

Revolutionary Leaves

Revolutionary Leaves:
The Fiction of Mark Z. Danielewski

Edited by

Sascha Pöhlmann

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P U B L I S H I N G

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In memory of Hedwig Kukla and Walter Reichel.

THE DEMOCRACY OF TWO: WHITMANIAN POLITICS IN *ONLY REVOLUTIONS*

SASCHA PÖHLMANN

Anyone who might inquire into the importance and relevance of Mark Z. Danielewski's works finds a simple answer in Larry McCaffery's statement he made in response to the call sent out by *American Book Review* to comment on the future of fiction. While other comments offer a variety of adjectives such as "dismal," "strong," "virtual," "neural," "transnational," "anonymous, viral, collaborative, ephemeral," and while they are undecided as to whether the book "will persist" or is already "going the way of the dodo," McCaffery's answer consisted of only a single straightforward sentence: "I have seen the future of fiction, and its name is Mark Z. Danielewski" ("Fiction's Future"). Nothing underscores the truth of this statement more than the fact that it can seriously be made without risking immediate ridicule or incredulity; even if some may debate the truth of the statement, they would not even consider it worthy of a debate if it was about another author. Imagine how many other contemporary writers you could really name in a statement like this and you will find that Danielewski truly occupies a special place in American fiction today. The publication of his first novel *House of Leaves* in 2000 not only gave him a cult following of readers but also the highest acclaim of literary critics both inside and outside academia. While his 2005 novella *The Fifty Year Sword* confirmed his reputation as an author of experimental fiction especially in his use of typography, color and the materiality of text and the book, it did not attract attention on a similar scale due to the fact that it was only published and sold in the Netherlands and was and is harder to come by. Yet his second novel, *Only Revolutions*, published in 2006, impressively proved that Danielewski was neither a one-hit wonder nor a one-trick pony: the book was not only again radically experimental but also radically different from *House of Leaves*. It makes use of Danielewski's trademark elements but in a way that changes them utterly in style and effect; one can only be amazed at the fact that both *Only Revolutions* and *House of Leaves* are instantly recognizable as Danielewski's

works at first sight but at the same time could hardly be any more different. If Danielewski was a band, he would be Radiohead, and these novels would be his *OK Computer* and *Kid A*.

Given his importance as a writer and the fascination of so many readers with his work, it may seem surprising that academic literary studies have taken a while to engage it critically on a larger scale. While there is an ever-active forum on the Internet in which fans debate his work with a fervor and love of detail only known from Pynchonites and Joyceans, academic criticism has mostly been limited to individual papers and essays published by enthusiasts in different journals. So far, no monograph deals exclusively with Danielewski's works, and the first collection of essays on them was published only as late as in 2011: the groundbreaking *Mark Z. Danielewski*, edited by Joe Bray and Alison Gibbons. Most importantly, there had not been a forum where scholars working on Danielewski could meet, exchange ideas and engage in academic debate in person. It was high time to create such an opportunity, and so, in May 2011, the Amerika-Institut of Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich cooperated with Junior Year in Munich to organize the first international conference devoted exclusively to this subject, with the title "Revolutionary Leaves: The Fiction of Mark Z. Danielewski." The present book is the result of this two-day event, and the eleven essays collected in it represent the diversity and richness of the scholarly discussions that took place there not only in the papers presented and the Q&A sessions that followed but also during coffee breaks, subway rides, visits to the famous *Schellingsalon* and a sunny beer garden, and generally every minute two or more Danielewski enthusiasts would spend with each other. These texts incorporate approaches that are as multifaceted as the novels they analyze, addressing ideas of structuralism and poststructuralism, modernism, postmodernism and post-postmodernism, philosophy, Marxism, reader-response criticism, mathematics and physics, politics, media studies, science fiction, gothic horror, poetic theory, history, architecture, and mythology, to name just a few of many more.

After this introduction, the collection opens with Hans-Peter Söder's essay "Writing in the Electronic Age," in which he theorizes the cultural and literary space in the digital era with special regard to the development from *readers* to *users* who are always also *critics*. He argues that electronic literature requires new, advanced, critical models of interpretation that do not resemble the poetics of the past, focusing less on notions of *docere et probare* than *delectare*. Asking whether these new aesthetic and medial spaces will bring about a new *Weltliteratur* or whether the 'new Futurism' will cause linguistic sprawl and dislocation,

he especially concentrates on the modernist components of the new Avant-garde in the Electronic Age.

Aleksandra Bida begins the discussion of Danielewski's novels by considering how the reader may or may not feel welcome in the text in "Hauntingly Sweet: Home as Labyrinth and Hospitality in *House of Leaves*." She presents the complexities of the metaphor of home with reference to the Minotaur myth and Jacques Derrida's work on hospitality in order to explore how it frames identity, belonging and agency in the novel.

Nathalie Aghoro then focuses on the materiality of book and text in "Textual Transformations: Experience, Mediation, and Reception in Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*." She analyzes how the interplay of several intradiegetic layers and the multiple (re)mediations in the novel turns its reception into an unconventional experience for readers that forces them to construct the narrative world while being constantly aware of its printed materiality.

Julius Greve addresses the political potential of *House of Leaves* in "Danielewski, or, Metacommentary as Literary Production" with reference to theories of Fredric Jameson and Gilles Deleuze. He argues that Danielewski's fiction once more raises questions similar to those Jameson was responding to in 1971, only that now the concept of 'metacommentary' has moved from the realm of literary criticism to literary production itself.

Using an even more explicit Deleuzian approach, Ridvan Askin in "'Folding, Unfolding, Refolding': Mark Z. Danielewski's Differential Novel *House of Leaves*" argues that the aesthetic experimentation in *House of Leaves* is grounded in an ontology of difference, and that it thus can be conceived of as a 'differential novel' on the levels of both story and discourse.

Sebastian Huber then goes against the grain of the most common categorization of *House of Leaves* as a postmodernist work. In "'A House of One's Own': *House of Leaves* as a Modernist Text" he analyzes the novel's representation of spatiality, myths, and structure and argues that adding the prefix *post-* may not be necessary, since the text nostalgically celebrates certain modernist doctrines that ultimately lead to the epistemological center of the archive.

Brianne Bilsky addresses a related subject in "(Im)Possible Spaces: Technology and Narrative in *House of Leaves*" as she considers how information storage technologies affect the construction and function of narratives. She argues that *House of Leaves*, with its radical approach to space at the level of form and content, stages a confrontation between analog and digital technologies that exposes the mediatedness of all

narrative, regardless of the technology used to record it, and that it ultimately attests to the value of interpretation in a hypermediated world.

Considering ontology rather than epistemology, Alison Gibbons argues in “‘You were there’: The Allways Ontologies of *Only Revolutions*” that the novel offers a multivalent system that manifests a polychronic topography of time and space. She shows through close textual analysis that the spatio-temporal planes in the novel appear to congregate and fragment, fuse and digress, to reveal the reader at the heart of this play.

Joe Bray focuses on the role of the reader from a different perspective in “Going in Circles: The Experience of Reading *Only Revolutions*.” He argues that the novel’s patterned, symmetrical structure calls for a process of continual and endless rereading. The history gutter in particular is shown to be of importance in that respect, since it can be considered a form of code that invites the reader to discover its hidden messages and resonances.

Finally, Hanjo Berressem analyzes *Only Revolutions* as a whole from a theoretical viewpoint that combines mathematics and physics with Deleuzian philosophy, developing the notion of ‘reinforced materialism.’ “The Surface of Sense, The Surface of Sensation and the Surface of Reference: Geometry and Topology in the Works of Mark Z. Danielewski” argues that what is at stake in Danielewski’s work is not only the materiality of the signifier and thus the ‘material’ playfulness of deconstruction, but *the materiality of the books themselves*. It reads both *House of Leaves* and *Only Revolutions* with regard to the reciprocal relation between materiality and poetics, addressing Deleuze’s “reciprocal presupposition” of intension and extension as well as the topological figure of the “projective plane” and its use as a poetological device.

All these essays and their approaches, which are very different but at the same time interlink with each other in many ways, show that Danielewski’s novels invite just the complexity they themselves espouse, and that readers—professional ones or fans—are far from exhausting the critical possibilities. Instead, this collection aims at being one important foundation among the other groundbreaking efforts that are currently carried out at many different sites, whether it is online forums, academic texts, or others; it does not seek to unite its essays along the lines of a single approach, but it rather strives to offer the diversity necessary to enable future criticism to grow into many different and indeed surprising new directions.

Faithful to that goal, this introduction now seeks to address a question that is crucial for an analysis and evaluation of Danielewski's work but that has yet to be discussed in greater detail. Most critics have (quite naturally) focused a great deal on the aesthetic aspects of Danielewski's fiction, its mediality, its typography and visuality, its play of narrative layers, and all those other things that make it 'experimental.' Yet of course this focus has also had the effect of placing other concerns in the background that are no less important. I would argue that one of the most crucial of these issues is this question: Are the works of Mark Z. Danielewski political? In what way can they be understood as political, if at all, and what kind of politics do they espouse? In asking that question, it is important to avoid generalizations that simply claim that all literature is political, and to draw the wrong conclusions from Fredric Jameson's statement that "there is nothing that is not social and historical—indeed, [...] everything is 'in the last analysis' political" (5). While Jameson is certainly right in his assessment, it should not be taken as an easy solution to the question of the political nature of a literary text. Merely claiming such a political universality would mean dismissing rather than addressing the issue; saying that all texts are political can only be the beginning of a political analysis and their entanglement in social and historical contexts, not the end of it. In the case of Danielewski's fiction, it is precisely this assertion of the political nature of literature that gives rise to the question instead of offering an easy answer. Because of their foregrounded radical aesthetic experimentation, *House of Leaves*, *The Fifty Year Sword* and *Only Revolutions* all face the very same charges that can be leveled against all experimental fiction, and that have been raised especially with regard to postmodernist novels in one way or another: they are only concerned with their own textual surface; they are all form and devoid of content; they are self-absorbed in playfully creating a world that bears no connection to the one they are read in; they are relativist in doing so, and ultimately they are, in a phrase, *l'art pour l'art*. Of course, there is a political aspect to such art that should not be underestimated, for example in its claims to aesthetic autonomy, but this will matter little to counter these arguments. Instead, we need to ask what political potential there is in radical experimental fiction in general, and I would argue that Danielewski provides a particularly striking example of such potential in *Only Revolutions*. (Julius Greve addresses the question of the political with regard to *House of Leaves* in his essay in this collection, so I will only analyze Danielewski's second novel here, also because I believe that both are as different in their political outlook as they are in their strategies of representation as well as their content.) I argue that *Only Revolutions*, in form and content, espouses,

adapts and expands a Whitmanian politics of radical democracy and individualism. This is not an attempt to find evidence in Danielewski's works that the "transcendentalist undercurrent" in American literature that Roger Asselineau identified in 1980 (13) is continuing in the twenty-first century, although that would be a fascinating project. Rather, this introduction seeks to show how *Only Revolutions* draws on Whitman's poetry and its major motifs and concerns in order to imagine a "Democracy of Two" that builds on his ideas but modifies them to establish its own democratic duality and thus translates Whitman's nineteenth-century vision into the twenty-first century.

This notion is grounded on the full title that is printed only on the copyright page of the novel but not its actual title page: "Only Revolutions//The Democracy Of Two//Set Out & Chronologically Arranged." This "Democracy of Two" is never mentioned in the novel, but as its subtitle—and thus a framing device—it is of immense significance, especially as the main narratives themselves are utterly devoid of any similar references to a political and social system. This numerical qualification is precisely what constitutes the crucial modification *Only Revolutions* is making to the Whitmanian imagination of democracy. Walt Whitman struggles in all his writing to fuse the concepts of individualism and democracy that seem to be at odds to him in the radical forms he conceives of:

For to democracy, the leveler, the unyielding principle of the average, is surely join'd another principle, equally unyielding, closely tracking the first, indispensable to it, opposite, (as the sexes are opposite,) and whose existence, confronting and ever modifying the other, often clashing, paradoxical, yet neither of highest avail without the other [...]. This second principle is individuality, the pride and centripetal isolation of a human being in himself—identity—personalism. ("Democratic Vistas" 982)

He summarizes his aesthetic and political agenda in one programmatic sentence about the democratic masses and the individual: "The two are contradictory, but our task is to reconcile them" ("Democratic Vistas" 965). Reconciliation means avoiding political solipsism on the one hand as well as the eradication of the subject on the other, and for Whitman one way of doing so was to imagine the individual and the universal as radically intertwined. The inscription that prefaced *Leaves of Grass* after 1881 gives a programmatic statement regarding "the paradox of many in one" (Erkkilä 94) and indeed of one in many:

One's-Self I sing, a simple separate person,
 Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse.
 ("One's Self I Sing," *Leaves of Grass* 1891-92 165)

In the end he may always be more of an individualist than a democrat, no matter how hard he struggles to keep both in balance, since he argues that "[e]ven for the treatment of the universal, in politics, metaphysics, or anything, sooner or later we come down to one single, solitary soul" ("Democratic Vistas" 984). However, Whitman also always considers the individual in connection to others, probably most notably in his theory of comradeship: "Not that half only, individualism, which isolates. There is another half, which is adhesiveness or love, that fuses, ties and aggregates, making the races comrades, and fraternizing all" ("Democratic Vistas" 973). Especially in the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, which I quote from in this essay unless indicated otherwise, Whitman explores "democracy's cosmic dimensions" (Mack 135) and not only its relevance for the single individual.

This is where *Only Revolutions* offers a fascinating and significant variation of Whitman's aesthetic and political dialectics of individual and democracy: instead of pairing the self with the mass of others through love and espousing a theory of universal brotherhood, the novel uses its dualistic form to add *two* individuals to Whitman's problem. In constructing the pair of Hailey and Sam as the irreducibly double basis of its narrative, the novel offers an imagination of the individual that always conceives of it in relation to another individual, not as a single subject that must negotiate its role with regard to a larger group. As the subtitle suggests, democracy is still an issue in relation to this duality, only that it is conceived as a "Democracy of Two" from the outset. It is, in a way, the radical implementation of Whitman's own tenets in *Leaves of Grass*, which he calls in a 1872 preface "in its intentions, the song of a great composite *democratic individual*, male or female" (1028), only that its great democratic individuals are male *and* female—but composite nevertheless. It carries out structurally what Whitman hopes to achieve in *Leaves of Grass*: "The Female equally with the Male I sing" ("One's Self I Sing," *Leaves of Grass*, 1891-92 165). The novel also moves away from a notion of individualism that has rightly come under fire in the twentieth century, most notably in the discourse of poststructuralism and the "death of the subject" which Foucault predicted in *The Order of Things*, by presenting the individual as always already connected to another and indeed an Other; as such, this "Democracy of Two" in *Only Revolutions* is not a choice of the individual to enter a democratic community, but he or she is *already in a community* by default, even if only with regard to a

single other individual. This seems to be contradicted by the beginnings of the novel, where both Sam and Hailey find themselves alone and only meet the other later, and yet the necessary rereading shows that neither have ever really been apart, and that their being alone is always only a step towards meeting again, just like being together is a step towards separation. In the beginning, Hailey finds herself “Terribly allone” (H 4) but also already “Heartrendingly hooked. Out there, my only harm” (H 4); she is already anticipating the meeting with Sam, and so she is not as alone as she thinks. After all, they keep the promise they have made to each other to be there even when they are not, and its first word is not accidentally a homophone of *two*:

*Too when you arrive. When you're allone.
When I go. When I'm allone. But
always beside you wherever we roam. (S/H 178)*

In making this assertion, this passage echoes the ending of “Song of Myself”—quoted always in the 1855 version in this essay—which is also relevant to the first pages of *Only Revolutions* in which Sam and Hailey have yet to meet, while re-readers will know that they must:

*Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
Missing me one place search another,
I stop some where waiting for you (88)*

In the cyclical view of the novel, it is clear that Hailey and Sam are always inextricably linked, even if they are physically distant at times in the narrative; similarly, they never become one in the novel, they never merge—as Emmanuel Levinas writes, “[i]n that relation to the other, there is no fusion” (*Alterity* 97). They always remain two distinct persons, so that *Only Revolutions* maintains its individualism on the one hand just as it maintains the connectivity between individuals on the other. At the same time, it combines this balance with a Whitmanian philosophy of continuity in its cyclical structure.

It is important to note that *Only Revolutions* is not only connected to Whitman’s poetry because they share similar politics; rather, this political connection is built on a complex intertextual relationship with regard to diction, style, motifs, strategies of representation, and thematic concerns, as the following analysis hopes to show. In order to outline this connection that forms the basis of the discussion of the politics of the “Democracy of Two,” I will ask the simple question: in what ways can *Only Revolutions* be called Whitmanian? Of course, it is “essentially a free-verse text” that

does not rely “on traditional formal criteria of rhyme and meter” (McHale 144), and like “Song of Myself” and so many other of Whitman’s poems it is written in the present tense, but these are only the first hints at larger connections. One of the first parallels that will strike any reader of Whitman in *Only Revolutions* is its own extensive use of the catalogue as a stylistic element; this means the long list of ever-different cars Sam and Hailey drive in on their road trip, but it is especially noteworthy with regard to the multitude of plants (in Hailey’s half) and animals (in Sam’s) that form an integral part of the narrative. Whitman has established enumeration and lists as a stylistic device in his poetry, using it as a way of expressing universality while at the same time arranging its individual elements in a democratic way that seeks to flatten hierarchies: this aesthetic practice is “universally welcoming, open to all facets of life” (Belknap 74), and it gives “an impression of multitude and variety in its imaginative reach, and of union and cohesion in its interlocking of lines” (Belknap 75). The following example from “Song of Myself,” giving a vision of travel across America, will serve as a brief illustration that resonates with the flora and fauna of *Only Revolutions*:

Where the panther walks to and fro on a limb overhead where the
buck turns furiously at the hunter,
Where the rattlesnake suns his flabby length on a rock where the otter
is feeding on fish,
Where the alligator in his tough pimples sleeps by the bayou,
Where the black bear is searching for roots or honey where the beaver
pats the mud with his paddle-tail;
Over the growing sugar over the cottonplant over the rice in its
low moist field;
Over the sharp-peaked farmhouse with its scalloped scum and slender
shoots from the gutters;
Over the western persimmon over the longleaved corn and the
delicate blueflowered flax;
Over the white and brown buckwheat, a hummer and a buzzer there with
the rest,
Over the dusky green of the rye as it ripples and shades in the breeze; (59-
60)

Only Revolutions stretches out its “Whitmanesque catalogues” (McHale 153) over the 360 respective pages of its two narratives instead of condensing them into a long stanza, and yet the enumerative effect is still achieved. It also includes small-scale lists that add to the effect:

First from my rear, forests of
 Giant Sequoia, Dwarf Juniper,
 Downy Hawthorn and Yew.
 Next, Rugosa Roses and Trailing
 Arbutus. Lastly relieved, Marble,
 Feldspar, Malachite and Opal.
 Coast to coast. Volcanic to Granite. (H 51)

Such passages emulate Whitman's technique of rendering a whole world in a poem, of course never achieving completeness, but still indicating that "there is strict account of all" ("To Think of Time" *Leaves of Grass*, 1855 104). This universality is also evident in the use of the terms *allone* and *allways* for *alone* and *always* in *Only Revolutions*: both connote inclusiveness and wholeness. While this already works well for the latter term, which combines temporal with spatial infinity by condensing all ways into one eternity, it is even more effective with the former. Changing *alone* to *allone* saves the individual from the isolation Whitman sees in individualism without comradeship; the term not only affirms that neither Sam nor Hailey are ever truly alone in the text, but also that all is one, that they exist in a universe in which all is connected. This holistic view can again be referred back to Whitman, whose use of the term *all* in *Leaves of Grass* and especially in "Song of Myself" is nothing short of excessive (and a similar thing could be said about *Only Revolutions*).

This presentation of everything is of course closely linked to the United States in Whitman's poetry, and a similar focus also characterizes it in *Only Revolutions*. Whitman famously states in his introduction to the 1855 first edition of *Leaves of Grass* that "[t]he United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem" (5) and later announces in "Democratic Vistas" that he "shall use the words America and democracy as convertible terms" (954). While he certainly espouses a holistic view of the world, especially in the first editions of *Leaves of Grass*, it is rooted in America, which forms the basis of his universality, as the following gesture of indicating the mortality of all humans exemplifies:

Slowmoving and black lines go ceaselessly over the earth,
 Northerner goes carried and southerner goes carried . . . and they on the
 Atlantic side and they on the Pacific, and they between, and all through
 the Mississippi country . . . and all over the earth.
 ("To Think of Time," *Leaves of Grass*, 1855 104)

Very similarly, *Only Revolutions* also offers a universality that is rooted in the USA. Even though Sam and Hailey may be nothing less than a pair of gods who create and destroy themselves and the world in a perpetual cycle

of life and death, they are also teenagers, “*always sixteen*” (S/H 275), on a road trip through the United States, and they never leave the national boundaries on that narrative level. Sam proposes to Hailey “by national crossroads” (H 239), and they conceive of themselves and each other as north and south—visually represented on the same page—which in the context of their trip seems an indication of American duality rather than of a global one: “He is my North. My Northern Lands” (H 240) / “Southern Fields. I am the South” (S 121). The invariable capitalization of the personal pronoun *us* contributes further to this national focus, as do other references that locate them firmly within the US:

We’re allways here. And overwhelmed by
no distances, encircling, fastening US to
The City, Our Mishishishi and US. Just two
for the World. Allone supplying the force
of unity. Altering, faltering
allies we need. (H 176)

The history gutter that accompanies their narratives also amplifies this effect, since the 200 years of history it covers are mostly American history, and even if events that occurred outside the US do get mentioned, they are often those that are highly relevant to the US. Both gutters connect on November 22, 1963, the day of the assassination of US president John F. Kennedy, and while this seems to firmly anchor it in American history, the world-wide significance of this event rather supports the argument that the history narrated in fragments in the history gutter is a global history with a strong American focus, just like the narratives of Sam and Hailey are global with a strong American focus (and indeed like Whitman’s poetry). After all, Sam, “all New World Order, / globalizes with a relentlessness only / he can coo through so / tenderly” (H 225); they are “[s]o beyond Occident & Orient. / And allways flowing” (S 57-58); and the narratives do expand towards the global while maintaining their localization in the US, as these complementary passages and their enumerations show:

Budapest, Santiago,
Warsaw. Amsterdam, Shanghai, New Delhi.
Lisbon. Every city. Roam. Air sharper.
Promises harder. Driving US from the ages. (H 216)

Tokyo,
 Dublin. Baghdad, Kiev. Berlin, Cairo.
 London. Every city. Paired. Air brisker.
 Wishes riskier. Chasing US to our ages. (S 216)

Only Revolutions thus presents a universal view that is global while at the same time focused on a national understanding of locality; another example is the traffic jam Sam presents to Hailey as a wedding gift. Its limits are located at the boundaries of the US, and yet it is also described as global:

From Bangor to Los Angeles by
 Barrow to Wailuku.
 A globally hubbed hork. (H 299-300)

From Tallahassee to Seattle by
 Honolulu to Noatak.
 A globally snarled knot. (S 299-300)

This duality of nation and globe is what places *Only Revolutions* once more in the Whitmanian tradition; after all, for all his nationalism, Whitman also asserts that “I have thought that both in patriotism and song (even amid their grandest shows past) we have adhered too long to petty limits, and that the time has come to enfold the world” (“Poetry To-day” 1049). Furthermore, his radical imagination of democracy can never be truly confined to these “petty limits” of the nation, since his efforts are always “to say—to sing—the democratic individual, especially as such an individual lives in receptivity or responsiveness, in a connectedness different from any other. Such connectedness is not the same as nationhood or group identity” (Kateb 21). The most famous example of his planetary scope is probably his “Salut au Monde!,” in which he uses his lists for an imagination of globality:

I see the cities of the earth and make myself at random a part of them,
 I am a real Parisian,
 I am a habitan of Vienna, St. Petersburg, Berlin, Constantinople,
 I am of Adelaide, Sidney, Melbourne,
 I am of London, Manchester, Bristol, Edinburgh, Limerick,
 I am of Madrid, Cadiz, Barcelona, Oporto, Lyons, Brussels, Berne, Frankfort,
 Stuttgart, Turin, Florence,
 I belong in Moscow, Cracow, Warsaw, or northward in Christiania or
 Stockholm, or in Siberian Irkutsk, or in some street in Iceland,

I descend upon all those cities, and rise from them again.
 (*Leaves of Grass*, 1891-92 293)

Sam and Hailey mostly exist in this space between globe and nation during their road trip, and the text is indeed repeatedly “[s]ticking US again to the World” (H 123) in the sense of emplacing the US globally without seeking to dissolve them in a universality that knows no national distinctions; however, once their road trip ends and they are back on the mountain where their narratives ‘began,’ they indeed disconnect from nation-ness, and the only reference in this respect is made with regard to the threatened destruction of the whole world after the respective other has died: “And every nation will burn” (S/H 348).

At the same time, again following Whitman’s model, these holistic aspects in *Only Revolutions* are always closely connected to the individual or rather *individuals*: Sam and Hailey are exploring a world, but they are also “exploring a World just for two” (H 185). At the beginning of their narratives when they reappear and have yet to find each other again, their individualism is so strong that it overrides all other concepts that could define the world, and Sam’s early statement “This land is my land” (S 2) must be understood less as a reference to Woody Guthrie than as an assertion of power; lacking the first half of the line of Guthrie’s song, which asserts that “this land is your land” also, it does not indicate territorial or communal belonging but rather exclusive ownership. Unsurprisingly, Hailey is only concerned with “me, me, me” (H 57), and Sam denies anything beyond himself in a statement that oscillates between solipsism and individual anarchism:

I will sacrifice nothing.
 For there are no countries.
 Except me. And there is only
 one boundary. Me. (S 3)

Yet at the same time, both Sam and Hailey already carry traces of each other within them, as their respective eye colors indicate—“Gold eyes with flecks of Green” (S 7) and “Green eyes with flecks of Gold” (H 7)—and their individuality is always already informed by the other individual; both selves are always connected to their respective others. The individual in *Only Revolutions* is always already multiple and universal in true Whitmanian fashion, as Hailey’s remarkable spatial stunt indicates (even if the first line implies a lack of empathy that is at odds with the Whitmanian world view):

I'm too multiple to feel.
 A fork ahead.
 I take both. (H 9)

Similarly, Sam asserts: "I take / every path" (S 345). This resonates with what are probably the most famous lines from "Song of Myself":

Do I contradict myself?
 Very well then . . . I contradict myself;
 I am large . . . I contain multitudes. (87)

In tune with this argument, it is fair to consider the contradictory statements in "Song of Myself" as precursors to those of Sam and Hailey that significantly define the style of *Only Revolutions*; Whitman's lines such as "Regardless of others, ever regardful of others" (42) or "I teach straying from me, yet who can stray from me?" (83) find their correlation in "Because I'm already discovered and never / discovered" (H 340) or "Everyone misses US but we're never / missed" (H 262). In light of this contradictory style, if one were to look for a single concept to summarize how Sam and Hailey represent themselves in their narratives, it would be this: they contain multitudes and contradict themselves, but they still remain individuals. *Only Revolutions* emulates precisely how the individual is constructed in "Song of Myself": the self contains all that it is not, it is the focal point of a universe. Both Hailey and Sam acknowledge this directly by saying "I'm all" (H 27) and "I'm the all" (S 27), or by asking whether they are "*always at once?/ —Everything and everyone's?*" (H 175). Yet the novel expands that concept of the all-encompassing individual by turning singularity into duality: Sam and Hailey only fulfill their true potential for multiplicity as a pair. Such duality is repeatedly addressed in "Song of Myself," as the following examples will show, and yet I argue that it is undermined by the single voice of the speaker. Whitman must do with in his poem, regardless of the many perspectives he incorporates in the "kosmos" (50) of himself, claiming:

And these one and all tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them,
 And such as it is to be of these more or less I am. (42)

I also argue that only the fundamental duality of *Only Revolutions* in its visual arrangement of the text allows it to fully implement this Whitmanian double perspective of self and other. In trying to reconcile the individual and the world, the self and the other, by pushing a single voice to its limits in a democracy of one, Whitman is laying the groundwork for

the democracy of two that is possible in *Only Revolutions*. Edward Dowden has commented on this tendency in an early review that emphasized the democratic implications of *Leaves of Grass*: “No single person is the subject of Whitman’s song, or can be; the individual suggests a group, and the group a multitude, each unit of which is as interesting as every other unit, and possesses equal claims to recognition.” While lines in “Song of Myself” such as “Clear and sweet is my soul . . . and clear and sweet is all that is not my soul” (29) indicate a distinction between self and other, others assert that this self is “not contained between my hat and boots” (32). The poem thus

seeks to teach that so far from being indivisible or even coherently multiple, one is, and should be glad to be, at any given moment, a composite—that is ambiguous and ambivalent—and that in a timeless but mortal sense, one is an immense and largely untapped reservoir of potentiality. (Kateb 28)

Its opening already emphasizes that the individual is not necessarily to be seen as entirely separate from its others either, and it is almost immediately confronted with a You that may well be taken as a hint at a “Democracy of Two”:

I celebrate myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you. (27)

One could even convincingly argue for an opposition between *I* and *myself* in the very first line (Hagood 26). “Song of Myself” also promises a multiplicity of perspectives and readerly autonomy that is arguably only fulfilled in *Only Revolutions*, even though of course it does make explicit on the copyright page that the narratives by Sam and Hailey have been “chronologically *arranged*” (my emphasis) and thus mediated:

You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,
You shall listen to all sides and filter them from yourself. (28)

Instead of the Whitmanian single self that contains everything, we thus get a pair in *Only Revolutions* that is nothing less than potential itself, even if its possibilities are contradictory to the point of being mutually exclusive: “Because whenever toast drops we’re both. / Jam Down. Jam Up” (S 193). *Only Revolutions* can maintain this potential because it is “an exercise in narrative perspectivism” in which “the divergent versions of events cannot always be reconciled” (McHale 141). In the course of the novel, as Sam

and Hailey become lovers, “their initial self-centeredness wanes and their immense egos contract to make room for the other, a process expressed visually on the page as the physical space devoted to the narrative shrinks and the other narrative/narrator comes into view as an important force” (Hayles 173-74). In this process, they only become selfless in the ethical sense, not in the sense of actually losing their self; their textual space shrinks but never vanishes. Despite this radical change, they remain individuals. They even do so while their identity is revealed as utterly uncertain, as is evident when they are facing a wild variety of racial slurs simultaneously:

—*Niggers!* Them retch.
 —*Chinks! Japs! Spicyspans! Wops!*
 Surrounding our Dodge Wayfarer.
 —*Kikes!!* (S 235)

Sam shrugs them off by simply claiming universality for Hailey and him:

Every race,
 except we're the only race, so speedy there's
 never a race. (S 236)

The transformation in the progression of this sentence is significant: they are every race, but they are also the only race, and ultimately there is never a race at all. Playing on the double meaning of *race* in connection with their road trip and their obsession with speed, Sam here both complicates and simplifies the category of identity that is imposed on Hailey and him; in emphasizing mobility, he indicates that they are transcending the category altogether and rejecting this fixed identity while not giving up on their individuality in the process. Yet they only hold on to a single category of identity throughout the text: “All races and shapes, colours and clothing: Sam and Hailey are coterminous with the domain of sensation and the continuum of individuation, and yet they are divided by sex” (Hansen 194). This is not the place for the deconstructive queer reading this gender binary undoubtedly necessitates and indeed invites; for the present purpose, I would argue that this category of identity is (in fact rather weakly) maintained because, along the mainstream lines of heteronormativity, it offers the most clear-cut binary and thus suits the duality of the novel best. Furthermore, it is rather insignificant compared to other characteristics; for example, they are much more defined by their being lovers than by their being male or female. Gender notwithstanding, Hailey and Sam both find that “I resist anything better than my own diversity,” as the speaker of “Song of Myself” (43) declares after having

both illustrated his multiplicity and asserted his individuality at the same time:

Of every hue and trade and rank, of every caste and religion,
Not merely of the New World but of Africa Europe or Asia . . . a
wandering savage,

A farmer, mechanic, or artist . . . a gentleman, sailor, lover or quaker,
A prisoner, fancy-man, rowdy, lawyer, physician or priest. (43)

Or, as Hailey might put it: “I’m all personnel. Impersonal” (H 89). This multiplicity of the individual is connected to another central motif in *Only Revolutions* that also resonates with Whitman’s imagery: the road. Drawing on the very American genre of the road novel, which saw some of the most famous celebrations of individualism and non-conformism ever since Huck Finn and Jim embarked on their journey on the wet road of the Mississippi, *Only Revolutions* frames its narrative of two teenagers who are “Allmighty sixteen and freeeeee” (H 1) as a circular journey that nevertheless affords them a development from egotism to selflessness. The road is the central location of individualism in the novel; this is where Sam and Hailey assert their individuality as well as their multiplicity and form the pair of individuals that becomes a symbol of potential itself:

Swinging wide for still
untried crossroads
with cairns left for encounters
never kept. (H 21)

Not only do they travel these roads not yet taken, but they also *are* the very possibility they imply: Hailey states that she herself is “every trail’s switch” (H 23), and Sam similarly asserts: “But I am the road following. / Everyway’s a road by me going” (S 61). They are “every happy trail” (S 152) and “ever happening” (H 152). This conception of the road as the site of potential for the individual not only stands in the long tradition of the American road novel, but it also goes back further to Whitman once again, whose “Song of the Open Road” contains a parallel imagination that is echoed in *Only Revolutions*:

I inhale great draughts of space,
The east and the west are mine, and the north and the south are mine.
.....
I will recruit for myself and you as I go,
I will scatter myself among men and women as I go,

I will toss a new gladness and roughness among them,
 Whoever denies me it shall not trouble me,
 Whoever accepts me he or she shall be blessed and shall bless me. (300)
 Allons! to that which is endless as it was beginningless,
 To undergo much, tramps of days, rests of nights,
 To merge all in the travel they tend to, and the days and nights they tend to,
 Again to merge them in the start of superior journeys,
 To see nothing anywhere but what you may reach it and pass it,
 To conceive no time, however distant, but what you may reach it and pass
 it [...] (*Leaves of Grass*, 1891-92 305)

Faithful to these notions of transcendence, passing on, connecting, refreshing, and inventing in a cycle without beginning or end, *Only Revolutions* presents Sam and Hailey's trip as both constitutive of their individuality and challenging to their identity, since they are one with the road as individuals who travel on it, but they are also not self-identical due to their constant movement:

I am the road. And roar.
 Here I go. Here goes.
 Not I.
 Allways. (H49)

I am the ruts. And rush.
 There goes I. There goes. Not I.
 Allways. (S 49)

The very duality of their pairing asserts that they are always the same and always different, thus pushing the Whitmanian imagination of the multitudinous individual who "tramp[s] a perpetual journey" ("Song of Myself" 82) further into a constellation where it needs to constantly confront another such individual at all times. Sam and Hailey are on the road *together*, and they ask of each other: "*for all we / Wander, Encounter and Open / allways curl up with me*" (H 183). Because of this unity in duality, their movement for the reader is indeed that of an I and not-I from two different perspectives, in which what is I for eight pages becomes not-I in the next. *Only Revolutions* thus incorporates multiplicity on a structural level and places the Whitmanian individual in constant dialogue with another instead of merely confronting it with (and containing) the world. It is never an option for Sam or Hailey (and thus the reader) to conceive of individual and world as a binary opposition because there are always two individuals to deal with; everything in this world always happens "[u]nder bipolar skies" (H 225), and subjectivity is always

intersubjectivity. There is always the acronym of the novel's title to contend with: OR, the alternative, the other. (This could also be the implication of the symbol on the novel's cover, two vertical lines in a circle, which can be read as a pause button to imply the arrested representation of their movement, but also as the Roman numeral for two and at the same time two Is, two individuals.) This given intersubjectivity answers directly to Whitman's problem of individual and world as he poses it in *Specimen Days*:

The most profound theme that can occupy the mind of man—the problem on whose solution science, art, the bases and pursuits of nations, and everything else, including intelligent human happiness, (here to-day, 1882, New York, Texas, California, the same as all times, all lands,) subtly and finally resting, depends for competent outset and argument, is doubtless involved in the query: What is the fusing explanation and tie—what the relation between the (radical, democratic) Me, the human identity of understanding, emotions, spirit, &c., on the one side, of and with the (conservative) Not Me, the whole of the material objective universe and laws, with what is behind them in time and space, on the other side? (919)

This Whitmanian notion of self and world, or self and other, is far from static, but even its strong fundament of individualism is set in motion in *Only Revolutions* through the interplay of two selves (and thus two others) with the world. It therefore emphasizes even more the processual character of individualism that becomes evident in the irreducible connectedness between self and other: “We are without / Perimeters, perpetually unwinding, unifying” (H 221-22). This perpetual change is what constitutes Sam and Hailey's freedom: they are “unprincipled” (H 234), “unmastered” (S 234), “impossible to confine” (H 298) and thus “exquisitely free” (H 140). Even with “the rest of the Pitiless / trying to pin US down” (H 118) they resist any attempt to fix them; significantly, this is possible precisely because of their duality. This is shown by the most blatant attempt in the novel to capture Sam and Hailey, carried out by the Creep (who, as I have argued elsewhere, can be understood as representing the reader and his futile attempts to catch up with the protagonists). He fails in binding them with the Nóose because it does not fit around both of them:

—Uh, hey, I shrug. *This can't do.*
The Nóose is never big enough for two.
 THE CORD already undone
 around our looseness. (H 275)

This indicates strongly that Sam and Hailey's potential, their mobility and diversity, comes about through their pairing and is not so much a quality each of them has on their own. Instead, it is an effect of their *combined* individuality, and their freedom comes about through their free association and mutual recognition of their separate but interrelated existence:

Because we are the littlest part of we
and I'm the littlest part of me.
And allways we will leave US
behind US.
Because we're free. (S/H 290)

The first two lines express the extent and nature of their connection. They form a group but are "the littlest" part of it, indicating that their community, their absolutely horizontal democracy of two that is free from any hierarchy, is more than the sum of its parts; at the same time, the self is also "the littlest part of me" and is thus complemented and indeed completed by the Other. This is one way to understand Levinas's comment that "'we' is not the plural of 'I'" ("The Ego" 43); a group is more than the simple multiplication of its components. Sam and Hailey thus form a pair that outgrows its constituent parts and also radically changes them, but at the same time they do not merge, do not permanently become one, and they never give up their individuality at any point. They literally get close to oneness precisely in the middle of the book where the respective chapters mirror each other more perfectly than ever before, and where even the two bookmarks (symbolizing Hailey and Sam through the same colors that also marks their presence in the green and gold Os in the text) almost meet—almost. Given the 360 pages of the book and the eight-page chapter divisions, the bookmarks never come to rest on the same page, and even this central chapter remains doubled so that Sam and Hailey never actually merge. These two are the only chapters in which colored Os appear in both gold and green on the same page, and yet this still implies closeness rather than oneness, which would mean mixing the colors into a new one instead of keeping them separate even as they share a page now. They comment on their closeness repeatedly on the pages surrounding number 180, the most significant turning point among many in the novel:

—*Somehow now, here, we're one,*
while already somewhere nearer we go on apart. (S 182)

They do claim that they are one, and yet the expression remains one of duality, since it still reads "we're one" instead of "I'm one." Before the

sentence is finished they already acknowledge their separation. If this is oneness, it is extremely short-lived, and I would argue that Sam and Hailey never merge at all in *Only Revolutions* but retain their two individual selves at all times, no matter how close they may get or how selfless they may become. This duality is the foundation of their existence in which “*Liberty and Love are one*” (H 20) and their very freedom depends on maintaining this incredibly strong and close connection between two individuals; in order to be free, they must realize that the one person they cannot be free from is the other, as the following dialogue indicates:

—*Isn't this Liberty, on our own.*
 —*Wherever whatever we please.*
 We're so eased.
 —*Just US alone.*
 —*Free from duty. From Regulation.*
From everyone and anything.
 Me: —*What about me?*
 Diminishings driving this spurn.
 Getting worse.
 Until he takes my hand, curling one fist from two,
 palm on palm, wrist on wrist,
 Peacefully mixed.
 —*Except from you.* (H 130)

Whitman's problem of individualism and democracy finds a new solution through this insight, and it connects his 'personalism' with the tenets of existentialism, but also with a Levinasian ontology and ethics of self and other in which the “first philosophy” is always “a philosophy of dialogue” (Levinas, *Alterity* 97): the freedom of the individual is dependent on that of other individuals, and the “democracy of two” is built on a mutual recognition and acceptance of dependency. As Sam and Hailey are ‘facing’ each other, in Levinas's term for the confrontation of the self with “an absolutely exterior being” (“Philosophy” 54), with what “one absolutely can neither take in nor possess” (“Philosophy” 55), their existence changes fundamentally. Adrian Peperzak's explanation of Levinas's phenomenological theory of the encounter with the other resonates strongly with Sam and Hailey's experience of each other as other:

Another comes to the fore *as other* if and only if his or her “appearance” breaks, pierces, destroys the horizon of my egocentric monism, that is, when the other's invasion of my world destroys the empire in which all

phenomena are, from the outset, a priori, condemned to function as moments of my universe. The other's face [...] or the other's speech [...] interrupts and disturbs the order of my, ego's, world; it makes a hole in it by disarranging my arrangements without ever permitting me to restore the previous order. (19-20)

This does not simply transform an egocentric monism into a dualistic monism but rather transcends any monistic view altogether. Both Hailey and Sam repeatedly emphasize their utter need for each other, and they also acknowledge that they are destructive without the other and fail to fulfill their creative role in the cycle they drive and are part of at the same time:

Because without him I am
only revolutions of ruin. (H 347)

Because without her I am
only revolutions of ruin. (S 347)

Yet even together they wonder about their significance in and for the world they find themselves in and maintain; even if they may form a "democracy of two," they are still unsure about its relevance for the rest of the world. In a crucial passage, Sam poses the question directly:

Me & Hailey allways around. Ever now.
But with all we go through here
is this Community enough? (S 161)

With the importance of community emphasized through capitalization, Sam refers to much more than the present situation they find themselves in, waiting tables in a restaurant for a highly unpleasant boss. After all, they also go through the world in *Only Revolutions*, and the community Sam talks about can be both that between Hailey and him and that of the whole world. A later dialogue shows that they are not only in contact with other people but also consider themselves on a mission of universal significance:

—*We go to free the World.*
But BAZETTI BILL tries for the last stab:
—*You go to lose the World. You allways do.*
—*No, we go to free you.* (S 215)