn’t believe that Poe’s world ever stops *containing*. Maurice J. Bennett describes in Poe a desire for a “‘habitable’ space” (262) that “stands as a formal antithesis to the chaos of human experience” (265) and argues that order’s restoration represents victory in Poe’s tales (267); here Bennett misses the unresolved tension that Poe maintains between order and chaos, even as he recognizes the crucial place they occupy. In his study of *Eureka* W.C. Harris writes that “if structure is itself given to hegemony, then the only way to actualize equality is to annihilate structure altogether” (22); in this way Harris prefigures my own argument that Poe’s texts seek to disappear structures entirely rather than simply explore their effects. Laura Saltz argues that evasion and concealment comprise the underlying formal structure of “The Mystery of Marie Rôget” (240), linking space and structure to movement, as this paper does. In his study of architecture in Poe’s tales, Richard Wilbur writes of the Usher mansion that “it remains standing only because the atmosphere of Usher’s domain is perfectly motionless and dead” (107)—also linking space with movement and stasis.¹

While very little scholarship directly links Poe with the history of taxonomies, many critics implicitly identify the taxonomic obsession in his work.² Poe’s tales employ an epistemological claim reminiscent of Michel Foucault’s: that knowledge is constituted through

deviance from taxonomic labels. “It is as a convict, as a point of application for punitive mechanisms,” writes Foucault, “that the offender is constituted himself as the object of possible knowledge” (*DP* 251). For Foucault, nineteenth-century knowledge arises from the apprehension of abnormality, after which a theory of normality can be scripted, and normalized subjects can be placed into taxonomy’s appropriate boxes.

In “The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, and Derrida”³ Barbara Johnson joins Foucault in her assertion that “knowledge itself is based on the imposition of definable objective frontiers and outlines whose possibility and/or justifiability are...being put into question. If ‘comprehension’ is the framing of something whose limits are undeterminable, how can we know what we are comprehending?” She continues by noting “the play on the spatial and the criminal senses of the word *frame*” (357). Johnson’s notions are important for a reading of Poe that sees his texts as dissolving the categories that are the foundations for knowledge, and her link between criminality and spatial framing is one that plays out in this study as well. Foucault’s convicts provide a model through which to read Poe’s delinquents and deviants: people to whom “punitive mechanisms” are applied. Or rather, the attempt to apply is present, though Poe’s characters manage to resist and refuse it. They choose flight, thus avoiding absorption into the spaces that seek to organize them. Movement itself becomes the way to suspend or discard the taxonomic project, which is by definition a project of stilling. Movement, then, becomes inherently *deviant*, inherently criminal, to a social fabric that depends on taxonomies for the justification of its violence.⁴

I use the term “deviance” to describe Poe’s negotiation of taxonomic space, conferring to the term a special status due to its double valence as both criminality and movement that tends or deflects from a standard or a fixed point. In Poe, the deviant occupies a privileged position.

Twisted characters and horrifying acts litter his corpus: dubiously sane individuals commit gruesome murders and dismembered bodies haunt incestuous and pedophilic characters. Perhaps what sets Poe apart from his American contemporaries is the weird amorality—the seeming relish and delight—that accompanies his spatial unmapping. His resistance to the cartographic and navigational limits imposed on bodies is always—it must be—figured as criminality. Poe’s epistemological stance is dependent upon the criminality of the deviant, a kind of First Mover who sets the universe’s diffusion in motion and maintains its expansion, “*forcing* the originally and therefore normally *One* into the abnormal condition of *Many*” (Poe, *Eureka*, 1278). It is only the normality of the noncriminal that remains stable and still; criminality is always in process, in flux—moving—in order to elude the normalizing discourses that chase it.

Much scholarship has defined Poe’s criminality as ideologically conservative, asserting that the violence he renders against the body—especially socially marginalized bodies—reinforces a social order dependent upon the violent subjugation of women and enslaved people. Teresa Goddu, for example, makes this point in *Gothic America*, noting that “the gothic can remain continuous with official narratives, even when it apparently contradicts them” (2). I agree with Goddu’s claim, as I imagine most sensitive and engaged criticism would. But I maintain that, *regardless* of official narratives with which Poe’s texts might be continuous, they are *also* capable of dissolving the categories on which the social structure is based. Poe’s deviants attack the norms of civil and social life in the nineteenth century. Their criminality is by definition extrasocial: it must stand outside the social order to be able to define itself. The veneer of conservatism on the surface of the prose reveals, upon scrutiny, characters who are deeply disturbed by the social order. In Poe, what looks like embrace is actually embrasure: perpetual

spaces erected between objects and the words that name them; repetitions that devolve, upon endless reiteration, into the nonsense at their core.

In order to diagram the mechanics of this deviance, I turn to a tale that has received less scholarly attention than other Poe works: “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether” (1845). In “Tarr and Fether,” a narrator visits an asylum where the inmates have locked up their keepers and are running the show. The asylum’s ostensible superintendent has gained a reputation for his “system of soothing,” a newfangled style of caretaking in which the inmates freely roam the grounds, having been acculturated to the belief that they are sane. At the end of the tale, the original keepers who have been locked away break out of their containment and crash the party.

“Tarr and Fether” can seem simplistically arch, coming off as one of Poe’s more cutesy attempts at harmless discombobulation and snide critique. “When a madman appears *thoroughly* sane, indeed,” warns the asylum’s superintendent, “it is high time to put him in a straight jacket” (713). *Heh heh*, a reader might think, *I get it*. The lure of reading the story as just another switcheroo can seem immense, and might account for the lack of critical attention it has received. If the tale is read only as a role-reversal, its potential for radical political intervention fizzles due to the reification of the very binaries it seeks to destabilize. How can the inmates be said to bust open taxonomies when they appear to simply reinstate the very disciplinary control to which insanity and criminality are subjected?

But difficulties that immediately arise from the superintendent’s seemingly facile joke can help direct a more nuanced analysis of the tale. Its events confirm a slim likelihood of correspondence between someone’s appearance as insane and the actual status of their sanity. The tale provides no stable iteration of sanity for comparison; each character is a subjective

barometer, creating multiple definitions of sanity, like particles in space that are constantly repositioning. In the world of “Tarr and Fether,” it is never clear on whom the straightjacket should be placed.

The tale asks readers to become uncomfortable with their definitions of sanity and insanity by questioning the binary logic that defines social subjects. If the inmates can take care of themselves, are they really insane? Are the properties ascribed to insanity based on inherent and immutable truths, or are they socially constructed and therefore malleable? As Poe warns in his cosmological work *Eureka*, “Being mutable, the ‘truths’ which grow out of [axioms] are necessarily mutable too; or, in other words, are never to be positively depended on as truths at all” (1303). The socially-constructed designations of sanity and insanity can be read as one of Poe’s “axioms” out of which a false idea of certainty arises.

At the opening of “Tarr and Fether” the narrator is taking a leisurely ride through the countryside with a companion, “on a tour through the extreme Southern provinces of France” (699). Critics of nineteenth-century American literature will immediately recognize Poe’s location as a veil for the American south, a geographical trope that will be invoked again in the tale when the narrator remarks, “I remember having been informed, in Paris, that the southern provincialists were a particularly eccentric people” (704).⁵ Poe makes the issue local and palpable when he embeds his critique of social and legal practices in the American south. But the simultaneous location of the story at some remove, in France, permits a reading of the tale as a more generally applicable critique of social structures, not locatable in any specific national border because universally pervasive. The layering of locations provides an opportunity to think about Poe’s tale as working in a number of shifting registers, covering the globe.

The narrator becomes curious about the famous asylum he spies in the distance, and decides to visit it in order to see for himself the “system of soothing” invented and implemented by its superintendent, Monsieur Maillard. The narrator expresses doubt as to whether he will be allowed on the grounds unannounced. His traveling companion, who has been previously introduced to the superintendent, decides to provide the introduction.

This introduction, however, is never narrated; the narrator sees “the visage of a man peering through” the asylum’s gate, who then “accosted my companion by name” (700). Though no introductions are ever textually spoken, the narrator satisfies himself that the man is Monsieur Maillard, partially based on his appearance as a “portly, fine-looking gentleman of the old school, with a polished manner, and a certain air of gravity, dignity, and authority” (700). This ambiguous introduction signals the unreliability of empirical perception that shrouds the tale. Upon the superintendent’s performance of breeding, the narrator immediately slots him into the ranks of sanity, a move the narrator will repeat again despite Maillard’s later injunction to beware of appearances. In this way, the (non)narration keeps categorical logics forever suspended in a game that involves the narrator, the other characters, *and* the reader, all of whom form a triad that cooperatively keeps taxonomic labels from settling onto the text. This triadic relationship emerges as another mode of movement, or deviance, employed through Poe’s texts, like a game of telephone or volleyball where objects remain “up in the air” or “in play,” and information might at any point become garbled as it progresses through the text. Importantly, if information is vulnerable enough to be garbled, it can’t be said to naturally or self-evidently *inhere*; any dictum can be rendered mutable; any ledger illegible.

The narrator is ushered into an explicitly *civilized* parlor of “refined taste” containing “many books, drawings, pots of flowers, and musical instruments” (700), replete with a “smart

footman in livery” (701). The narrator’s eye locates all the signs of culture, and again implicitly conflates culture with sanity. He encounters a beautiful young woman at the parlor’s piano but, because he has heard that the inmates are left to freely roam the asylum, he “cannot be sure that she was sane” (700). He searches her countenance but finds no clue to the status of her mental condition, save the “certain restless brilliancy about her eyes” (700) which he tentatively ascribes to possible insanity. She “replied in a perfectly rational manner” (700) to the narrator, but he remains uncertain of her sanity until Maillard informs him that she is his niece. Significantly, Maillard does not directly confirm the niece’s sanity, but only infers it, offering the assurance of genealogical relation as a stand-in for the assurance of sanity. The narrator’s reliance on ambivalent visual data and codes of behavior and performance produce anxiety around his effort to identify the subjects before him, and that anxiety is kept in play by readers who have also been activated to question the niece’s sanity.

Maillard’s niece is described by the narrator to be “excessively, although to my taste, not unpleasingly pale” (700), signaling her compatriotism with other Poe ladies of tenuous vitality. While Maillard’s niece will not die and revive several times, like Ligeia and other of Poe’s half-dead corpses, she does serve as the initial signifier for the role that “pale” bodies play in his corpus: they destabilize binaries and boundaries through their permeability.⁶ The seasoned Poe reader will recognize the niece as a character in whose body the instability of taxonomy will play out. But for the narrator, the niece’s appearance is illegible; thus, for him, her psychological status remains in flux between the two possible poles of sanity and insanity. She inhabits an anatomically impossible space; the clues that emerge from her body—the pale countenance, the bright eyes, the rational conversation, the piano aria—recall multiple taxonomic categories for the narrator and so fail to fix her in place. She successfully eludes identification in this instance,

which amounts to a deferral of identification in the scope of the tale; she will eventually become “known” as insane to the narrator, but by the time she can be identified as insane, the sanity/insanity binary has been so destabilized that none of the characters—including the narrator—can confidently utilize its signifying codes for disciplinary classification.

The niece’s unknowability branches out to encompass the asylum’s entire population. Maillard invites the narrator to a dinner in the asylum’s formal dining room attended by almost thirty guests, all who appear to be Maillard’s friends. Before dinner Maillard warns the narrator that “the time will arrive when you will learn to judge for yourself what is going on in the world, without trusting to the gossip of others. Believe nothing you hear, and only one half of what you see” (703). Maillard’s injunction anticipates the complete dissolution of morphologies—organic and linguistic—that the narrator’s unreliable sense data makes possible; his warning is even more remarkable because the narrator will fail to heed it. To the narrator, the dinner guests are “*apparently*, people of rank—certainly of high breeding” (703, italics mine)—signifiers of culture and, thus, sanity. But he cannot seamlessly read their ostentatious or anachronistic clothing into the narrative of their comportment—the niece’s “hoop and farthingale, with high-heeled shoes, and a dirty cap of Brussels lace” (704) is one example of the strange combinations he encounters. The incompatibility of the guest’s appearances and behaviors further suspends the narrator’s attempts to pin their identities in place.

As the dinner commences, the narrator discovers that “the topic of lunacy was, much to my surprise, a favorite one with all present” (705). During the dinner conversation each guest describes an inmate who used to reside at the asylum, and then physically mimics that description:

“[W]e had here, not long ago, a person who had taken it into his head that he was a donkey—which, allegorically speaking, you will say, was quite true. He was a troublesome patient; and we had much ado to keep him *within bounds*. For a long time he would eat nothing but thistles; but of this idea we soon cured him by insisting upon his eating nothing else. Then he was perpetually kicking out his heels—so—so—”

“Mr. De Kock! I will thank you to behave yourself!” here interrupted an old lady, who sat next to the speaker. “Please keep your feet to yourself!” (706, italics mine)

Mr. De Kock’s rhetoric of failed boundaries can be applied to the other guests. Each guest, in turn, acts out the peccadilloes of madness attributed to a former inmate, and is then interrupted by another guest who acts out a different former inmate’s behaviors. In mimicking previous residents of the asylum, the dinner guests echo an index of symptoms ascribed to insanity. But these acts of repetition fail to fix those behaviors to any single person or condition. The codes of insanity shadow themselves through the suggestion of something that was once present in an original and embodied state but cannot be fully recovered. The reiteration of insanity is transported into the contemporary present space of the dining room, but also always refers back to the imagined location and time of the original production of these behaviors.⁷ This temporal circuit takes up space in the same way that each repetition takes up a new space, moving from itself to the next copy of itself, never quite identical and never still.

Interrupting the guests’ discourse is Maillard, who continually pushes strange dishes—“rabbit *au-chât*, for example—upon the narrator. A band of “seven or eight people with fiddles,

fifes, trombones, and a drum” interrupts the whole company “at intervals” (705) during the meal, and the cacophony is punctuated by intermittent offstage howls, which Maillard explains as the howls of asylum inmates locked in their cells under his new “system of exclusion.” The narrator is bewildered by the experience and, after yet another guest rehearses the theatrics of insanity, he exclaims to Maillard:

“You astonish me!” said I; and I looked inquisitively at Monsieur Maillard.

“Ha! ha! ha!” said that gentleman—“he! he! he!—hi! hi! hi!—ho! ho! ho!—hu! hu! hu!—very good indeed! You must not be astonished, *mon ami*; our friend here is a wit—a *drôle*—you must not understand him to the letter.” (708)

This is an absolutely bizarre moment in the text, characterized by its nonsense. The denuded vowel sounds emitted by the superintendent signal a breakdown of morphological meaning that occurs on the level of language; each vowel is orated but not articulated. The individual letters of each vowel unmoor from the taxonomic box of the word, slipping from the superintendent’s mouth only to bump against exclamatory punctuating marks. Language, reveals Maillard, is just another appearance; it mustn’t be held to a standard of representing itself “to the letter.” The repeated vowel sounds stand for all of the stymieing repetitive language and behavior emitted by the guests; their quacks and kicks do not represent the former inmates “to the letter” any more than they represent insanity itself.⁸

Of course, as the narrator soon discovers, those quacks and kicks don’t represent the former inmates, either. He finally suspects that the guests, in acting out the behaviors of insanity

attributed to someone else, might actually be acting out themselves. He observes of one of the guests: “I was much astonished to hear [her] addressed as Madame Joyeuse, after the description of Madame Joyeuse she had just given” (709). This astonishment is repeated when Maillard’s niece launches into a description of one Eugénie Salsafette, “who thought the ordinary mode of habiliment indecent, and wished to dress herself, always, by getting outside of her clothes” (709); the guests then scream for “Mam’selle Salsafette” to put her clothes back on as the niece begins to disrobe, inferring that she is the Salsafette she mimics. As Shawn Rosenheim argues about Freud’s Wolf Man and the Dupin tales, it is “an essential but impossible task to say whether the words name a real event or whether in themselves they produce the symptoms they are meant to explain” (156). The guests’ repetitions work similarly for the narrator: the words might name the “real event” of their bodies, the “real event” of past bodies, or just the “symptoms” of insanity they act out. The ability to assign to these bodies attributes that indicate or correspond to their essential identity is here frustrated; the names do not quite adhere to their bearers, as they refer both to the present guests and to past guests, half imaginary but half iterated in the present bodies. The urge for Eugénie to get “outside of” her clothes echoes the tale’s fundamental trope of categorical taxonomies—manifested as buildings and bodies and words—that bind to the subject and must be shed.

The guests are suddenly interrupted by “a series of loud screams, or yells, from some portion of the main body of the chateau” (709). The narrator is confused by the yells, but he finds the reaction of the guests completely pitiable:

They all grew as pale as so many corpses, and, shrinking within their seats, sat quivering and gibbering with terror, and listening for a repetition of the sound. It

came again—louder and seemingly nearer—and then a third time *very* loud, and then a fourth time with a vigor evidently diminished. At this apparent dying away of the noise, the spirits of the company were immediately regained, and all was life and anecdote as before. (710)

Now all the guests, not just Eugénie, have become the pale bodies that, for Poe, do the work of disarticulation. The sounds from which the guests shrink are like the terrifying photographic negatives to their own festivities: repeated sounds that never materialize into a connective syntax. The narrator, as usual, is preoccupied with appearance: for him, the howls *appear, seem*, and possess the capacity for *evidence*. The use of “anecdote” feels important here; with its usage, the narrator describes the guests as summaries or accounts of themselves, displacing their speech and behavior away from the immediate physicality of their bodies and truncating the experience of the dinner into a “story” of itself. This characterization of the dinner and its guests as anecdotal foregrounds language and appearance as labile; words and behaviors are *summaries* of the bodies to which they are assigned, rather than transparent *representations*—or, perhaps, summaries *are* representations, never essences.⁹

The narrator’s use of “anecdote” can also be read in the mode of deviation or devious movement: it pulls the guests away from their bodies, extracting their behavior and rearranging or summarizing it *simultaneous* to its occurrence. A space opens here and a revolution is undertaken: the extraction of language or apparent behaviors from the guest’s bodies and the simultaneous replacement of altered language back onto the bodies from which it originated instills a kind of constantly whirring mechanism into the text and into the narrator’s mode of analysis.¹⁰

This is also the first time in the story that the threat of violence becomes palpable. Whoever or whatever produces the noises inspires genuine, debilitating terror in the guests. A whole history, then, is invisible to the narrator but encoded in the guests' reactions. The threat of the anonymous screams is the threat of boundaries imminently dissolving; the guests fear the screams because their issuers might not stay in their contained space; they have the power to enter the dining room and disrupt whatever world Maillard and the guests have created. This is, at the very least, the threat of *structural* violence: walls and foundations that might not hold.¹¹ If Poe's texts advocate the exposure of the taxonomic project as violent, and then subsequently seek to dissolve the structures of taxonomies, then the screamers behind the wall might be the "good guys," with their threat to explode the structures that contain them. But, clearly, the story also asks us to root for the guests as exterminators of taxonomy. In this way, Poe's text confuses the discrete conferral of criminality; *everyone*, the story seems to claim, must move as a deviant in order to break through the paradigms that structure social subjects. I hesitate to say it, but I believe that Poe's stories argue for criminality and violence *as* revolutionary.

I don't mean to suggest that Poe's violations aren't creepy—the wrenching of Berenice's teeth from her mouth, or the dismemberment of the L'Esplanaye women, could turn anyone's stomach, especially from the inference of sexual violence. We needn't accept Poe's *version* of the violations; his methodology might prove more useful to different circumstances entirely. What I do mean to suggest is that Poe helps direct readers to identify the *concept* of violation as importantly antithetical to the dovetailed carpentry of social orders: only a boundary, only a box, only a wall can be said to be violated. As Poe argues through *Eureka's* borderless oneness and unity, the absence of taxonomies is achieved through structural violence.

But I digress (a devious movement).¹² Back in the dining room, the unnerved narrator presses Maillard for explanations of the events he observes. Maillard assures the narrator that the screamers are just the asylum's inmates, who formerly roamed the grounds freely but have since been locked away under his new "system of exclusion." Maillard explains that these inmates are all men—"stout fellows"—to which the narrator expresses surprise, having been under the impression that "the majority of lunatics were of the gentler sex" (710)—a sex to which, of course, the majority of the dinner guests belong. In lieu of further explanation, Maillard and the guests just echo themselves back to the narrator, in word and deed, enacting a spiraling multiplication of language through their continuous repetitions:

"Some time ago, there were about twenty-seven patients here; and, of that number, no less than eighteen were women; but, lately, matters have changed very much, as you see."

"Yes—have changed very much, as you see," here interrupted the gentleman who had broken the shins of Ma'mselle Laplace.

"Yes—have changed very much as you see!" chimed in the whole company at once. (710)

But the narrator doesn't "see" any change to which the guests refer, because that change is beyond his scope, having ostensibly occurred before his arrival at the asylum; these changes are safely stowed in another location—unless they can "break" the dining room's "walls." Maillard's early injunction to the narrator to trust his own sense data begins to look like a strategy of

deviation, a way for Maillard to establish distance between himself and the narrator, and to move his guests—his charges—away from the narrator’s taxonomic gaze.

In response, the narrator explicitly communicates to Maillard his diagnosis of the guests as insane. Maillard denies each charge. In rejoinder to each of Maillard’s denials, the narrator begins repeating *himself*. Four consecutive times, after the narrator has questioned a guest’s sanity and Maillard has countered him, the narrator replies, “‘To be sure,’ said I—‘to be sure’” (711). Colloquially, this phrase might read as, “Oh, yes, absolutely, of course,” and if read in such a way it would act as the narrator’s validation of Maillard’s sanity, his capacity to correctly judge the guests. But the repeated iteration of *sureness* also insists on the narrator’s own taxonomic sanity—he is sure, like Maillard, that categorical logic is being upheld—while simultaneously imprinting the guests with legibility—he is sure of the guests’ sanity. The narrator’s repetitions destabilize his secure identity as sane, since he has now adopted the reiterative practices of insanity.¹³ But those repetitions also bring him closer to the language of the guests and therefore potentially closer to decoding them and rendering them perfectly legible and fixed in a stasis that refers back to and reassures his own static sanity: if the guests can be stilled into their category, then the narrator can remain at a polar opposition.¹⁴

Following a series of yells now very close to the dining room, “it became evident that some persons outside were endeavoring to gain entrance into the room. The door was beaten with what appeared to be a sledge-hammer, and the shutters were wrenched and shaken with prodigious violence” (715). The screamers—*evidently*, of course, in the narrator’s unchanging vocabulary—have breached the dining room. In the scene that ensues, the guests, who are now understood by the reader to have always actually been the original inmates of the asylum, shift

from acting themselves out to representing themselves in metonym,¹⁵ by way of the chief trait of their condition.¹⁶

Meantime, upon the dining table, among the bottles and glasses, leaped the gentleman, who, with such difficulty, had been restrained from leaping there before. . . . At the same moment, the man with the tee-totum predilections, set himself to spinning around the apartment, with immense energy, and with arms outstretched at right angles with his body; so that he had all the air of a tee-totum in fact, and knocked every body down that happened to get in his way. And now, too, hearing an incredible popping and fizzing of champagne, I discovered at length, that it proceeded from the person who performed the bottle of that delicate drink during dinner. And then, again, the frog man croaked away as if the salvation of his soul depended upon every note that he uttered. (715)

The presence of the original keepers unleashes in the inmates a full-scale embrace of—or regression back to—their insanity. There is no longer any pretense to systems of soothing or exclusion; fear, confusion, or the threat of the keepers' re-incarceration has lifted from the inmates the burden of culture and the signifying gestures of sanity.

In this purely metonymic moment the inmates enact their most devious movements, away from that incarceration. The frogman enacts frogness, but the narrator would identify him as insane. The inmates become both multiply identifiable and also utterly illegible and therefore unidentifiable: are the inmates actually themselves, or are they the characters of themselves? Are they acting out being dinner guests, are the dinner guests acting out being inmates, or *are the*

insane inmates acting as insane inmates? The inmates' behavioral practices—repetition, metonymic representation—cannot be translated by the narrator into taxonomic legibility. Instead, their practices set off a spiral of *transformations*, during which the inmates elude a classifying gaze that depends on representational transparency. Or, inversely, transformation cannot be translated; it remains inscrutable and illegible. The inmates translate the language of themselves, through echo, into the language *of themselves*. They move further and further away from the “original” locution, transforming themselves into iterations—and reiterations—of themselves.¹⁷

Or, read another way, through the distancing violence of the metonym the inmates occupy both the space of their bodies and the space of the body's representation. In this split, they inhabit both pure physicality and pure abstraction. Any taxonomically useful property extracted from the metonymic representation—frogness—is difficult to recuperate back into the physical fact of the body—humanness. The repetition, mimicry, and outlandish costuming of the dinner guests/inmates suggests that the essential properties that supply taxonomies cycle *through* bodies rather than inhering *in* them, and are dependent upon a necessarily unreliable perceiver.

The anatomy of the policing in which the inmates engage seems very important to diagram; as we have seen, the desire to generalize and extrapolate about the mechanics of the tale can quickly lead to the deflation of its anarchic charge. At the beginning of the tale, in the first few minutes after their meeting, Maillard tells the narrator that he had “return[ed] to the old usages” by “enforc[ing] a system of rigid exclusion” (701) upon the inmates, and had “set each lunatic to guard the actions of all the others. [...] In this way we were enabled to dispense with an expensive body of keepers” (702). When readers discover that the inmates have actually locked up their keepers and taken on their roles, this “rigid exclusion” starts to resemble the

narrator's attempts to regulate the subjects that surround him. In fact, the inmates do police each other: during the dinner party, they constantly interrupt and chastise each other in the midst of their repetitions—but only for the purpose of generating their own repetitious acts.

Further troubling the question of whether the inmates simply reify disciplinary control, the tale takes place inside the confining interior space of the asylum and its dining room, and the inmates have reversed the seeming laxity and freedom of the “system of soothing” in favor of architecture's constraint. But Poe suggests that the straightjacket is not the problem, nor is the asylum. The structural *objects* that confine bodies to taxonomic control are just symptoms of the larger anxiety Poe betrays about structurality itself. And in the end, the deviant body is always the ultimate location to which Poe's inquiry inclines.

The deviant body can be read as a spatial map on which the self-policing impulse locates itself. Foucault writes:

The delinquent...is not only the author of his acts (the author responsible in terms of certain criteria of free, conscious will), but is linked to his offence by a whole bundle of complex threads (instincts, drives, tendencies, character). The penitentiary technique bears not on the relation between author and crime, but on the criminal's affinity with his crime (253).

The deviant body is a *space* in, on, and through which deviant movement potentially originates, erupts, and cycles. Through Foucault's formulation, the deviant body becomes a self-sustaining unit in which its ability to be located or placed is absorbed into itself, bypassing or recuperating the externality of the gaze required for classification. The inmates, then, are not simply offenders

who have violated some law; they encompass their offence, and also become delinquents through the connection the narrator perceives between that offence and their essential selves. The delinquent does not simply perform the action of a crime. He is in a relationship with his *criminality* through threads and networks that constitute him as an individual and provide the conditions out of which he is able to commit his act.

This image of the deviant's relationship to his criminality visually resembles or replicates the structure of the Panopticon: the delinquent is the centralized locus from which threads and networks of criminality reach outward to create his crime, and then reach back inward to constitute him as a criminal, reinstating his identity as a deviant; he *becomes* the fixed gaze of the central tower onto which circumstances bear and into which penetrates whole disciplinary mechanisms that constitute his body. He is both writer (through the commission of his criminal act) and written upon. Both the panoptic prison and the delinquent body are architectural concepts; they manage space. The delinquent body *is* panoptic architecture, alive with nodes of possible interference and disruption.¹⁸ In this way, the specific institutional architectures—the prison, the asylum, the school—stand in for the body itself. Faulting the institutional enclosure is too easy; it is the very notion of enclosure that Poe problematizes with his ever-permeable, vagrant bodies.

The inmates of “Tarr and Fether” do not dismantle the system; they *change their (spatial) relationship* to it, forcing the original disciplinary gaze to chase after them in its effort to fix and indentify. At some point in the unceasing process of the chase, that disciplinary gaze starts to look more and more like the deviants it chases, like the narrator in “Tarr and Fether” who gradually accrues onto himself the behaviors and speech rituals of insanity; his performance eventually becomes nearly indiscernible from that of the inmates. The inmates have manifested

for themselves “a situation that seems to question assumptions as basic as the physical continuity of inner and outer and the noninterpenetrability of solid bodies” (143), as John T. Irwin writes of the Dupin tales. Indeed, the inner and outer spheres—the dining room, the locked-away keepers, the breaking of windows that admits the escaped keepers back inside—are not only continually confused; they are *conflated* until they blend into sameness, like the solid objects of the world spun into unity in *Eureka*. Irwin’s suggestion that solid bodies in Poe’s tales are always interpenetrating is made manifest in “Tarr and Fether” through the reiterative bodies of the guests/inmates and the subsequent dissolution of borders they beget.

In his introduction to *The Order of Things* Foucault writes:

The history of madness would be the history of the Other—of that which, for a given culture, is at once interior and foreign, therefore to be excluded (so as to exorcise the interior danger) but by being shut away (in order to reduce its otherness); whereas the history of the order imposed on things would be the history of the Same—of that which, for a given culture, is both dispersed and related, therefore to be distinguished by kinds and to be collected together into identities. (xxiv)

“Tarr and Fether” fleshes out—and complicates—Foucault’s “history of madness”; it is difficult to identify who is “Other” in a tale that excludes some bodies, and then others, and then none, and excises appearance and behavior from the bodies that generate them. But it is into Poe’s cosmological opus *Eureka* that Foucault’s “history of the Same” is encoded. *Eureka* might be described, indeed, as the “history of the order imposed” upon the universe, but also as the history

of order retracted; *Eureka* longs for the absence of boundaries upon which order depends. Much scholarship has argued that *Eureka* lays out a compositional practice that can retroactively inform the rest of Poe's work.¹⁹ In the above passage Foucault also helps establish a link between "Tarr and Fether"—and all of Poe's tales—and *Eureka*, and for this reason I turn briefly to the text of *Eureka* as a way to understand what, for Poe, might have been the wider cosmological implications of the unstable structures that permeate his work.²⁰

In the opening movements of *Eureka*, the narrator instructs his readers how to inquire into the structure of the universe. They must relinquish any attachment to solutions or fixed concepts, which falsely attribute an ordering telos to the act of inquiry. "I am convinced," states the narrator, "that no human being can [entertain the conception of Infinity]," but that, "so long as we continue the effort...we are *tending* to the formation of the idea designed; while the strength of the impression that we actually form or have formed it, is in the ratio of the period during which we keep up the mental endeavor" (1274). *Eureka*'s narrator teaches that a conception can only be "grasped" so long as the thinker is in the *process* of grasping it; logically, this is no "grasping" at all, because something that constantly moves, that constantly *proceeds*, cannot ever be grasped. Throughout, *Eureka* advocates this process-driven epistemology that resists the stillness of certainty. One of the foundational elements of this text is its defense of perpetual movement—the asymptotic "tending to" that forever leans into an unachievable finitude, like the inmates' repetitions in "Tarr and Fether" that forever stray away from the original utterance.

Eureka's narrator suggests that "[h]e who from the top of Aetna casts his eyes leisurely around, is affected chiefly by the *extent* and *diversity* of the scene. Only by a rapid whirling on his heel could he hope to comprehend the panorama in the sublimity of its *oneness*" (1261). The

“*diversity*” of which the narrator speaks reads like the unfolding of taxonomically distinct categories across the landscape, categories whose dissolution requires the rapid and continual movement of the perceiving subject. The narrator traces the origin of the universe back to an irrelative oneness, “one particle” (1277)—matter in its simplest form—which diffused outward and diversified, radiating indefinitely, by dint of the “Thought of God [which] originat[ed] the diffusion” (1301). But Poe’s universe does not expand outward indefinitely, and instead expands and then, hypothetically, contracts back into unity, which each particle ever desires. This is, of course, just what Poe argues for the universe of “Tarr and Fether”: every deviation, every movement, is like that spin on Aetna’s (imaginary) peak; it further confuses the ability to assign sanity or insanity to any of the bodies in the asylum, and every character begins to resemble every other. The story draws ever closer to the irrelative oneness that appears, to the taxonomic eye, as the chaos of non-differentiation.

The domain of space into which *Eureka* unfolds is the space in which the universe enacts itself:

[I]n using the phrase, “Infinity of Space,” I make no call upon the reader to entertain the impossible conception of an *absolute* infinity. I refer simply to the “*utmost conceivable expanse*” of space—a shadowy and fluctuating domain, now shrinking, now swelling, with the vacillating energies of the imagination. (1275)

For *Eureka*’s narrator, words and their definitions are just a stand-in for the *process* that is comprehension. The expanse of space which he dubs “infinity” is ceaselessly moving in tandem with the imagination; the imagination itself produces the collapse and expanse of the universe. In

this way, the text defines space itself as imagined and therefore mutable, drawing parallels between the operations of the mind and the operations of the universe. Bounded, demarcated space is, for Poe, imagined, just as words only imaginarily represent concepts to which they are attached. Like Maillard's guttural vowel utterances that warn the narrator against relying upon language "to the letter," Poe's words are the means by which "one human being might put himself in relation at once with another human being and with a certain *tendency* of the human intellect"; a word, in *Eureka*, is "by no means the expression of an idea—but of an effort at one. . . . Man needed a term by which to point out the *direction* of this effort" (1272). In both *Eureka* and "Tarr and Fether" language indicates movement: it directs the speaker and hearer toward that which cannot be uttered, rather than transparently inhering in objects. Taxonomies thereby become unintelligible: the words or properties that assign subjects or objects to categories don't necessarily adhere; they can be peeled away at any moment—at the moment, in fact, that the universe contracts into irrelative oneness—and it is revealed that it was only the construction of the word that permitted the subject's entry into one category or another. If "sanity" or "insanity" fail to adhere to any bearer, then those categories fail to mean.

Eureka's characterization of the spatial universe is the culmination of a body of work that explores movement itself *as a mode of deviance*—as a radical criminality. Social unrest imbricates Poe's fictions, infused as they are with political and ethical inquiry, even as they often look like—and, as many scholars argue, often are—a conservative backlash against that unrest. Poe's exploration of deviance and violence can be so sickening that it makes possible such a conservative reading, one that advocates for Poe's texts as normativity reinscribed. But, as I argue above, I believe that in Poe, violence—deviance—criminality itself is revolutionary. In tales like "The Man of the Crowd" space is traversed through urban pursuit, during which the

narrator chases after an unusual man for whom he cannot find a label. The physical facts of his person that might ordinarily serve to identify him fail to mean, producing traces that dissipate into the darkness of the city's alleyways before they can be followed. In tales like "Ligeia" a woman's abnormalized body (a space in its own right)²¹ is displaced and replaced through multiple substitutions in a narrator's effort to finally discover the correct, normal body that obeys his logic; this final body, though, refuses normality in favor of a gruesomely uncanny iteration. In tales like "Morella," where a man expresses sexual desire for the living daughter who inhabits the body of his dead wife, the revolving instability of the body becomes a way to question patriarchal genealogy and the ethics of incestual relations. The narrator is "criminal" in his intent, but Morella, too, opens a productively deviant space through her corporeal substitutions that, as with Ligeia, trade one body for another. In the Dupin tales the interpreting subject is forcibly relocated from an original act of murder through the distancing mechanisms of metonymy, a distance that makes the violence more, not less, horrifying and obvious.

Movement is, of course, a different kind of resistance than armed conflict. The subject who drifts or bolts from normalcy is not necessarily—or not only—defined *against* the categories that long to (re)organize her; rather, they both take up the same *space*. The deviant and the mechanisms that classify her must be in constant negotiation for that space. Poe's deviants do not revolt. They do not attempt to dismantle the categories that want to enfold them. Rather, through constant movement they shift the locations of their bodies, skirting the languages and practices that reach out to describe them, thereby maintaining an uncrossable distance between themselves and taxonomy's labels. The yawn that opens between point a and the subsequent reiteration, differing, deferring, or distancing movement toward point b creates an

unclassifiable intermediary space inhabited by subjects who disturb categorical boundaries. The actions of deviance produce these intermediary spaces inside which identity can never be fixed.

Eureka's circumscription of the "Infinity of Space" echoes the engagement with material spatial structures in other of Poe's tales. The establishment of highly charged material spaces functions as both an extension and thwarting of discipline. Architecture is never invisible or incidental in Poe. His spaces read like an inventory of the four institutions that constitute Foucault's square of nineteenth-century discipline: the tombs into which living bodies are prematurely interred, representing prisons; the school in which William Wilson fractures into the evil twin of himself; the many sickbeds that microcosmically represent hospitals; and the asylum in which the inmates of "Tarr and Fether" invert roles and repeat themselves. His labyrinthine hallways, bedchambers, libraries, and cells produce or frustrate conditions for the staging of deviance and are intimately connected with its practice.

Political critiques that emerge from the negotiation of space are not limited to Poe. Nineteenth-century American narratives consistently link the traversal of material and metaphoric space to political struggles; whether through Melville's annihilation of whiteness made possible only at sea, Whitman's employment of the liturgical long line as a corollary to the expansion of body and spirit, or Dickinson's ejaculatory dashes that push against or even puncture women's imprisoning spaces. The nineteenth-century American anxiety about structural mechanics and structural soundness might be said to originate, in part, from complex negotiations of the social and political fabric of the country. The exploration of the American frontier anxiously reiterated the nation's original violent settlements that located and bound uncharted peoples and spaces. The challenges to and ultimate dissolution of chattel slavery that marked the period called attention to space itself in the form of persistent and pervasive

categorizations of human beings. Those categories can be seen as spaces, policed by the individuals who inhabited them and the official discourses of law, science, and social science that stood outside and defined them.²²

In Poe, too, spaces threaten; the pressure he puts on structures to hold becomes a suspension, almost a wish, against the threat of their breakdown and dissolution; Poe's imagined worlds are so unstable that they cannot be willed to cohere. Whether manifested as buildings, bodies, or institutions, Poe's spatially-embodied structures generate an incredible fear that their buttresses will not stabilize definitely, like the universe described in *Eureka* that perpetually mobilizes and demobilizes. His universe forever expands and contracts to accommodate both the incredible terror of structure's absence—void—and the necessary resistance to the ideologies that various material and political structures protect.

In this light, the lure of Poe for both structuralism and poststructuralism becomes obvious: Poe's writing seduces critical apparatuses that question and disassemble structurality. French poststructuralism, especially, may be said to have germinated in Poe and in the frenetic structuralizing endeavors of nineteenth-century Europe and America. Foucault's body of work emerges from this twentieth-century poststructuralist moment to inquire into the relationship between knowledge and institutional structures. His *The Order of Things* (1970) and *Discipline and Punish* (1977) are seminal texts directly engaging nineteenth-century deviance and criminality. Foucault seems especially linked to Poe; both writers are highly attuned to the horror of spaces and the threat of structural machinery, and both use gothic language in the scenes that punctuate their theories. Foucault's work helps draw out the relationship in Poe between criminality as deviance, and deviation—movement away from normality—as deviance. In this way, I argue for poststructuralism as a historically-grounded *methodology* that, in part, grows out

of Poe's theoretical problems with structurality. To read the poststructuralists alongside Poe implicitly argues for their work as a continuation of his project.²³

Both Poe and the poststructuralists have been increasingly accused in critical discourse of a similar misguided removal from the material and political sphere into what has been cast as the Elysian safety of theory and gothic fantasy. But other scholarship has noted, to a certain extent for poststructuralism and a larger extent for Poe, that both bodies of work are constituted by their profound political sensitivity, or, at the very least, their engagement with their historical context.²⁴ I argue that to elide the deeply—and radically—political work of both Poe and the poststructuralists is to miss the total reorganization of the social structure they make possible. Beyond their façade of gothic terror, Poe's tales reveal "systems of soothing": social, cultural, and legal practices that calm the body politic into the rationalization and acceptance of brutal taxonomies in the furtherance of economic prosperity. The degree to which Poe's work refuses normalcy and comfort is an indication of the possibility for political critique that inheres in the work: in the nineteenth-century context, deviation from the norm becomes a mode of ethical reformulation and ontological survival. The very elasticity of *Eureka's* universe—now shrinking, now swelling—finally allays the threat of the structural machine's fixed gears. The essence of Poe's cosmology is prevarication, which provides a contrast to—even a violation of—the straight lines and fixed boundaries that constitute structures.

Notes

¹ Occupying the opposite end of the spectrum is Harold Bloom, who cursorily misreads space in Poe: “Emerson exalted freedom, which he and Thoreau usefully called ‘wildness.’ No one in Poe is or can be free or wild, and some academic admirers of Poe truly like everything and everyone to be in bondage to a universal past” (6). Of course, it is the very concepts of freedom and bondage that Poe interrogates in his work.

² Douglas Anderson most explicitly articulates a taxonomic position for Poe when he writes that the narrator’s descriptions of Ligeia suggest “the collective preoccupations of natural philosophy: a museum of curiosities for the biologist, the explorer, the moralist, or the astronomer to ponder” (125), and later describes the manse of Roderick Usher as “an ambitious cultural depository, an elaborate museum” (137-138). Usher’s house, of course, self-destructs, as all taxonomic categories inevitably do in Poe.

³ Significantly, Johnson’s remarks are part of a critical genealogy beginning with Lacan’s reading of Poe (his “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’”) and Derrida’s response to Lacan’s reading.

⁴ In the introduction to *American Gothic*, Eric Savoy reads the gothic itself as mobile: “if the gothic may be said to be everywhere,” he states, “then it will cohere *nowhere in particular*” (ix). In his essay “The Face of the Tenant,” which appears in that same volume, he describes the gothic as “a fluid tendency rather than a discrete literary ‘mode’” (6), an impulse I echo in my argument that movement in Poe’s tales undoes the static discreteness of taxonomic categories.

⁵ In a related example, Leslie Fiedler convincingly locates *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* in the American south: “it grows not colder, but warmer and warmer, as Pym aboard the...*Jane Guy*, pushes closer and closer to the Pole” (258).

⁶ Justin D. Edwards makes an interesting comment about Poe’s novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* that relates to my own argument about pale bodies and disruptions of taxonomy. He writes: “At the heart of Poe’s text...is an examination of racial difference that reveals binaries as self-collapsing at the epistemological level” (13). I will argue for Poe in general—and in “Tarr and Fether” specifically—that binaries are indeed self-collapsing in Poe, which renders categories of knowledge—or knowledge itself (since knowledge *is dependent upon* taxonomy)—meaningless or nonexistent. But I have not yet worked out an argument that uses Edwards’ suggestion to explore the *racial* implications in my own assertion that “pale” bodies do the transgressive work in a Poe tale. Certainly, other bodies in Poe transgress as well.

⁷ In an article about “Tarr and Fether” and historical treatments of madness, Marek Paryz sees *memory*, not repetition, as the central trope for the tale, stating: “investigating the past is not exclusively a matter of moving back in time literally, it is as much a question of remembrance, which is quite prominent in the tale” (98). Here Paryz is not referring to the guests’ repetitive locutions but to various temporal complications in the tale; however, I find it interesting to ponder that, through repetition, the guests are enacting a kind of memorializing or remembrance of their former selves. Through memento, the guests enact movement through time as well as space.

⁸ In his poetically-written 2009 study *Pictures of Ascent*, which argues for Poe’s texts as particular kinds of journeys, Douglas Anderson reads the fragmentary messages in Poe’s *Pym* in a way that corresponds to this moment in “Tarr and Fether.” He describes a “tantalizing verbal vessel [that] is both empty and overflowing” (114), which in many ways could describe Maillard’s enunciation: words as containers that direct one toward meaning but contain no meaning themselves and, in Maillard’s case specifically, direct the reader away from any meaning at all.

⁹ See Barbara Johnson's discussion of paraphrase and quotation in reference to Poe, Lacan, and Derrida, which contains striking insights for a discussion of anecdote in "Tarr and Fether"—insights which are beyond the scope of this project.

¹⁰ I argue here that particular uses of language can create movement in space. Stephen Mainville takes a related approach; in "Language and the Void" he argues through *Pym* and *Julius Rodman* that, in Poe, language is space:

the intentional but uninterpretable mark *is* the frontier between consciousness and what is unconscious: its very existence makes it a *trace* of consciousness, yet its meaninglessness cannot be distinguished from dumb, unconscious nature. That is, the frontier presents a *pretext* of language. (348)

Here Mainville asserts that ambiguous or undecipherable language is a kind of space, or at least a movement through space—an ever-advancing frontier.

¹¹ Robert L. Carringer also recognizes the inherent relationship between violence and space in Poe. In his study on Poe's circumscription of space, he writes that "to circumscribe a Poe character is usually to involve him in some form of violent destructiveness" (20) and he describes this relationship as a "formula" for Poe wherein "circumscription involves destruction" (21). Colin (Joan) Dayan notes further: "Poe's tales do violence to all metaphysical categories or formal determinations" (*Fables* 133). As I argue above, it is this violence itself that dissolves taxonomic categories.

¹² In reference to the triangulation of texts produced by Poe, Lacan, and Derrida, Barbara Johnson argues that "an unusually high degree of apparent digressiveness characterizes these texts, to the point of making the reader wonder whether there is really any true subject matter there at all" (343). Johnson's point implicitly reveals that "subject matter"—and its friend "plot"—might be just another taxonomic category to be defeated through digressive movement.

¹³ In his "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" Jacques Lacan states: "in determining the scope of what speech repeats, it prepares the question of what symptoms repeat. Thus the indirect telling sifts out the linguistic dimension, and the general narrator, by duplicating it, 'hypothetically' adds nothing to it. But its role in the second dialogue is entirely different" (35). Lacan here draws a parallel between speech and symptoms—a useful parallel for a story like "Tarr and Fether." In light of the story, speech repetitions are, in some sense, an index of *symptoms* through which the narrator has tried to read the guests' insanity. Through Lacan's formulation I argue that, at this point in the text, the narrator joins the guests in a frenzy of multiple repetitions that, while appearing to be the same, actually accrue and produce difference—movement—at each utterance. The narrator here begins to produce the same "symptoms" by which he attempts to read the guests.

¹⁴ Marek Paryz makes a related claim by reading Philippe Pinel's 18th-century "Memoir on Madness" alongside "Tarr and Fether." If a madman becomes threatening and arms himself, Pinel recommends closing the distance between superintendent and madman, both physically and through mimicking behavior. Paryz writes: "In the light of Pinel's claims, the superintendent, despite his numerous mundane preoccupations, appears close enough to madness as to exercise control over it" (99).

¹⁵ See Shawn Rosenheim's "Detective Fiction, Psychoanalysis, and the Analytic Sublime" for a strong interpretation of the workings of metonymy in Poe's detective stories, and especially how metonymy as an analytical practice can engender material effects.

¹⁶ I have drawn out Poe's use of metonymy here partially to foreground the inherent movement that metonymy implies through its distancing and separation, and also to suggest the potential for political upheaval that a metonymic poetics encodes. Metonymy creates distance and forces *movement*. Its employment requires that

the original object under interpretive attention must be relocated to a different, often unrelated or distantly related space. The reader is also implicated in the mechanism of metonymy: metonymic performance forces the relocation of the *reading* subject, who must follow the object through space to the new location in order to reattempt interpretation. It also *takes up* space: the trace of substitutions from an origin to its metonym inhabits the opening formed by the metonymic gesture. Metonymy becomes a mode of deviance in its refusal to be reabsorbed into the original object from which it arose. It doesn't require the ceaseless movement of deferral, repetition, or pursuit. It maintains distance while remaining still; it *is* distance.

¹⁷ It may be useful here to consider Derrida's notion of transformation: "Translation practices the difference between signified and signifier. But if this difference is never pure, no more so is translation, and for the notion of translation we would have to substitute a notion of *transformation*: a regulated transformation of one language by another, of one text by another (334). For Derrida, as for the narrator's relation to the guests, what cannot be translated is instead transformed.

¹⁸ Hubert Zapf expresses a related idea in his study of Poe. He writes that *Eureka* is an example of "the connection of structure, chaos, and self-reference which shapes Poe's thoughts, his worldview and his aesthetic, an aesthetic constituted in the constant subversion of its own ordering principles" (66). Zapf's mention of "ordering principles" points to the disassemblage of the taxonomic project so inherent to Poe, but I'm most interested in the way Zapf describes Poe's corpus similarly to the way Foucault describes the deviant body—a self-referential, enclosed unit, structured to manage its own discipline, who nevertheless—especially in Poe—inaugurates structural chaos.

¹⁹ For example, in the introduction to their edition of *Eureka*, Stuart Levine and Susan F. Levine argue for "strong connections between *Eureka*, the works that Poe used in preparing it, and the rest of his writing" (xii). In his chapter on *Eureka* in his book *The Measure of Poe*, Louis Broussard also argues for "the work's relation to all of Poe's work" (57).

²⁰ For the faint of heart—or short on time—Broussard provides an excellent and thorough summary of *Eureka* in *The Measure of Poe*.

²¹ Eric Savoy might read the "space" of Ligeia's body as, rather, a "discursive field in which a metonymic national 'self' is undone by the return of its repressed Otherness" (vii); this is, in fact, how he describes the American gothic. While Savoy doesn't quite push the limits of space and boundaries to their inevitable dissolution, he does recognize that a critical approach to Poe must in some way use the vocabulary of spaces, especially in his assertion that the gothic situates readers "at the border of symbolic dissolution" (vii).

²² Levine and Levine suggest something similar in their introduction when they draw a thematic genealogy from Humboldt's *Kosmos* (to which *Eureka* is dedicated) to Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, Melville's *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre*, Thoreau's *Walden* (this would certainly make Poe uncomfortable) and the music of Liszt and Wagner; they identify all these works as "difficult to confine to convenient categories, works intended, indeed, to dissolve boundaries between categories that their creators felt to be oppressive" (xi). In this way, Levine and Levine see in Poe the drive to dissolve taxonomies, linking that drive in part to nineteenth-century American literature—although that link is not fully explored in their introduction. Colin (Joan) Dayan draws out this link more explicitly when she states: "By choosing the limited vista rather than the indefinite extent, Poe will exploit what most of his contemporaries saw as human restriction. For this idea of limited space was quite unorthodox in American thought, opposed to manifest destiny ideology, as well as to the sublime nature of the Hudson River poets and the godlike eye of the Orphic poets" (*Fables* 25). Here, Dayan locates in Poe a quirky and unexpected contribution to American taxonomic anxiety, one that opposes the mainstream.

²³ Eric Savoy argues for something similar when he discusses poststructuralism in terms of his definition of the gothic, citing "the incipient or tacit 'gothic' preoccupations of a variety of poststructuralist theories" (viii) such

as deconstruction. In his extended discussion about the interpenetration of Poe and poststructuralism, Joseph G. Kronick claims that “it has taken post-structuralists to secure for Poe a place in the American Renaissance” (23), and argues that it is the insistent “textuality” of Poe’s texts that is responsible for their “receptivity...to post-structuralist readings” (24).

²⁴ For example, both Eric Savoy and Teresa Goddu claim that the gothic, in general, is profoundly inseparable from its context. Savoy claims that American gothic “does not exist apart from its specific regional manifestations” (6), and for Goddu “the gothic, like all discourses, needs to be historicized; to read it out of cultural context is to misread it” (2). W.C. Harris argues for *Eureka* that it is “one of a series of nineteenth-century American literary texts that attempt to come to terms with the problematic nature of unity in order to resolve certain logical contradictions within American social formation” (3). Terence Whalen’s body of criticism links Poe’s literature to industrial production, reading practices, political economy, and race politics in nineteenth-century America, discouraging the view that literature and capitalism “designate practices which are somehow discrete or even autonomous” (382).

Important early criticism by Killis Campbell helped inaugurate the historicist trend in Poe studies, but interrogations of race are strikingly absent from his work; while he acknowledges that Poe wrote “with evident sincerity, in defense of Negro slavery” (111), he makes no effort to consider the contextual consequences of this fact. It is Leslie Fiedler who most visibly took up this task. In his midcentury analysis of Poe’s *Arthur Gordon Pym* Fiedler famously wrote that “the proper subject for American gothic is the black man, from whose shadow we have not yet emerged” (258). Although Fiedler’s assertion contains a kernel of oversimplification, he helped inaugurate current critical debates; sustained discussions of Poe and race have been taken up more recently—in fact, in current criticism this is the overwhelming trend—by many of the scholars already mentioned in this paper. This critical approach produced Toni Morrison’s seminal essay “Unspeakable Things Unspoken,” in which Morrison argues for the absent presence of blackness, slavery, and race in all nineteenth-century American canonical literature; she entreats scholars to acknowledge the “shadow of the presence from which the text has fled” (12). The anthology *Romancing the Shadow: Poe and Race* claims for its inspiration Morrison’s article.

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