Filtering: A Theory and History of a Style

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Filtering: A Theory and History of a Style

Michael Dango

Trending Filters

In 1959, it was still possible for the sociologist C. Wright Mills to describe life in America as a "series of traps"—itemized as the "close-up scenes of job, family, [and] neighborhood" among others—and thereby to theorize society as a chain of enclosures.[1] In particular, Mills thought life was a cycle of "playing . . . roles within specific institutions. To understand the biography of an individual, we must understand the significance and meaning of the roles he has played and does play; to understand these roles we must understand the institutions of which they are a part."[2] Mills's view of a society in which persons are always preceded by the institutions in which they are "trapped" was a strong corrective to the US frontier mentality he dismissed from previous eras. The paradigmatic space of US life was not the unbounded frontier but the bounded office; Mills thought we were in "the beginning of the office-machine age."[3] In this age every institution starts to look like an office—"families as well as factories, leisure as well as work, neighborhoods as well as states"—because it is hermetically enclosed, with its own set of roles.[4]

What Mills called institutional "traps" may seem, from the perspective of many laborers in the present, a bit of a luxury, because traps had boundaries. Today, institutions are either muddled and overlapped or distressed, extended, and difficult to locate. Think about the idioms that make institutions endless and therefore without borders, unable to claim a delimited space of their own: continuing education (you are always a student), flexible labor (you are always working), healthy living (you are always a patient). You answer work emails at the bar; you listen to an audiotape while on the treadmill. It's difficult to isolate a single role you are playing at a given time, because you never seem to belong to just one institution. And it is this decline in the power of institutions to shore up and delimit their own space of functioning, or their impotence in the face of generalized crises they cannot address, that characterizes a central aspect of many facets of the contemporary, whether political, in our waning faith in institutions like Congress or the US Presidency;

ecological, in the difficulty of any one institution to mediate between individuals and problems of atmosphere (the pollution of air that knows no municipal or domestic borders) or problems of planetary scale, such as climate change; or domestic, as people sense that traditional institutions, including the nuclear family, do not guarantee the "good life" in a period of economic downfall and inequality, or feel more generally that identity groups that had provided a sense of belonging have faded or been washed out.

This essay is about a style that has emerged in contemporary US culture to repair this sense of institutional decay. It is a style shared by photographic social media platforms including Snapchat and Instagram and by literary novels by authors including Jennifer Egan, Colum McCann, and Elizabeth Strout. In bringing together, for example, puppy dog-ear filters on Snapchat and Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* under the name of a common style, I do not make a case for a transfer of logic from one to another, or, more broadly, track the pressures that "new" media place on "old." Egan, among others, is certainly interested in the interpenetration of media; one chapter of her novel is told in the form of a PowerPoint. My account is more parallel than interactive. What then becomes interesting is how the same style in each medium differentiates itself from prior, seemingly related styles within the same medium. *A Visit from the Goon Squad* is a novel of short stories, that is, a novel in which each chapter is an autonomous story (many began as independent works in such publications as the *New Yorker*), but they are linked (a minor character in one may appear as a protagonist in another) and so work together to map out a larger, shared narrative universe. It is an increasingly popular style that has accelerated into a standard of the contemporary literary fiction scene. Ted Gioia, in a 2013 essay on the novel of short stories, even remarked that it has become "a mainstay of the literary world."[5] But, as I will chart in the final section of this essay, novels of short stories have a long history; in the US, they reach a first apex of popularity in short story cycles of rural life in the early twentieth century. How is Egan's style different from, say, William Faulkner's? Instagram became popular because the filters it offers manipulate the color and hue of user-posted photographs. How is the craze for these filters different from a craze for toning and tinting photographs and films in the early twentieth century? In answering these historical questions about stylistic innovation, this essay also explores how the style of filtering has emerged to provide a sense of repairing the institutional distress of the present.

From Photographic Toning to Digital Filtering

Snapchat was launched in 2011, but many of the core functions that would secure its longevity, popularity, and iconicity were introduced in 2014 and 2015. Those were the years when Snapchat introduced its geofilters and lenses, respectively, two formally similar ways of manipulating images. Selfies, or self-portraits usually taken by a user on his or her smartphone, had always been the preferred genre of the Snapchat photograph, and lenses and geofilters enabled new ways of stylizing them. With lenses, facial-recognition software identifies and manipulates the core features of the subject, thereby adding effects in real-time, like bulging eyes, puppy ears, or a crown of flowers (Fig. 1).[6]

Fig. 1. Face filters on Snapchat.

Geofilters provide a similar overlay, although they do not manipulate the image directly. Instead, they might add a border or frame saying "Happy Birthday," or else they add data from the scene of the image production: a clock with the time of when the photograph was taken, for instance. What makes the filters "geo" is their priming to a particular location; where you are determines the filters available to you. Users can also personalize geofilters and make them available to other Snapchat users within a customizable region, attaching the filter to a particular community ("Show your spirit and design a free Geofilter for a place that's meaningful to you and your community," Snapchat invites in promotional materials) or a particular occasion ("From birthdays and weddings to 'welcome home' shindigs and gameday tailgates, Geofilters make any moment more fun") (Fig. 2).[7]

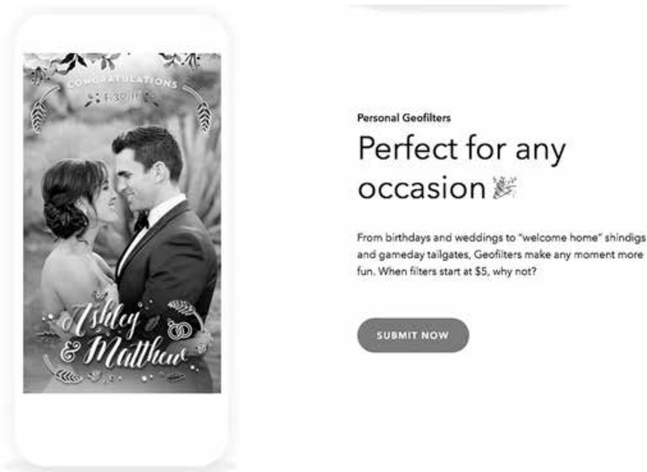

Fig. 2. Geofilters on Snapchat. http://snapchat.com.

Other social media websites and applications have also recognized the utility of overlays. In 2017, Instagram added its own facial recognition lenses, allowing users to convert themselves into zombies, dogs, and the like. But Instagram, which launched a year before Snapchat, is perhaps best known for its earlier and still popular built-in filters that manipulate the hue, tint, and shade of an image, motivating among other things a resurgence in amateur sepia photography. Instagram gave each of its filters a name, for instance "Valencia," which was inspired by San Francisco's Valencia Street in the Mission and adds a yellow hue; "Earlybird," a sepia-like filter often applied to morning cups of coffee; "Lark," which brightens and cools landscapes with blue and green; "Walden," which tints a photograph yellow and increases exposure, giving a calming, washed-out feel; and "1977," which evokes the 1970s by both lightening and fading an image. As the names often explicitly suggest, the filters manipulate images in order to carry their contents to a different time or place: cool and clear, "Lark" transports its contents to the daybreak for which larks are often a symbol, and then provides a sense of renewal for which daybreak is a symbol in turn.[8]

Filters not only manipulate the look of images, in other words, but also their affective range. They do so by limiting this range: when deepening the warm browns of an image, "Earlybird" makes a cup of coffee seem nostalgic, unlike "Lark," which brightens rather than deepens mood. Etymologically, "filter" comes from the word for "felt," a woolen cloth through which water was passed in order to separate out dirt; in digital social media, the piece of felt is the given overlay, and the dirt is whatever does not contribute to the desired, purified affect, for instance,

nostalgia. That means that nostalgia was always latent in the image; it just had to be distilled, intensified, and augmented. In both Instagram and Snapchat, the seemingly everyday moment—whose spontaneity is named by the "insta" of one platform and the "snap" of the other—is, through a filter, similarly refined and enhanced: out of the multiplicity of a moment's possible affective meanings, one finite range is extracted.

Aesthetically, Instagram's filters join a longer genealogy of photographic toning and tinting. Sepia toning is perhaps the most common treatment of black-and-white photographs, consisting of bleaching the silver in a print and then running it through a chemical bath that converts it to a sulfide compound. The resulting red-brown tones were originally named for the ink derived from the sepia genus of cuttlefish, and although a browning of photographs is natural as they age, the aim of intentionally toning them sepia was in fact to preserve photographs or give them "increased archival permanence," as silver sulfide is more stable and resistant to environmental interference than metallic silver.[9] But the archival motivation tended to coincide with an aesthetic one as well. An 1892 piece in the *Scientific American* detailing different chemical formulas to use for toning prints different colors pointed to brown as "very warm, very agreeable and of an artistic stamp."[10] In this move from "warm," a projected property of the print, to "agreeable," a judgment of a viewer, toning also imagines a conversion of affective response to a given subject matter. What matters is that the "agreeable" nature—not to mention the "artistic stamp"—is attributed to the color itself, rather than to any contents within the print: the landscape, person, or thing being pictured. Brown could make any content agreeable.

Because it operates through the chemical conversion of silver, sepia toning is only available for black-and-white photography, and by the beginning of the twentieth century, it had been adapted to black-and-white film as well. In addition to toning, film stock companies began to produce rolls pre-tinted with a particular dye. As Joshua Yumibe explains in his history of color in early cinema, the tinting and toning aimed, at times, "to create certain diegetic meanings, such as blue for night or red for fire," but it aimed, even more essentially, for an affective effect, drawing upon emotive connotations of different colors.[11] Kodak's 1929 advertisement for their pre-tinted Sonochrome stock promotes "relief from the black and white of the present sound film and a wider range of expressive hues than the motion picture ever before possessed!" Offering "A Complete Gamut of Colors"—from "rose doree" and "peachblow" to "verdante" and "aquagreen"—Kodak explained, "Soncohrome colors have definite affective values. Some excite, some tranquilize, some repress. Properly used, they enhance the moods of the screen and aid the powers of reproductive imagination in the observer, without making a distinct impression on the consciousness" (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3. Advertisement for Kodak Sonochrome.[12]

This unconscious effect of toning black-and-white photographs is formally similar to filters on Instagram—the manipulation of color for affective conversion—but toning and filtering can ultimately be differentiated both technologically and stylistically. It is not just that chemical toning, by changing the actual substance of a singular print, has a different relation to materiality than the digital manipulation of a replicable file, although this matters; nor is it only that toning, whether through chemical conversion or through printing directly on a colored stock, has a different relation to layering than filtering, whose mode is the overlay, although this matters, too. What comes out of the layered replicability of the digital file is that different filters can be tried on—first Lark and then Earlybird—an act that gives a sense of sampling; and in turn, filtering has not only a different materiality but also a different temporality from toning. Toning is always temporally disjunct from the pictured image: chemical conversion into sepia happens after the print has been made, while tinting Sonochrome reels happens before. This disjunction is why the "agreeable" brown has autonomy from content, just as Sonochrome's colors "excite, tranquilize, or repress" by means independent of the conscious perception of the image itself. Filtering, too, may (but does not always) happen after the fact. But its distillation of affect is still more immediate in the sense of, being picked from among other options, it declares: *this*, right here, right now. Its manipulation is not indifferent to content but interactive with it, for its aim in filtering this content is extraction of a singular affective range. While toning anachronistically generalizes, filtering contemporaneously specifies.

This is not to deny that there are a finite number of specifications or filters afforded on a platform like Instagram, and so an image always belongs in some way to a general category. But it is to differentiate the functioning, stylistically and socially, of the status of the category in toning and filtering. Working with the singular material object of the print, toning subordinates its objects to a general aesthetic category defined by a broadly affective term: the agreeable, the tranquil. Its level of specificity is something like: *this is happy*, which, like all aesthetic judgments, is placed somewhere between the object (this thing has the properties of a happy thing) and the subject (this thing makes me happy).[13] As suggested even by their names—so often the names of places—filters on Instagram are more scenic, supplying both a wider and a more particular affective range: more particular because attributed to a scene, such as an early morning sunrise rather than just any happy scene, and wider because this scene contains less a single affect and more an affective range, all the feelings that get collected by the morning sunrise. In this wider but more particular range, the category of the filter functions

more like a cinematic subgenre, its level of specificity more like, *this is a Western* or *this is a musical.* Genres are often named affectively—when we go to watch a horror, we know we are signing up to be horrified, although not only; a thriller, to be thrilled, but perhaps also tantalized and seduced—and even though a Western is named after its setting, it still comes packaged with a set of promised feelings, in this case some combination of nostalgia and excitation. But what matters here is the combination of expectation and range: both a wider and more diffuse set of affects than merely "happy" (or agreeable or tranquil) and still a set of knowing what they might feel like in advance, in the same way we know what to expect of a Western before watching it.

On social media platforms, filtering is the transformation of the moment into something like a genre: so that one becomes, in this moment, a puppy like all the other users who have used the puppy ear filter or a celebrant of the Smith wedding along with all the other guests applying the Smith wedding geofilter. In the early nineties, Brenda Laurel drew an analogy between computers and theatre, because both "attempt to amplify and orchestrate experience."[14] On social media, the theatrical has taken on an additional sense of performing in a generic scene named by a filter, for the filter's distillation of the everyday moment is also the submission of the moment to a category of experience that is social, shared, and replicable. In picking out, isolating, and intensifying an appropriate role for a person to play in a scene, filters are an exercise in a genre administering a public presentation of the self.

This causal formula, of genre before presentation, also distinguishes filtering from nineteenth-century exercises in genericity. In his famous article on "The Body and the Archive," Allan Sekula synchronizes the rise of photography with the nineteenth-century sciences of physiognomy and phrenology, both of which believed "the surface of the body, and especially the face and head, bore the outward signs of inner character," and both of which, in their taxonomic effort to "encompass an entire range of human diversity," mandated the construction of archives of the types this diversity contained.[15] By the midcentury, this archival impulse was carried forward by criminologists who turned the body into a "text" with measurements and features that could distinguish one individual from another. In his contribution to this enterprise, Francis Galton created what he called "generic images," which were composites of portrait photographs of multiple members of a genre of people, such as "the military officer" or (because Galton believed in "the reality of distinct racial types") "the Jew." As Sekula describes Galton's process, the effect of overlaying portraits of multiple people from the same "type" was that "individual distinctive features, features that were unshared and idiosyn-

cratic, faded away into the night of underexposure. What remained was the blurred, nervous configuration of those features that were held in common throughout the sample."[16]

From "the Jew" to the "puppy-dog" there is a transformation both in the status of social types and in the status of an individual's contribution to it. It is not just that a roughly demographic category has been replaced by a category that not only transcends, but that its value is offered precisely because it transcends the biopolitics of the flesh: whereas Galton wanted to show the "average" Jew's above-average nose, for instance, the Snapchat algorithm means to account for variation in order to replace it with new appendages that diverse people can hold in common. It is also that the category preexists its empirical instantiation in a new way: whereas the composite is a literal palimpsest of portraits who blend into a "type," the puppy-dog type stylizes its captured subject, aiming not for an average but for a genre. A composite deindividualizes in its pursuit of the blended average; a filter generalizes an individual, but by way of adding rather than subtracting particularity. It does not seek to erase the features of a subject that may deviate from an average but to fashion a new subject by means of its stylization.

In this facilitation of self-fashioning, provisioning a genre in which the self can show up in a limited but still generalizable way, filters on interactive platforms like Instagram and Snapchat participate in a circuit of subjective reflexivity and modulation. For Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, all interfaces are ideological in Louis Althusser's sense of hailing subjects; they actively produce, rather than merely facilitate the actions of, their putative users.[17] But the nature of this interpellation is different with filtering's relation to genre. Just as a genre does not wholly explain the objects that participate within it, but instead designates an affective range in which it is bound—so to say that something is a horror is not to say everything there is about it or to determine the precise way in which it will generate horror—so too does a filter not so much hail and determine a *you* in the sense of Althusser's "Hey, you there!" but rather hails and determines a *there*: a scene or place in which a *you* shows up and is conditioned, restricted in its arsenal of gestures, but not wholly scripted.[18]

Such a scenic and generic aspect to the filter is also what distinguishes Snapchat's puppy-dog ears or crown of flowers from earlier photographic precedents, especially the "comic foreground" or, more colloquially, "head-in-the-hole" consisting of a painted cardboard figure with a hole cutout for sticking a subject's head, today most popular in the muscleman variety frequently available on boardwalk fairs and carnivals. Although probably not his original invention, the comic foreground is

often attributed to Cassius Marcellus Coolidge, a jack-of-all-trades born in 1844 in upstate New York and otherwise famous for his paintings of *Dogs Playing Poker*. In his petition for a US patent, written just before Christmas of 1873 and filed in the new year, Coolidge presented his "invention" as "a process for taking a photograph or other picture of a person's head large on a miniature body."[19] The miniature body was drawn onto a "thick material, such as wood or pasteboard" and, by being placed in front of and held up by the photographic subject, appeared as if connected to the human person's head. It mattered to Coolidge that, instead of an operation in which a head might be cut out of a photograph and pasted onto a drawing, "the head and body are taken at one operation."

In his supplemental diagram for this process of creating "caricature photographic pictures," Coolidge provided a man with a mustache and a top hat whose chin rested on a rectangular illustration of a body perched on the grassy edge of a stream and holding in its hands a fishing rod with a fresh catch in front of him; behind, a cat approaches (see Figure 4). The face is roughly the same size and rotund shape as the miniature torso, the hat, about the same height as the skinny legs. This vertical symmetry is matched horizontally with the man's and the miniature's hands on the same plane, equally spaced apart. The alignment of the miniature and human body is further enhanced by the way in which the drawing requires the man to look in three-quarters profile in order to match its orientation. In other words, at the same time that the man holds and thereby controls the position of the drawing, the drawing also scripts the bodily comportment of its holder.

By drawing a scene with the cat and the fish, Coolidge's invention does not just transpose a photographic subject's head onto another body but also transports him to another space. To participate now in the action not of holding a pasteboard but holding a fishing rod is also to participate in a different range of affects; and yet, because of the technical necessity of holding a still face for a photograph at this time, before the invention of the Kodak, Coolidge's subject is depicted in typical deadpan. Although there is a physical symbiosis between miniature and human in the alignment of bodies, there is a less reciprocal participation in the creation of an affective scene; the drawing, rather than the subject, provides the atmospheric details. And so the cat, which is on the same vertical plane as the caught fish and seems to be glimpsing a prospective prey through the miniature's legs, adds a comic note as much as the miniature itself. Indeed, although manipulated in size, the miniature is sartorially similar to the man himself; both wear a jacket and pants. Although the miniature's are perhaps more dandyistic, the

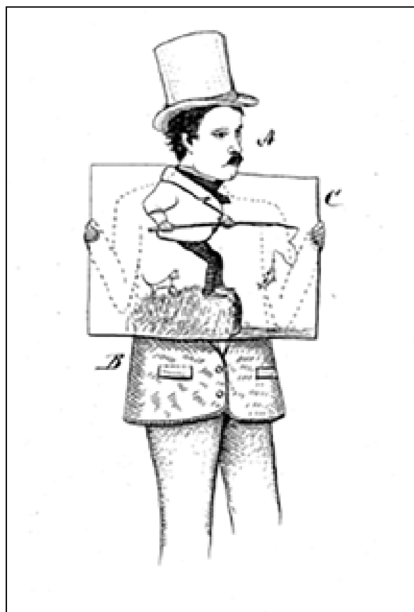

Fig. 4. Coolidge's patent illustration of comic foregrounds: with a person's head (A) atop a cartoon miniature (C) that obscured his body (B).

man's at first seem not transported across any major lines of social difference, whether gender, race, or class. (Indeed, although I have provided masculine pronouns for this particular subject, Coolidge uses the gender neutral "person or subject" throughout his prose description.) The only flesh we see in miniature belongs to the hands holding the fishing rod. This dominance of clothing over body, in addition to the exaggerated proportions of the torso and legs, seems to recommend the miniature claim no essential underlying anatomy or embodiment.

If, in this way, the miniature generalizes rather than specifies a body, just as Galton's "Jew," and if the transformation of the photographic subject is as much an effect of the scene as the body itself, then it can be seen as both continuous with, but finally distinct from, the puppy-dog filters we have been discussing on Snapchat. Although interested in the "one operation" of body and head participating together, requiring a symbiosis of alignment, Coolidge's compilation, by requiring a foreground, is distinctly not the same as the puppy-dog ears, which track and dynamically interact with the head of a user, who is in turn holding a phone with a front-facing camera in order to see the collaborative effect. Like toning, a comic foreground is temporally disjointed from the subject it manipulates, for the person holding the foreground cannot see themselves within the photograph, while the Snapchat user taking a

selfie necessarily does. And so too while the foreground provides not just a body but a scene, in the same way that I have been discussing filters as provisioning a generic scene in which a subject can appear within a limited affective range, the holder of the foreground is nonetheless manipulated only physically, in the alignment of the body, rather than affectively in the expression (not to mention experience) of a particular feeling. Sepia and Sonochrome, techniques of toning black-and-white photographs, are to Instagram's Lark and Earlybird manipulations of color and hue what Coolidge's comic foregrounds are to Snapchat's puppy-dog ears: toning is to filtering what temporal disjunction is to immediacy, and also what subject is to genre; filters, whether in Instagram or Snapchat, provide a genre that selects and distills a particular performance from their users.

Scholars of the original technology of the snapshot—George Eastman's invention of the Kodak in 1888—have documented its manufacture of other visible subject positions, not least "the idea, indeed, the ideology, of the family."[20] This Kodak could create these positions in large part because of its seeming democratization of or at least provision of increased accessibility to self-photography. Especially with Kodak's introduction of the mass-produced "Brownie" in 1900—which was advertised as being so easy to use even a child could master it—a "new world" opened up "in which a broader and more diverse group of people could observe, record, and represent themselves and their world than ever before."[21] There were the expected expert backlashes, but the era of middle class self-fashioning had irrevocably arrived in visual form.[22] Filters carry this project forward, but just as they administer simultaneously a wider and a more specified genre of affective range, they also administer roles different from the broader and more disciplinary "family." It is the difference between participating in an institution and participating in a scene, being confined to the role of "father" or "mother" on one side, and being brought into the affective atmosphere of a Western on the other. Both provide forms of repeatable recognition. But whereas institutions relate to regimes of behavior, generic scenes relate more to a range of feelings and poses, gestures and intonations. And so the form of belonging they offer, in which a community of virtual strangers—where virtual means both practically and digitally networked—can see themselves as participating in the same category, is mediated not by people doing the same thing but by people expressing in the same way.

In this way too the filter can be separated from the chemical toner in a way not only technological—in an allegory of the "new" digital versus "old" photographic media—but historical and political. Although for media theorists such as Alexander Galloway, the digital is to be defined

as division—the wholeness of a thing divided into a binary code—for Lev Manovich, a principle of division or discontinuity cannot account for what is new about new media or, more specifically, about the digital; film, for instance, is composed of discrete frames, and, more radically, any system of communication built upon a linguistic model presumes divisibility: "We speak in sentences; a sentence is made from words; a word consists from morphemes, and so on."[23] In this, twentieth-century semioticians converge with twentieth-century industrialists, whose principal mode of production, the assembly line, required the differentiation and then standardization of parts of a whole in order for assembly to be maximally efficient. But as the paradigmatic scene of labor shifts from the factory to the entrepreneurial home office, so too does the standardization of media in something like the typewriter or the mechanical projector become individualized and customized when web browsers assemble, from a set of media modules, a personal experience for each user. The move from toning to filtering seems, at first, to align with this historical movement from the assembly line to the home office or from Fordism to something Post-Taylorist. Indeed, Sonochrome reels were literally assembly-line produced, with the aim of making efficient the mass conversion of affect. People line up to have their pictures taken, one after another, at the comic foreground on the midway, whereas the seemingly individualized experience of taking a selfie or filtering your own image can happen anywhere by anyone at any time, often the same time as others are also taking selfies. And so production has been liberated from an institutionalized and scheduled apparatus. But what the continuities between toning and filtering also show is a kind of nostalgia for that apparatus, at the same time as it is no longer tenable. They show a desire for generalizability, at the same time that the old institutions have waned in their capacity to offer common forms of recognition, a strategy for punctuating the free-flow of time—the ongoingness and never-endingness of a life not scheduled by institutions—through, precisely, a noninstitutional means.

In his groundbreaking studies of the history of photography and vision, Jonathan Crary has shown that the nineteenth century saw a transition from an understanding of a kind of universal or objective eye to one radically embodied and therefore subjective. It is this movement from "fixed and stable" vision to subjective vision with "an unprecedented mobility and exchangeability" that makes ostensibly opposing developments in visual culture—the seemingly realist camera and the antirealist techniques of impressionist painting and its afterlives—part of the same process.[24] In the twentieth century, Sean Cubitt sees a reverse development, as a kind of cyborg vision desubjectivizes the eye once more:

"The expanding use of computers and the growth of the internet have created the terms of a new community, potentially a universal one."[25] What Cubitt is interested in are the pleasures of this "community" and how they have been coopted by corporations, which promise to offer their isolated users a sense of belonging. What interests me is the historical loop of this process, a return to a quasi-universalism to remedy a situation in which the subjectivization of photography has become so extreme as to be alienating.

This is to say that filters do not merely symptomize what Deleuze influentially called the society of control but seek to repair it; and so too do they provide a wedge between the technological "digital" and the political "control" through a kind of willful archaism, a sense that control can be slowed down if the digital can build and substitute new scenes of belonging for the institutional confinements that have fallen into disrepair and on whose ruins control spreads. Unlike viral methods that accelerate the logic of control until it breaks, filter is a method of deceleration through reviving and adapting the form, but not the substance, of a prior disciplinary mechanism. On both Instagram and Snapchat, stylizing photos through filters is a way of both reducing and compartmentalizing the ongoing unfolding of everyday life in the service of improvising new categories of social belonging. A filter registers the condition of the acceleration of life under a scrambling of institutional space by seeking to delay it: its gambit is that ongoing modulation can be slowed down, for a moment, in raising up a quality latent in a given scene. Virtual space provides a model of a larger public phenomenon in which people encounter each other without an institutional context to provide a sense of shared recognition and understanding: are we both students, do we all participate in the institution of the family, what occupational experiences do we have in common? On social media, they form a collective in their mode of appearance. Snapchat's geofilter, for instance, tries to repair institutional space by proposing a temporary monopoly: you are here to celebrate the Smith wedding, it says, and anything else you do will be filtered through that lens. You can take a picture of yourself drinking champagne, admiring the plates, dancing or smelling the flowers, but this filter will frame it in such a way to stamp it as a wedding celebration. Filter is a reparative strategy of disciplinary lag. It is the style of extemporizing new types of temporary institution—what I have called generic scenes—that can activate and dilate a part of a person in order to assimilate them to a group of people who share a common affective repertoire.

Style Across Media

My account of filtering as a style that repairs the decline of the institutional organization of shareable roles assumes an account of style that is at odds with some of its most compelling theorists in the past generation. For Mark McGurl, for instance, style is to be understood in relation to the relative strength of an institution such as the university, whereas for D. A. Miller, style is to be understood in relation to a total symbolic order that administers heterosexual roles. Although they differ in their accounts because of the different historical periods about which they write, they share an understanding of style as managing ambivalent attachments to big social forms. Miller, writing about Jane Austen, has in mind a disciplinary society in which regimes of normalization compel individuals to monitor and realize themselves in a certain, limited way.[26] McGurl, writing about the postwar period, has in mind a close kin of disciplinary society in which society is cut up into institutions, as I discussed in the introduction to this essay. For both, an impersonal mechanism administers knowable social types with knowable ways of being and doing in the world, and it is the work of style to manage proximity to them. But if, as I've argued, the contemporary is better defined not by a total structure and not by the relative strength of institutions, but by a general crisis of order, then how do we place the ambivalence of style? What to make of style when it cannot take the givenness of institutions or shared symbolic orders as an anxiogenic point of departure? In today's world of generalized institutional crisis, style might be better understood not as psychic management but as social repair, and not as organized by given social roles but as generating new ones.

In turn, I have identified a style in this essay not as what it expresses or even necessarily what it looks like but what it does. Although "filter" is a term we now associate with digital media, it is an action independent of them, and it names a specific way in which any medium might organize its forms. In the dynamic interaction between a fabricated overlay and a subject, filtering is a style of wrapping a person in a generic fabric so that they appear in an essentially theatrical pose rather than in an institutional role, so that you appear not as your proper name but as a category of people indexed by the costume chosen. What filtering does is coordinate this costume with a person, this impersonal form with that personal content, in order for the generation of genericity to occur. In other words, I mean that filtering is not the "puppy-dog ears" itself, but the organization of a scene in which those ears and this body participate together.

In a pivotal lecture from 1974, Nelson Goodman argued for abandoning the sometimes-easy reduction of style to form, a reduction often facilitated by thinking of style as "how" something is said rather than "what" is said in the content. "What is said, how it is said," wrote Goodman, "what is expressed, and how it is expressed are all intimately interrelated and involved in style."[27] The idea was that style is a coordination of form and content, the dynamic organization of their relation. In what forms should this content show up? Or to what content should this form be applied? Styles name particular formations that answer these questions. Goodman went on to defend a view of style I think is untenable after the death of the author—he viewed style as a signature or mark of an individual genius. Nevertheless, I take his insight as a motivation to think of style not as a shape, which we might attribute to form, nor even as the expression, presentation, or priming of affect, as I talked about in relation to genre, but as an action: a coordination of form and content from which generic affective effects may follow. Style, in turn, may evolve even when form itself remains consistent; as I argue in the following section, the novel of short stories, as a form, has a long, continuous history in the US from local color fiction in the late nineteenth century to works by Egan, McCann, and Strout in the twenty-first century, but these more recent novels constitute a different style because of the particular way they coordinate form with a different content, because of the particular action their style manifests.[28] To riff on Goodman: content is what is *said*; style is what is *done*. And we might identify styles, then, according to the particular kind of doing they offer, the particular coordination of form and content they choreograph.

To view style as an action in this way makes possible what I call "promiscuous" archives, which although not monogamously committed to any *one* object, may still pursue a particular *kind* of object. Someone who has many partners may also say, *I have a type.* A common action provides a better foundation for grouping the objects in this "type" than does a formal coincidence in their shape. Recent formalist analysis, to which this essay is clearly indebted, has turned to homologies among political, social, and aesthetic forms in order to see, as Caroline Levine puts it, "patterns of sociopolitical experience" that make both the nation state and the novel (for instance) appear structured by the same logic.[29] One difficulty of formalist analysis, however, has been how to scale structure: why we should think that the character network of a novel, for instance, is a good model for the social networks of the real world; why the shifting intensities of attention in a film can teach us modes of community life blown up from the case study of the dyad to the experience of the collective; why the containment of an aesthetic form is analogous to the

containment of a nation-state and therefore a lesson in sovereignty and its disruptions. Responding to the urgency of thinking the big scale of human agency in the age of manmade climate change, Derek Woods has called the assumption that scholars can scale up from the small to the large without distortion the "smooth zoom" of scaling up, thereby assuming that a shape and the forces that convene upon it are identical throughout the transformation. As one example, drawing upon the work of biologists J. B. S. Haldane and Stephen Jay Gould: an insect can walk on the ceiling because it is small enough that surface forces trump gravity but blow up the insect to the size of a horror movie monster, and gravity will win; a 6-foot insect could not walk the same paths of its 6mm model.[30] Forms do not always scale smoothly; a different scale brings in different variables and environments. By comparing not forms per se, but an action in which form is coordinated—and therefore seeing a relation not between political and aesthetic objects, but in a common habituated practice that underlies and produces objects in separate political and aesthetic domains—style focuses on processes that mediate among scales of analysis and domains of experience. Candace Vogler has remarked that one of the "excellent" things about definitions of action is that they are "applicable to people, to firms, and so on": "nation-states, corporations, and other such bodies also act."[31] Comparing actions allows us to compare what agents on different scales are doing, even if the agents themselves are not of the same make-up or structure.

Style theorized as action calls for stylistics to generate and name promiscuous categories provisionally capacious enough to collect such disparate phenomena as political and novelistic action together in order to see how they illuminate one another. As an action of coordinating form and content manifests in different media, style enables their robust comparative analysis, to the point we might take, say, the political space of direct action as one medium alongside more conventionally recognized ones, like cinema or music, that is, a domain in which a practice manifests. To return to filtering: as a coordination of an overlay and a subject in the production of a genre, it is a style we might find not only in digital social media, where the name itself appears, but also in wide-ranging phenomena, such as Krzysztof Wodiczko's site-specific projections of politically charged overlays onto public monuments, which reframe institutions of art as open to those experiencing homelessness; Occupy Wall Street, which filters a public park into a political forum so that new political subjectivities can emerge beyond the institutional roles of, say, a congressperson.[32] Another example is the spectacle of the "flash mob," in which people assemble in a public space and perform what is usually a choreographed dance together, all with the appearance of spontaneity

so that the space seems suddenly and temporarily transformed into a disco. During a "flash mob," the public space is filtered in a sort of mini-Occupy that lasts the duration of a song, the flash mob's own particular overlay device in its activation of a subjective and generic performance. In the remainder of this essay, I explore one manifestation of filtering in particular: the increasingly popular novel-of-short-stories in which the unit of the chapter frames subjective appearance in new genres that repurpose the institutional ones that have fallen into disuse.

Filtered Scenes in the Novel of Short Stories

The first chapter of Elizabeth Strout's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Olive Kitteridge* (2008) begins: "For many years Henry Kitteridge was a pharmacist in the next town over, driving every morning on snowy roads, or rainy roads, or summer-time roads, when the wild raspberries shot their new growth in brambles along the last section of town before he turned off to where the wider road led to the pharmacy."[33] Each chapter in this novel is a short story focusing on some character or other in the small town of Crosby, Maine. As chapters, each story vies for novelistic space, trying to carve out part of a larger world—the total social network subtended by the novel entire—and turn it into the intimate scene of a selected few. Moreover, because the characters foregrounded in each story will reappear as minor characters in other stories, where they will be filtered through the perspective of *that* story's centering consciousness, each chapter is also trying to carve out from the complexity of its characters a specific role they perform in a specific context. The first chapter's first sentence insists on giving us Henry as a pharmacist and pharmacist only, subordinating an incredible expanse of space and time to the cause. The sentence gives us winter, spring, and summer; it gives us a drive both bucolic ("wild raspberries") and civilized; and it contains all this imagery between the bookends of "pharmacist" and "pharmacy": the entire calendar and the entire space of the novel literally "le[ad] to the pharmacy." Of course, Henry is other things during this time and within this space. He is a husband, he is a father, a church-goer, a citizen. His life traverses myriad institutional contexts: the institution of marriage; the family; religion; the institutions of the state. Many of these institutions are entangled, especially in a small town, so that religion will come to bear on his childrearing, and the state will come to bear upon his labor. But the sentence begins with the premise that one institution, one role, one part of his life can be intensified to such a point that the others are minoritized to it or embedded within it.

The style of works like *Olive Kitteridge* is best understood as a kind of filtering: here, the chapter distills the laboring part of Henry so that we get a pure version of him as "pharmacist" only. The effect can only be temporary: the filter is applied by the unit of the chapter, and so other parts of the novel will present Henry in different ways. Within this style, like in the filters of social media from Instagram to Snapchat, there unfolds a dynamic between dilation and confinement, between letting one role a character plays monopolize his entire presentation but requiring, as a condition of that intensification, that the presentation be limited to a particular shot, moment, or space.

And yet, just as Instagram and Snapchat have a prehistory in toning and comic foregrounds, the novel of short stories is not new. Local colorists like Sarah Orne Jewett had sought in the 1870s through 1890s to present the regional dialects and customs of rural New England communities as part of a movement that was prolific enough to obsess critical editors of periodicals like *Harper's* and *The Atlantic*, but short-lived enough to be promptly dismissed by ultimately more influential authors like Edith Wharton, who rejected how colorists had seen "the derelict mountain villages of New England" through "rose-coloured spectacles."[34] Her complaint with the colorists, whom Donna M. Campbell has demonstrated satirized in her own early short story "Mrs. Manstey's View," was that they provided too limited a picture of local life, a selective "View" that could only belong to one self-indulgent character and not to a general community.[35] Although Jewett was also a novelist, the preferred form of most of this fiction was the single short story, which perhaps also indicated the limited surveillance of their project. But many writers in this period turned forcefully to the short story collection precisely as a means of getting to a wider social view, especially in what Sandra Zagarell has influentially called the "narrative of community," in which what we call the self is "part of the interdependent network of the community rather than . . . an individualistic unit."[36] As Zagarell has argued, episodic narrative, paradigmatically in novelistic collections of short stories, was one technique early regionalist writers deployed to subordinate the individual to an interdependent social network.[37]

What local colorists discovered as a technique for the creation of communities through the genre of the short story collection was then taken up by later ruralist writers in the following generation, most influentially in Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), William Faulkner's *The Unvanquished* (1938) and *Go Down, Moses* (1942), and Eudora Welty's *The Golden Apples* (1949). Although Anderson's book has had greater impact on the later writers, and although Anderson even thought he had "invented a new genre" in writing it, the book is, stylistically, of a piece

with the short story sequences generated by Jewett and others before.[38] The aim of these works was the description of a subculture; they tell the story not of a single character, but of a single place. So too do the short story cycles of the later twentieth century. Hubert Selby, Jr.'s *Last Exit to Brooklyn* (1964) was an early and influential example, and other narratives that explored drug use followed suit, including Denis Johnson's *Jesuss Son* (1992) and Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* (1993).[39] The 1980s and 1990s also saw the publication of works like Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* (1984), documenting sixty years of life among the Ojibwe people in the North Dakota Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation, and Robert Olen Butler's *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain* (1992), tracking the experiences of a group of Vietnamese immigrants in Louisiana. Like Tim O'Brien's treatment of Vietnam War veterans in *The Things They Carried* (1990), the style in each of these works attended to a group psychology and sociality, marking the emergence of social groups cohered by common experiences. James Nagel, writing about many of these novels, thinks they are twinned with a multicultural moment in the US in which writers wish to express the complex formation of identity and readers wish to consume identity narratives; it is because this style is so attractive to contemporary ethnic writers that it reached a sort of renaissance, according to Nagel, in the 1980s and 1990s US when ethnicity was both popularly produced and consumed.[40]

But it is here that more recent novels of the new millennium depart from previous short story cycles, because the subordination of character to group does not produce socialites cohered by geographic place or identity categories. There is rarely a single culture that transcends or mediates among the chapters of Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010), David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004), or McCann's *Let the Great World Spin* (2009). Indeed, the global and historical reach of these novels speaks instead to the impossibility of a single demographic or cultural category providing a common point of reference for each of its characters. Absent such a category, each chapter operates more like a scene, attempting to intensify a role in its characters. The novels as a whole are then an exercise in cutting up a world, in the form of a novel, into relatively discrete spaces of social interaction, in the form of a chapter, so that characters present only part of their subjectivity according to the expectations of the particular space in which they presently appear. In *Olive Kitteridge* we saw that these spaces were indeed disciplinary spaces of family, labor, and so on, that is to say, institutions. In other novels, these spaces are more often scenes in the sense I analyzed in the previous section. In this way, the twenty-first-century novel of short stories is to the earlier twentieth-century novel of short stories what, in the previous section, I

described as the relation between filtering and toning. It is not just that the newer novels provision generic scenes (for instance, as I will put it, the "romance") more than institutions (the strictly nuclear family with its attendant Oedipal roles), and in turn supply a narrower affective range rather than a broad aesthetic category like the tranquil. It is also, and more importantly, that these novels do not tell the story of a community or aim even to produce community, but instead to distill and isolate a role from a given character. Characters are not subordinated to space but are instead filtered through scene. The effect is a kind of interactivity akin to Instagram and Snapchat but absent in something like Coolidge's comic foregrounds, in which subjects are aligned physically, but not affectively, with the scene in which they are placed. In the twenty-first-century novel of short stories—a novel in filtered style—isolated aspects of subjects are actively extracted and dilated rather than in the earlier novel of short stories—a novel that is merely toned—in which they are simply placed into a physical proximity with other characters of a similar identity or location (Table 1).

Table 1. Toning vs. Filtering in Multiple Media

Toning	Filtering
Sonochrome; Sepia and other chemical conversions of B&W photos	Instagram color manipulations, e.g. "Lark"
Coolidge's comic foregrounds	Snapchat lenses and geofilters
Rural and subcultural novels of short stories (Anderson, Faulkner, Welty, Selby, Jr.)	Contemporary novels of short stories (Egan, McCann, Mitchell, Strout)

This is the organizational principle of the filtering style of *A Visit from the Goon Squad.* The novel begins with the story of Sasha on a date with a man named Alex, whom she met through an online dating website. The date is going poorly until Sasha, who is in therapy for kleptomania (the dialogue from a session with her therapist is interspersed throughout the chapter), is energized by stealing a purse left on the counter of the bathroom of the hotel bar where they met: "Postwallet . . . , the scene tingled with mirthful possibility. Sasha felt the waiters eyeing her as she sidled back to the table holding her handbag with its secret weight. She sat down and took a sip of her Melon Madness Martini and cocked her head at Alex. She smiled her yes/no smile."[41] For Sasha, having a "secret" allows her to come more fully into herself: "her yes/no smile" registers

a trademark form that she can finally slip into in public because of her private act and knowledge. Submitting to her urge to steal brings Sasha closer to her sense of herself, in other words, but only because it is routed through a publicness in which she can recognize her prize as indeed a secret, something shielded from the eyes of the waiters and of Alex. It is not that the stealing of the wallet immediately provides Sasha with a change in disposition; rather, the action is routed through the "scene" of the restaurant, which is what holds the "mirthful possibility" rather than herself, and her disposition becomes derivative of the scene in which she appears. The tethering of performance to scene also suggests for Sasha a proliferation of self-fashionings contingent upon a proliferation of scenes: there may be as many ways of presenting the self as there are scenes in which the self shows up.

Indeed, each chapter of *A Visit from the Goon Squad* seeks to provision a scene filtered from the life of a character, presenting a part of their self that is episodically confined: what a character is like at a particular time and place. Here, she is the subject of romantic heterosexuality. In later chapters, we will see Sasha as a subject of employment, as a former runaway bohemian in Naples, as an older student at New York University, and as a future mother in the Californian desert, and these are parts that are at times radically different, collected only under a common proper name that insists on their continuity. The chapters show Sasha at the height of particular moments in her life rather than in the transitional periods that bridge them; like "her yes/no smile," they present genres of Sasha, time periods carefully sectioned off and bordered. But the work of keeping temporality contained and therefore parts of a self hermetic is continually disturbed at the same time it is aspired toward. At times, the chapters rebel against their own projects, longing for more temporal breadth at precisely the moments they claim to want temporal confinement.

Consider the final paragraph of the first chapter, after Sasha has just detailed the Alex story to her therapist, thereby subordinating her subjecthood of heterosexuality to her subjecthood of compulsion. The chapter has distilled the therapeutic subject, filtering out the romance, and then: "They sat in silence, the longest silence that ever had passed between them. Sasha looked at the windowpane, rinsed continually with rain, smearing lights in the falling dark. She lay with her body tensed, claiming the couch, her spot in their room, her view of the window and the walls, the faint hum that was always there when she listened, and these minutes of [her therapist's] time: another, then another, then one more" (*V* 18). At first, the silence marks an uncertainty in how to proceed; Sasha has just asked her therapist not to ask her "how I

feel," but that precisely is the role laid out for them by the contract of their therapy, where he asks her questions and she confesses affective states. The uncertainty in how to inhabit the room when the roles laid out for them are declined propels Sasha to reexamine the room itself and especially the figure of the psychoanalytic couch, which, as "her spot in the room," places her back in the role she had for a moment disturbed. The passage speeds up in this last sentence as she reclaims her "spot," falling into a list of observations that cascade out from the place. The flow of this sentence is unique in the chapter; never before have we encountered the rolling cadence afforded by the syntax of lists, extending into an unnamed future where unmarked minutes continue to expire. In turn, we can see a peculiar anxiety at this moment when the chapter is supposed to conclude, sealing off Sasha in the scene of her compulsion: at this moment when ending is supposed to happen, the ultimate sentence rebels, feeling out for a future into which it extends. The ambivalence of the final sentence—concluding the chapter but resisting finality—speaks to a tension internal to the project of cutting experience into scenes that can provision partial, and only partial, subjectivity. A chapter can filter a scene, but filtering is always local and limited, bound by the frame it applies, and it is from this anxiety to make total or generalizable the feat of capturing a subject that induces so much temporal anxiety at the chapter's conclusion.

The ambivalence at the end of the first chapter of *A Visit From the Goon Squad*—both confining characters in a disciplined space and expanding the confinement to take over other space spaces, thus making the border of the confinement fuzzy—repeats in the following chapter, though with a difference. This chapter narrates an afternoon in the life of Sasha's boss and record producer Bennie Salazar; it is about Sasha and Bennie as subjects of employment. But then, at the very end, there is a disturbance from a competing scene: Bennie, dropping off Sasha at her home, makes a move on her, which she graciously declines. "Then she was out of the car. She waved to him through the window and said something he didn't catch. Bennie lunged fixedly across the empty seat, his face near the glass, staring fixedly as she said it again. Still, he missed it. As he struggled to open the door, Sasha said it once more, mouthing the words extra slowly. 'See. You. Tomorrow'" (*V* 38). As in the first chapter, there is a convergence of two scenes and two different sets of roles Bennie and Sasha could inhabit, here professional and sexual. Sasha declining Bennie's advance reasserts the professional scene and eliminates the other. Then, having reaffirmed the scene, the chapter seems to want to stay with it. The passage relishes its—and the chapter's—final words, building up to them by having them said twice without being heard before

finally delivering them. The syntax too develops in ways original to the end of the chapter; the shorter sentences, reaching an apex in Sasha's punctuated line ("See. You. Tomorrow."), slow down the chapter, halting its finish. Whereas in the previous chapter, the final sentence rushed forward, as if eager to continue to fill up the future, here the sentence wants to slow down, pacing out words to savor each one, resisting the future it speaks of ("Tomorrow"). In both cases, however, the temporal disturbance afforded by the final prose—sped up for Sasha's chapter, slowed down for Bennie's—registers the difficulty of ending itself, of putting up a border between the different spaces of life, and different subjective roles, that each chapter presents.

The endings of chapters in McCann's filtered *Let the Great World Spin* bear a similar form. In a novel not characterized by minimalism, the last sentences of these chapters are remarkably slower, more plodding, more repetitive: "Oh, she said, his forehead's cold. His forehead's very cold"; "Come, she says, come. Let's go see Joshua's room"; "There is, I think, a fear of love. There is a fear of love."[42] There is something almost formulaic about these slowed-down sentences, their hoarding of a couple simple words in order to stall off the closure they also bring about. Toward the borders of the units of this multicast novel, the syntax of sentences firms up the walls, keeping subjects in the confined space in which they were filtered.

The style of these novels speaks to the difficulty of sustaining a project of dilating a filtered part of the world to the whole world when the curation of that part was always premised on its finitude—the "snap." It is a problem of the utopian enclave in general: how to subtract from the world in order to open up a space of difference withdrawn from dominant orders, but then elaborate that space to saturate or replace the world originally opposed. Because the big world can never be wholly replaced by the local scene that is subtracted for a moment from it, a filter's reparativity is always compromised. It is partial, or—more precisely—prototypical and redirected. The outpouring of recent literary critical work on "reparative reading," inspired by Melanie Klein by way of Eve Kosofksy Sedgwick's groundbreaking essay, has overlooked how the psychoanalyst's account of reparation originally included two modes through which an ego can fantasize it is repairing an object without actually repairing it.[43] In the first, the anxiety of having an object under threat is alleviated by a manic defense through which the subject assumes an omnipotence that disparages that object's importance, pretending as if she does not really love or need it, pretending even that she has only contempt for and a sense of triumph over it in a fantasy of mastery and control; the manic defense is primarily a mode of denial, which

fantastically reverses the real relation of dependency on the object. In the second, the anxiety of performing the great labor of reparation is displaced through an obsessive defense that finds smaller objects that are easier to repair, pretending this is all along the repair of the larger threat that animates the subject altogether. The manic pretends to a great omnipotence that is farcical and therefore cannot be long sustained. The obsessive enacts a small omnipotence that is actual, but still not on the level where the great drama of object threat and repair is played out. Therefore it is still incapable of accomplishing the work of reparation proper. For this reason it is obsessive, forever repeating the small task it has mastered, forever knowing a larger threat remains.[44]

In a chaotic world of overlapping institutions, some people try to filter out or isolate roles to play one at a time; it is an obsessive task of purifying a given scene when the larger structure of institutional loss cannot be repaired. But the nature of obsession is a constant need to repeat the small task because the big task of fixing the decaying world is too impossible to accomplish. And so the filtered novel, anxious when its minor task comes to an end in each chapter and it must prepare to start new, flails in its language, becoming shorter or longer, its temporal distress mirroring the obsessive nature of the project altogether. As these novels will suggest, filter style also sometimes falls back upon other hegemonic logics to facilitate its counterhegemony. Consider *A Visit from the Goon Squad*'s third chapter, which shifts us to 1980s Kenya and gives us a glimpse into the family life of another record producer, Bennie's mentor Lou, as he vacations with his two children, Charlie and Rolph. The chapter is impatient with letting this glimpse stand on its own; again toward the end, it unloads a postscript:

> As they move together, Rolph feels his self-consciousness miraculously fade, as if he is grown up right there on the dance floor, becoming a boy who dances with girls like his sister. Charlie feels it, too. In fact, this particular memory is one she'll return to again and again, for the rest of her life, long after Rolph has shot himself in the head in their father's house at twenty-eight: her brother as a boy, hair slicked flat, eyes sparkling, shyly learning to dance. But the woman who remembers won't be Charlie; after Rolph dies, she'll revert to her real name—Charlene, unlatching herself forever from the girl who danced with her brother in—Africa. Charlene will cut her hair short and go to law school. When she gives birth to a son she'll want to name him Rolph, but her parents will still be too shattered. So she'll call him that privately, just in her mind, and years later, she'll stand with her mother among a crowd of cheering parents beside a field, watching him play, a dreamy look on his face as he glances at the sky. (*V* 83)

Charlie's concept of Rolph is located within a moment of his coming into her heterosexuality, leaving behind a homosocial bond he has had with his father and learning to interact physically with women. Charlie, in other words, wants to seal Rolph off into a moment from his life, refusing to see that moment's participation in a larger narrative that would collect other moments that could also define him. Although Charlie seems to escape definition by this moment—becoming "Charlene," going to law school—the passage notably concludes by positioning her in mature heterosexuality, opposite a Rolph proxy. It is not a question if Charlie will give birth to a child but "when," suggesting that whatever contingency her change of name and pursuit of career introduced into the repronormative narrative, she never strays from its defining forms, reproducing the signal major life events that make her future, unlike Rolph's, intelligible within the frame of this story of heterosexual awakening. At the same time that the story jumps forward for other spaces in which its characters can show up—especially the field of whatever game Charlene's son plays—it is jealous of keeping its characters the same: Rolph is killed in order to preserve the memory of this moment, and Charlie becomes Charlene only to realize the nascent heterosexuality the scene figures. Here, the space of the chapter pushes out for more spaces in order to colonize them, mediated by a heterosexuality that stabilizes the roles characters play across time. This "reproductive futurism" repeats throughout *A Visit from the Goon Squad*: at the conclusion of another chapter about Sasha as a runaway in Naples, the novel fast forwards to when she becomes "like anyone": "married . . . and had two children" (233).[45]

The reproductive futurism repeats as well in *Cloud Atlas*, another filtered novel that distributes a multinational and multihistorical narrative of linked characters across six episodes. Each episode shows up in the next one because heterosexual reproduction facilitates its transfer: "The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing," we learn in footnotes, has been collected and published by his daughter; the "Letters from Zedelghem" are collected by a lover's niece in "Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery"; "The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish" is transmitted to us because "An Orison of Somni-451" tells it in its message to future generations of clones and humans; and "Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After" is postfaced by the memory of its narrator's son, who sustains the telling of the story even after his death.[46] The crucial role of children in mediating between the stories enacts at a formal level what musical composer Robert Frobisher, the writer of the "Letters from Zedelghem," hints at when he writes that "a half-read book is a half-finished love affair,"[47] thus aligning erotic narrative with narrative itself: as each story reads

its previous story, it writes its own love story to be read by the next. The love story both makes reading possible by producing children who can preserve it, and becomes the story of reading itself.

When a heteroreproductive love sutures the spaces of filtered novels, it is perhaps unsurprising that queer characters come to bear the burden of these novels' stylistic contradictions. In *A Visit from the Goon Squad,* queerness is concentrated in a character named Rob, who forms attachments to Sasha and performs a relationship with her but also desires their friend Drew. The story is the only one in *A Visit from the Goon Squad* rendered in second person: "If you could see Drew naked, even just once, it would ease a deep, awful pressure inside you" (*V* 199). This "pressure" is, notably, nonlinguistic: it is not that Rob has an idea of coming out as, say, gay or bisexual, but rather that there is something "awful" and therefore ineffable that he feels in proximity to Drew. At the end of the chapter, Rob does see Drew naked, as they jump into the East River, but as if afraid of the release of Rob's pent-up pressure—as if afraid that this queer energy will infect the rest of the book—the novel quickly kills him off, as he gets carried away in a tide and drowns. So, too, does the one explicitly queer character in *Cloud Atlas* die. Frobisher's sexual identity is also difficult to place; he writes letters to his "love," Rufus, while sleeping with his employer's wife. He in turn will be the only protagonist of the novel's stories who dies of suicide, allowing his queerness to be rewritten: in future stories, his relationship with Rufus will be euphemized as "friendship," freeing Rufus to take up a position in a heterosexual genealogical matrix that propagates both of their stories.[48] Frobisher "has to be killed" in order for the narrative of the novel to progress.[49] "Cloud Atlas" is after all the title Frobisher gives to his composition, and the novel's adoption of it for its own title raises up its enduring interest in sources of queerness that exceed or transcend the confines of its individual stories, even as it disavows such an attachment by requiring Frobisher, and only Frobisher, to die.[50] Wendy Chun has shown how the internet, "rather than enabling anonymity, supposedly allows users to pass as the fictional whole and complete subject of the bourgeois public sphere. This narrative of passing threatens to render invisible the practices of the very people of color from whom the desire to be free stems, and to transform the desire to be free from discrimination into the desire to be free from these very bodies."[51] That is, a universalism of color blindness in fact requires racial disavowal, a logic we saw glimpses of as well in the postracial imaginary of social media filters that position crowns of flowers through a universal and anatomical facial recognition; in what Joy Buolamwini calls the "coded gaze," facial recognition algorithms, trained to recognize white faces, also often fail

to detect faces of people of color.[52] In the filtered novel, this disavowal is more precisely of queerness, putting outside the frame those energies and bodies that exceed neodisciplinary scenic confinement.

Filter creates new forms of recognition by excluding others, whether the faces of people of color in social media algorithms or the queerness of characters in the novel of short stories. It is a style anxious about these unruly bodies because of its nostalgia for reviving disciplinary borders that make social roles intelligible. Indeed, each of the six episodes of *Cloud Atlas* takes place in a confined space that is one of the paradigmatic disciplinary institutions Jeremy Bentham presented in his writings on the Panopticon: hospital, factory, prison, or home.[53] The ship in the first episode is a hospital; the house in the second is a family home; in the third, there is an industrial factory; in the fourth, a nursing home that doubles as another hospital; the fifth episode takes place in a prison, and the sixth takes places on an isolated island, which provides the boundaries of another domestic family. The novel's nostalgia for disciplinary institutions is betrayed as well by *Cloud Atlas*'s peculiar will to archaism. In the futuristic society of Somni-451, for instance, clones are recycled—killed in order to become food for more clones in a "perfect food cycle"—on an assembly line labeled "industrialized evil."[54] But it is strange to see a twenty-second-century society founded upon a Fordist mode of production that was already being replaced in the twentieth century, underlining *Cloud Atlas*'s investments in older social organizations. Queerness, however, disorganizes this structure and therefore registers as a threat that must be neutralized in order for filtering to continue. Here, I mean queer not only in the sense of a sexual minority, but in the sense of an energy that evades classification: the "awful," unidentifiable desire for which Drew provides a home, or the impossibility of immediately classifying Frobisher into a social, sexual, or familial role. Such energy of the ineffable frustrates the borders of the filters each chapter applies to its novelistic space. Bringing us to a disciplinary limit the queer character represents, the novel must then kill him in order to move on. Filtering's slowing down of the world into discrete spaces is a counterhegemony that requires queer disavowal: to carry a minor space into the major key, this style employs heteronormative sutures.

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NOTES

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3 Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1951), 195.

4 Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, 169.

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9 Clint Hughes, "Beyond Sepia," *British Journal of Photography* 9076 (October 9, 1996): 18.

10 "Formulas for Making Different Colored Photographic Prints," *Scientific American* 66, no. 11 (1892): 161.

11 Joshua Yumibe, *Moving Color: Early Film, Mass Culture, Modernism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2012), 5.

12 Yumibe, *Moving Color*, 23.

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14 Brenda Laurel, *Computers as Theatre*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Addison-Wesley Professional, 2013), 38.

15 Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (1986): 11, 12.

16 Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," 47.

17 Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 65.

18 Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 174. The sense of an object participating in a genre is derived, classically, from Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," trans. Avital Ronell, *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980): 55–81.

19 Cassius Coolidge, "Processes of Taking Photographic Pictures," No. 149,724. Patented April 14, 1874.

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21 Angela Berkley, "Snapshot Seeing: Kodak Fiends, Child Photographers, and Henry James's *What Maisie Knew*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 61, no. 3 (2015): 380.

22 See Peter Rawlings, "A Kodak Refraction of Henry James's 'The Real Thing,'" *Journal of American Studies* 32, no. 3 (1998): 447–62.

23 Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 50.

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25 Sean Cubitt, *Digital Aesthetics* (London: SAGE Publications, 1998), 149.

26 See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995), 195–230.

27 Nelson Goodman, "The Status of Style," *Critical Inquiry* 1, no. 4 (1975): 803.
28 For a further elaboration of how style's history may depart from form's, see Michael Dango, "Minimalism as Detoxification," *Modern Fiction Studies* 65, no. 4 (2019): 643–75.
29 Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2015), 2.
30 Derek Woods, "Scale Critique for the Anthropocene," *The Minnesota Review* 2014, no. 83 (2014): 136.
31 Candace Vogler, *Reasonably Vicious* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2002), 259.
32 Public parks have always had the latent germs of a public sphere, as in the Speaker's Corner in London's Hyde Park; what Occupy sought to do was distill this political dimension, so that a space like Zuccotti Park became wholly and solely about the curation of political subjectivities that contested a larger social order.
33 Elizabeth Strout, *Olive Kitteridge* (New York: Random House, 2008), 4.
34 Edith Wharton, *A Backward Glance* (New York: D. Appleton, 1934), 293.
35 Donna M. Campbell, "Edith Wharton and the 'Authoresses': The Critique of Local Color in Wharton's Early Fiction," *Studies in American Fiction* 22, no. 2 (1994): 173.
36 Sandra A. Zagarell, "Narrative of Community: The Identification of a Genre," *Signs* 13, no. 3 (1988): 499.
37 Zagarell, "Narrative of Community," 503.
38 Roxanne Harde, ed., *Narratives of Community: Women's Short Story Sequences* (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 3.
39 Ian Bell, "Last Exit to Leith," *The Guardian*, August 14, 1993, http://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/1993/aug/15/featuresreview.review.
40 James Nagel, *The Contemporary American Short-Story Cycle: The Ethnic Resonance of Genre* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 2001), 17.
41 Jennifer Egan, *A Visit From the Good Squad* (New York: Knopf, 2010), 5 (hereafter cited as *V*).
42 Colum MCann, *Let the Great World Spin* (New York: Random House, 2009), 72, 114, 156.
43 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2003), 123–52.
44 Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis provide these definitions of manic and obsessive defenses to reparation: "To the extent that their operation is defective, mechanisms of reparation may come to resemble sometimes maniac defenses (feeling of omnipotence), and sometimes obsessional ones (compulsive repetition of reparatory acts)." Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), 388. See also Melanie Klein, "Love, Guilt, and Reparation," in *Love, Guilt and Reparation, and Other Works, 1921–1945* (New York: Free Press, 1984), 306–43.
45 The phrase "reproductive futurism" is from Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2004).
46 David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (New York: Random House, 2004), 21, 501, 451.
47 Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, 64.
48 Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, 435.
49 I am borrowing the language of describing narrative productions as authorial defenses from Jacques Rancière, "Why Emma Bovary Had to Be Killed," *Critical Inquiry* 34, no. 2 (2008): 233–48. Like Emma Bovary, Frobisher was not, within the novel, murdered; he die of suicide. But he was, like Emma, killed by an author who decided he would write a novel in which he would die, for reasons as much the effect of authorial politics as narrative cohesion.

50 Somni-451 also dies in *Cloud Atlas*, and one could argue that this is a condition of her legacy as martyred revolutionary. I would also argue that Somni-451, as a nonreproductive clone who is created through technology instead of a love plot, is also a source of queerness in the novel, and for this reason she dies with Frobisher.
51 Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 29.
52 See the Algorithmic Justice League, https://www.ajlunited.org/.
53 On these spaces of confinement, see also Scott Selisker, "The Cult and the World System: The Topoi of David Mitchell's Global Novels," *Novel* 47, no. 3 (2014): 454.
54 Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, 343, 344.