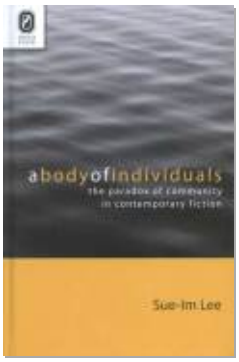
Introduction: The Paradox of Community



INTRODUCTION

The Paradox of Community

This book argues that community is a perennial source of contention because it holds a self-contradictory proposition in its most basic definition—that multiple individuals become "a body of individuals." "A body," after all, indicates a person, an individual, a singleness of being. So how can community be a condition of multiple, disparate, and distinct individuals as well as of a single body of being? Two vastly different responses to this paradox circulate in contemporary literary criticism, philosophy, and cultural criticism, and these two conflicting responses, I suggest, represent the competing discourses of community that dominate current debates over community.

In one response, community functions as an aspiration and an ideal. This idealized discourse of community argues that the paradox of community is superseded when multiple individuals are bound by forces of commonality, sharing, belonging, connection, and attachment. As these forces perform the seemingly impossible task of transforming many into one, the enormity of the feat explains why community functions as the ultimate expression of human unity. Indeed, there are numerous other terms to describe unity—for example, organization, association, membership, collectivity, union, affiliation, group. Yet none of these terms approaches the cultural prevalence, emotional appeal, and political heft of the term community. The reason, this book ventures, rests squarely on the paradoxical proposition of community: that many can become

one through *fusion*. While other terms of unity describe an aggregate number of individuals and particular modes of relationship between them, community as an ideal promises a fusion of multiple individuals into one subject position. Promising a degree of oneness that no other term of unity delivers, community becomes the seat of the most desirable human relationality—a unity that is convivial, productive, safe, familiar, comforting, intimate, and healing. Enacting what Raymond Williams calls the "warmly persuasive" connotation surrounding the word community (76), the many expressions of *idealized community* emerge from divergent sources—from ordinary speech, political discussions, communitarianism, feminist criticism, ethnic minority discourse, and, most importantly for the argument of this book, literary criticism of contemporary fiction.[1]

Conversely, no other term for unity provokes as much criticism and dismay as does the term community. *Because* community functions as the ultimate expression of fusion, community becomes the bearer of *totality*. In this response, the proposition of transforming many individuals into one body becomes the ultimate logic of totalitarianism. Rather than being the seat of conviviality and health, community's promise of oneness becomes the seat of all human organizations that are exclusionary, coercive, and oppressive, as found in historical evidences of nationalism, regionalism, racism, ethnicism, sexism, and heterosexism.[2] Relatedly, concepts that are valorized for their ability to fuse many into one, such as commonality, sharedness, belonging, and attachment, become synonymous with forces that demand homogeneity, regulation, and obedience. In its fundamental negation of the idealized community, this response may be called the discourse of *dissenting community*—a dissent from the assumptions, values, and goals of idealized community. To the paradox of community, then, dissenting community offers an antithetical answer. No, there cannot be a single body of individuals, and to aspire to one ignores the vital fact that heterogeneity, conflict, difference, and unbreachable singularity of being are inextricable ingredients of any unity. This negation of idealized community foregrounds postmodernist inquiry into power, identity, difference, and hegemony, as well as feminist and cosmopolitanist revisions of community.

This book examines contemporary American fiction that offers a third response to the paradox of community: to simultaneously believe and disbelieve in the proposition of "a body of individuals." As these novelists simultaneously pursue and critique the alchemy of community, they intervene in the debate over community in a unique manner.

They highlight the fact that the two competing discourses of community share a commonality: both of them remove the paradoxical nature of its proposition. Idealized community supersedes the paradox by arguing the transformative power of commonality, sharing, belonging, and attachment to fuse many into one. Dissenting community dismisses the paradox as a dangerous delusion. In profoundly different ways, then, the two competing discourses conceive of community only by excising the paradoxical nature of "a body of individuals."

In contrast, the fictions examined in this study conceive of community as full of paradoxes, impossibilities, and contradictions. Their conflicted movement between the values, assumptions, and ideals of community means that they invoke the two competing discourses of community in a dialectic manner. They idealize the proposition of community and pursue the transformative powers of commonality; in the next breath, they interrogate the nature of that commonality and even the very *category* of commonality. They expound the impossibility of many becoming one and follow that dismissal with the thought: but how nice it would be if it were possible. What these novels offer us, then, is a dialectic community without synthesis. While they richly illustrate the pulse points of idealized community and dissenting community, they do not arrive at a stable vision of community by legitimatizing one vision over the other. I suggest that the concept of ambivalence becomes an important theoretical category for understanding their dialectic community without synthesis. To be ambivalent is to be undecided between two contrary values, pursuits, or entities, to appreciate the desirability of one while still heeding the pull of the other. The state of ambivalence, then, attains a rich epistemological value in this study of community, affording a unique vantage point from which to intervene in debates over community, commonality, and fusion. As Dennis Foster eloquently describes, the state of ambivalence is a characteristic feature of American literary and cultural expression of community:

> [W]e express an ambivalence about community that is part of a fundamental American tension; fleeing compulsory society, we find some way to light out for the territories, where people unite freely. But once there, we again draw around us the strictures that had previously driven us from civilization. 'Community,' it turns out, refers both to a fantasy of a place we lost and hope to regain, and to the real, often agonizing condition of living in proximity with the separate bodies and minds of the others. (20)

Ambivalence about community certainly shows no abatement in contemporary American fiction. If anything, the philosophical, cultural, and political implications of imagining community present one of the greatest challenges to contemporary fiction. This book demonstrates the continuing challenge of community by tracing the ambivalent community in vastly different areas of contemporary American fiction—through a multicultural spectrum of writers, ranging from canonical to avant-gardist, whose works engage a wide range of social locations and topical issues.

In addition to demonstrating the ambivalence over community as a central tension in contemporary fiction, the unusual combination of writers examined in this book—Toni Morrison, Karen Tei Yamashita, Richard Powers, Lydia Davis, Lynne Tillman, and David Markson—uniquely contributes to the two aims of this book: to expand the critical framework for discussing community in literary criticism, and to have the two competing discourses of community talk to each other in a way that is missing in contemporary scholarship of community. First, aside from Toni Morrison, none of the other writers represents a familiar face in literary discussions of community. While Morrison's novels anchor discussions of community in contemporary fiction, and her presence in this study seems self-explanatory, the array of other writers requires some explanation. What does Yamashita, an Asian American writer whose works centrally explore global migration, have to do with considerations of community? What does Powers, a leading writer of science and technology in contemporary fiction, have to do with concerns over community? What do Lydia Davis and Lynne Tillman, whose works are better known for their epistemological quests, have to say about community? What does David Markson, one of the most avant-gardist writers of contemporary fiction, have to show about community?

Although it may sound quixotic, precisely the seeming irrelevance of these writers to discussions of community is the point—to expand the critical framework of community beyond the idealized vision. These writers seem unrelated to the concerns of community, I suggest, because their literary visions of community *diverge* from the idealized community dominating contemporary literary criticism. The rich topical concerns, diverse social locations, and different ideals brought into play by these writers challenge the established discursive pathways by which "community" as such is discussed in contemporary literary criticism. Furthermore, the ambivalence these writers evince towards notions such as commonality, unity, and fusion brings the two competing discourses of community into dialogue.

In order to fully encompass these novels' unique intervention in discussion of community, this study does not begin with a fixed definition of community. Instead, it approaches the paradox of community through a study of the literary manifestation of first-person plural "we." As a pronoun that proposes to be singular and plural at the same time, the paradox of the pronoun "we" is metonymic of the paradox of "a body of individuals." What forces endow a single subject with the heft of the multiple? How does a single "I" presume to be a plural "we"? What needs and desires are met in this transformation into a single "we"? When we move beyond the prevailing understanding of community as the most benevolent, ultimate expression of unity, we can see that Yamashita's interest in global migration is an attempt to formulate a global "we"; that Powers's defense of human uniqueness is an attempt to say "we, the human" and make it *mean* something special in the face of virtual reality and simulation technology; that Davis's and Tillman's treatment of intersubjective transparency is an exploration of "we" as intersubjective continuity; and that Markson's philosophical treatment of language games is a dramatization of the biggest "we," the fact of coexistence. Through their complex arrival at a first-person plural "we," these works invoke a multifaceted vision of community that expands the critical framework for discussing community.

Furthermore, each of these literary manifestations of "we" calls up various ideals central to the community debate—the ideal of identification, universalism, humanism, universalism, communion, and coexistence. As familiar rationale for transforming multiple individuals into a unity, each of these concepts is thoroughly embedded in the philosophical, political, and cultural valence of community. Like community, every one of these concepts is subject to political contestation as rationale for unity, and, like community, each is under suspicion as a rationale for totality. Thus the literary drama of asserting a "we" becomes the drama of negotiating a whole host of contested ideals surrounding the very notion of unity. Finally, each of these literary instances of "we" articulates a need, a desire, or an expectation—that "we" are alike, that "we" are connected, that "we" are unique, that "we" fully know each other, or even that there *is* a "we." Addressing the work of "we" in contemporary fiction allows me to address the issue of *functionality* at the heart of the community debate. What does community do? At a more fundamental level, should community *do* anything? The answer to this question has severe repercussions in the debate over community.

In order to contextualize the significance of ambivalent community,

let me begin with an overview of what I am calling the competing discourses of idealized community and dissenting community.

Idealized Community

"Community Is like Family, Sisterhood, Brotherhood, Village, Neighborhood, Friendship"

In the discourse of idealized community, community as an ideal fundamentally relies on the kindness of analogies. In the familiar similes of community as family, kinship, village, and friendship, there is a direct transfer of affect between community and the particular relationship made analogous to that concept. That is, community becomes as natural, as primary, as normal, and as essential as family, kinship, neighborhood, village, or friendship. From such analogies, furthermore, community attains the benevolent relationality among its members (of sharing, support, understanding, warmth) as well as the consensual logic of operation (governed by common aims, consensus, and shared fate).

In using community as an aspiration, contemporary discourse of idealized community performs a revolutionary maneuver between Ferdinand Tönnies's *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society). The enormity of this maneuver lies in the fact that while Tönnies theorizes Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft as contrasting models of human organization, contemporary discourse of idealized community utilizes the two in seamless conjunction, incorporating aspects of both in a strategic manner to generate a brand-new theory of community. As the most influential theory of community not only in sociology but in any consideration of community in the twentieth century, Tönnies's *Gemeinschaft Und Gesellschaft* (1887), translated as *Community & Society* (1957), offers a nostalgic description—and prescription—for what he sees as a way of life fast disappearing in the urbanization, industrialization, and fragmentation of late-nineteenth-century Europe. Tönnies theorizes the benevolent and consensual nature of community informed by "natural will" ("*Wesenville*"). This natural will expresses itself through the kinship group, the neighborhood, and friendship as relationships of intimacy and unconditional emotional bonding. The identifying feature of community is the "common spirit" that runs through it (224), and the ultimate seat of the common spirit lies in the form of the family. As the "simple," "organic," and the "only real form of life" (226–27), the

family best exemplifies the concord, folkways, mores, and religion that make the Gemeinschaft "the body social": "Each individual receives his share from this common center, which is manifest in his own sphere, i.e., in his sentiment, in his mind and heart, and in his conscience as well as in his environment, his possessions, and his activities" (224).

In contrast, the instrumentalist and depersonalized nature of Gesellschaft is manifest in "rational will" ("*Kurville*"). This rational will expresses itself in business, economy, the state, and social relationships that are exchange-based and driven by self-interest. As the core characteristics of community gradually dissipate in society, Gesellschaft is distinguished by the absence of common will. Thus Gesellschaft is a movement away from the "simple form" towards the "complex form of social life": "The 'house' maintains the 'family character of the house' the most, then the village, and the town. When the town develops into the city, the 'family character of the house' is entirely lost. Individuals or families are separate identities, and their common locale is only an accidental or deliberately chosen place in which to live" (227).

Strictly speaking, contemporary discourse of idealized community is neither Gemeinschaft nor Gesellschaft. In using Gemeinschaft models of family, neighborhood, and friendship as aspirations for community, the discourse of idealized community performs a careful adjudication between Tönnies's theory of natural will and rational will. While it directly continues the benevolence of the family, neighborhood, and friendship in arguing the benevolence of community, it diverges from Tönnies's use of such groups as expressions of "simple" or "organic" expression of "natural will." Instead, idealized community seamlessly merges aspects of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, so that community is "a body of individuals" who *aspire* to achieve the benevolence of a relationship like that of family, neighborhood, and friendship. By carefully negotiating between the two wills set in opposition by Tönnies, contemporary ideal community discourse introduces a voluntary dimension to the formation of community, thereby acknowledging a late-twentieth-century political, cultural, and theoretical suspicion of "natural" expressions. Rather than being a given expression of "natural" or "primordial" will, community is the *rational* movement towards *natural* unities. This seamless movement between aspects of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft and between the "natural" and the "rational" generates an even more significant effect. Community becomes inherently *teleological:* it becomes a body of individuals united towards a final objective of achieving a unity *like* that of family, kinship, neighborhood, village, or friendship. Furthermore, these

telos of community—the Gemeinschaft categories of unity—directly inform the benevolent nature and politics of idealized community. This teleological view of community as the "rational" movement towards "natural" unities will be best demonstrated in Morrison's construction of community, in which kinship models of community lead to the healing of all its members.

Precisely such a teleological thinking of community underwrites idealized community's invocation of family, neighborhood, and friendship as aspirations for community. Limited to no one ideological group, this teleological view emerges from divergent political views, social locations, and cultural arenas, such as conservative political theory, African American discourse, feminist discourse, literary criticism, and popular culture. In "good communities," writes the conservative communitarian philosopher Amitai Etzioni, "people treat one another as ends in themselves, not merely as instruments; as whole persons rather than as fragments; as something like an extended family rather than only as employees, traders, consumers or even fellow citizens" (25). Similarly, "family is the original human community and the basis as well as the origin of all subsequent communities. It is therefore the norm of all communities, so that any community is a brotherhood. . . . The more a society approximates to the family pattern, the more it realizes itself as a community, or, as Marx called it, a truly human society" (MacMurray 155).[3] Consider, also, the centrality of kinship models in Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision of "Beloved Community," a vision that holds global "sisterhood" and "brotherhood" as its final aim of progress and is still vital to African American discourse.[4] For instance, the ideal of "Beloved Community" informs bell hooks's vision in *Teaching Community.* Taking inspiration from June Jordan's statement, "We look for community. We have already suffered the alternative to community, to human commitment" (qtd. in hooks 3), hooks argues that the ultimate aim is to achieve "beloved communities where there is no domination," communities in which members understand "the truth of our essential humanness" (66).

Similarly, the kinship model of sisterhood prevails as the aspirational model of community in feminist discourse, as well as for asserting commonalities of female-gendered identity, experience, and body politics.[5] In close company with the trope of sisterhood in feminist visions of community are other Gemeinschaft models of friendship, village, and neighborhood. Marilyn Friedman's "Feminism and Modern Friendship: Dislocating the Community" is an example of idealized community expression that uses the voluntary relationship of friendship as the ideal model of

community: friendship is a unity "arising out of one's own needs, desires, interests, versus expectations assigned, demanded by one's found communities" (199–200). It is no coincidence that "neighborhood" is often used synonymously with "community," or that "neighborly feeling" is used synonymously with friendliness or conviviality. The use of neighborhood as the aspiration for community retains much of the Gemeinschaft connotations of the village: a small-scale locality, a living arrangement of face-to-face interaction, leading to an intimacy that generates a greater sense of belonging and attachment. The intimacy of the village as the telos is perhaps best represented philosophically, politically, and culturally as a specific vein of communitarianism, which emphasizes the heightened civic responsibility, engagement, voluntarism, and activism fostered by small-scale, unmediated interactions.[6] As Iris Marion Young describes this communitarian ideal expressed by Carol Gould, Michael Sandel, and Michael Taylor, "[t]he ideal society is composed of small locales, populated by a small enough number of persons so that each can be personally acquainted with all the others[,] . . . decentralized, with small-scale industry and local markets" (Young 316). These aspirational models for community powerfully shape many of the ambivalent communities analyzed in this book. The telos of the family, sisterhood, and friendship propels the motivations and actions of Morrison's protagonists. Likewise, the intimacy and shared fate of the neighborhood as the model for community reigns strong in Yamashita's exploration of the globe as a village.

Just as importantly, the aspirational and teleological views of community give rise to a thoroughly naturalized view of commonality. With "commonality," we arrive at one of the most hotly contested sites of contemporary debates about community, identity, and unity. What is the politics of commonality? What is the politics of asking, "How are you like me?" Why, in the discourse of idealized community, does that question seem the most basic, the most essential—indeed, the most natural—question to ask? I suggest that the degree to which similarity, sameness, and sharedness become seemingly inevitable criteria of community is the same degree to which idealized community *depoliticizes* the concept of commonality. Of course, no concept is inherently political as such, bearing an essential ideological allegiance to a value system, worldview, or power deployment. Rather, the issue at hand is the discursive context in which the concept of commonality becomes relevant or visible. And in idealized community's fundamentally benevolent teleology, the practice of uniting along the axis of similarity seems an obviously justified and legitimate procedure. In a mutually supporting manner, then, the

teleology of idealized community renders the question of commonality into a self-evident imperative, and vice versa. The search for commonality in order to become a community like a family, village, or friendship becomes an *a*political activity, an operation that does not prioritize the interests of one group over another or strengthen the power of some over another. Free of any self-serving partiality, searching for the ways "you" are like "me" becomes a search for what is already "out there." Indeed, the degree to which commonality functions as the identifying marker of community is evident in the way the definitions of "community" and "common" are interdependent.[7]

For many of the fictions discussed in this book, too, commonality operates as the constitutive feature of forming a "body of individuals." Commonality sits at the heart of Morrison's use of identification, as her female protagonists bond according to the similarity of their life experiences and struggles, as well as to their shared objective of collective healing. Yamashita explores the numerous ways that universalism assumes—and exploits—commonalities. In Powers's novels of science and technology, humanism becomes the pursuit of that one uniquely human commonality that will, in the final analysis, demarcate the human from the machinic. Although the "what" or the "content" of commonality differs, each of these literary attempts at imagining a single "we" employs the concept of commonality as an imperative.

Yet these fictions also question that imperative, and this antithetical treatment of commonality sits at the center of their ambivalence about community. In these literary works the very search for commonality becomes a process fraught with struggles, partiality, negotiations, conflict, and dissent. There is no simple commonality "out there" about the determinate features of "we" of the village, of the human, of the globe, or of "you" and "me." Instead, searching for that commonality necessitates partiality—for *some* to determine, and enforce, the criteria of commonality—and constructivism—to impose and shore up arguments about "our" similarities and sharedness—and, if all else fails, conscription—to impose a commonality onto all of "us." These struggles highlight the inevitably political nature of searching for commonality. In their self-reflective examination of their own uses of commonality, these fictions challenge the apolitical vision of commonality in the discourse of idealized community. Their ambivalence towards their own deployment of commonality, then, negates the central myth of idealized community and engages the concerns and arguments of dissenting community.

Dissenting Community

"Community Is like Totalitarianism, Fascism, Authoritarianism"

The various expressions of dissenting community, emerging from divergent political, philosophical, and disciplinary quarters, converge upon the negation of community as an ideal. But the negation of idealized community is not limited to those specific debates over community. The discourse of dissenting community is thoroughly imbricated in contemporary cultural theory's reconsideration of unity, in poststructuralist critique of the neo-Kantian liberal philosophy and politics, and in the larger postmodernist interrogation of single body ideology, teleological view of community, and valorization of wholeness, oneness, and unity. Postmodernist philosophical dissent from idealized community begins by negating the final aim of idealized community as an impossibility—a unity in which multiple bodies become a single body. This negation foregrounds postmodernist recuperation of concepts such as difference, dissent, heterogeneity, antagonism, and conflict, precisely the concepts categorized as contaminants or obstacles that must be overcome or excised in the "progress" towards a unity like that of family, kinship, village, or friendship. By emphasizing the fissures that render "a body of individuals" impossible, dissenting community reinvigorates those fissures and recategorizes them as constitutive features of a community whose final telos is *not* a single body community.

A classic expression of poststructuralist theory and radical democracy, Ernesto Laclau and Chantel Mouffe's influential work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* might be read as just such a reclassification project of dissenting community. When they famously state that "society is impossible" because antagonism and hegemony are key ingredients in a radical democracy (114), they are arguing the "impossibility of a final suture" that would make society into one single body (125). Thus the impossibility they address is the single body ideology at the heart of community as a proposition. Rather than being temporary instances of conflict that give rise to feelings of aversion, hostility, or antipathy, they argue, antagonism is a perennial condition expressing the uneven, fluid, always changing, always relative nature of subject positions and proclaimed identities. Far from being an incidental irritant or obstacle that must be resolved and eliminated, antagonism describes "the incomplete, open and politically negotiable character of every identity" (104). As antagonism expresses the "limits

of society, the latter's impossibility of fully constituting itself" (125), it critiques the very desire for commonality and consensus in the teleology of idealized community.

Indeed, the presence of antagonism is crucial to a "free society," as Laclau further expounds in "Community and Its Paradoxes: Richard Rorty's 'Liberal Utopia.'" Laclau's critique of Rorty's "liberal utopia" is representative of the way postmodernist philosophy's critique of the neo-Kantian, Enlightenment liberal tradition enacts the discourse of dissenting community. More specifically, the postmodernist-liberal tradition debate demonstrates how the discourse of dissenting community emerges as a critique of *any* philosophical or political theory that holds a teleological view of human history as a progress towards unity, and as a critique of any rationalist view of a "foundational" human nature in which consensus is the ultimate achievement. Laclau writes: "Antagonism exists because the social is not a plurality of effects radiating from a pregiven center, but is pragmatically constructed from many starting points. But it is precisely because of this, because there is an ontological possibility of clashes and unevenness, that we can speak of freedom" ("Community" 92). In contrast, in Rorty's "liberal utopia" outlined in *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity,* there is an untenable distinction between "legitimate" and "illegitimate" conflict, Laclau argues. As Rorty claims, "A liberal society is one whose ideals can be fulfilled by persuasion rather than force, by reform rather than revolution" (*Contingency* 60). But such are distinctions, Laclau continues, that can be made only when consensus is the determining criterion of legitimacy: persuasion is distinguished by the presence of consensus, while force is distinguished by the absence of consensus.

But might not the very achievement of consensus involve force? "The question that remains is to what extent in persuasion/consensus there is not an ingredient of force" ("Community" 89). The valorization of consensus as the legitimate, democratic form of struggle is possible only in a value system in which antagonism can only be a problem or an obstacle that must be removed. A social arrangement whose telos is the absence of antagonism strives for a "totally determined society," "a society from which violence and antagonisms have been *entirely* eliminated" (92; original emphasis). On the contrary, Laclau agues, "the existence of violence and antagonism is the very condition of a free society" (92). Hegemony, then, is the very expression of a society in which antagonism is a constitutive feature. Rather than being an oppressive force that one group wields upon another and that must be eradicated, hegemony describes the perennial struggle between subjects whose self-identifica-

tions are inextricably contingent and mutually related to each other. It describes the struggle by different subject positions that take place in the field of limitless, differential relations that is the social sphere. Fundamental to the larger commitment of dissenting community is postmodernist philosophy's resuscitation of antagonism and hegemony from the teleology of liberal emancipation. Other notable expression of postmodernist dissenting community takes place in the theoretical exchanges between Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, in which "antagonism," or "the incommensurability or gap" between identity and identity-claims, forms the theoretical basis for radical democracy: "we each value this 'failure' as a condition of democratic contestation itself" (1–2).

Jean-François Lyotard's dissent from Enlightenment rationality, well represented in his critique of Habermasian consensus, is another rich expression of the way postmodernist philosophical critique of liberal tradition contributes to the discourse of dissenting community.[8] Like the postmodernist repositioning of antagonism and conflict as inherently necessary ingredients to any open-ended, democratic society, Lyotard's theory of heterogeneity and the differend directly negates the telos of unity in social, cultural, and political theory. By exploring the fissures that render a single body impossible, Lyotard calls attention to the ways in which the pursuit of unity always "betrays" itself. Voicing one of the harshest condemnations of the valorization of unity, he compares the political call for solidarity as a:

> totalitarian apparatus, constituted as a result of the elimination of debate and by the continuous elimination of debate from political life by means of terror, [which] reproduces within itself . . . the illness that it claims to cure [that is, call for solidarity]. Disorder within, an internal proliferation of decision-making authorities, war among inner-circle cliques: all this betrays the recurrence of the shameful sickness within that passes for health and betrays the "presence" of the unmanageable (intraitable), at the very time that the latter is hidden away by the delirium and arrogance of a unitary, totalitarian politics. ("À l'insu [Unbeknownst]" 43)

As solidarity "passes for health," it follows that heterogeneity passes for illness: "With the horror resulting from this sanitizing operation, the phantasm of oneness and totality is sustained by the belief that this heterogeneous thing has, or is, a face (Medusa's face?), and that it would suffice to turn it around to get rid of it" (43).

Likewise, Lyotard's theory of the differend explores the disruptive power of the "unmanageable" in the movement towards unity. Extending Wittgenstein's theory of language, Lyotard argues an anti-instrumentalist theory of language, in which language use—what can be said and what cannot be said—is metonymic of the material and discursive disparity in power. As he begins *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute:* "You are informed that human beings endowed with language were placed in a situation that none of them is now able to tell about it" (3). The differend shows itself in disputes in which the experience, reality, and testimony of one party cannot be "phrased"—has no means of being credited or legitimated and is repeatedly made to account for itself without any hope of attaining either. Like the testimony of Holocaust victims who are repeatedly questioned, or the language of the worker who can make himself visible only by speaking of his labor in the language of capitalist value system, the differend testifies to the fundamental falsity in the social, political, philosophical, and cultural myth of a single body community and valorization of consensus. Reading for the differend in literary formations of community indeed reveals the material and discursive disparity in power and the coercive and exclusionary maneuvers at work in formations of community. The teleology of health and healing in Morrison's *Paradise,* for instance, means that practices and values that do not contribute to collective healing remain unphraseable in the novel. For Powers's protagonists, the machine's differend poses the greatest challenge, and their inability to phrase the machine in any idiom other than the "human" reveals the instability of the human community.

Reappropriating the "Common" in Dissenting Community

While expressions of dissenting community emphasize the fissures that render the single body community impossible, another instance of dissenting community might be located in those postmodernist philosophers who negate the role of community as an instrument towards achievement. In arguing for a community that is "inoperative" (*désœuvrée*), theorists such as Jean-Luc Nancy, Maurice Blanchot, and Giorgio Agamben voice the anti-instrumentalist theory of community.[9] While heterogeneity, dissent, and antagonism are well established as postmodernist negations of idealized community discourse, lesser known is the postmodernist project of reappropriating the word "common" for the purpose of an anti-instrumentalist theory of community. No other contemporary thinker has emptied and redefined the meaning of the "common" more

vigorously towards this aim than Jean-Luc Nancy. Like the larger postmodernist philosophical project, Nancy critiques the depoliticized use of the common as the "natural" binding agent for community. But going beyond a critique of the common as the rationale for community, Nancy offers the most expansive understanding of the common by way of a Heideggerian understanding of Being. For Heidegger, Nancy points out, "'being 'itself' comes to be defined as relational, as non-absoluteness, and, if you will—and in any case this is what I am trying to argue—*as community*" (6; original emphasis). For Nancy, the only utility for the common is to assert existence itself as a fact of "being-in-common." Rather than being a descriptor of a parochial similarity, the common in Nancian terms is a descriptor of coexistence itself. When that foundational fact is ignored, and unity is founded on the fact of what "we" have in common—in history, self-interest, life experience, objective, and so on—the primary fact of being-in-common is elided. The unity that arises out of parochial sameness finds its final expression in ideological totality. Nowhere is this danger more strident, Nancy argues, than in the discourse of single body community.

The Inoperative Community, published in 1987, addresses the fall of the Soviet Union and the unprecedented force of free-market global economy as primary examples of single body community. As instances of unity conceived through "economic ties, technological operations, and political fusion (into a *body* or under a *leader*)" (3; original emphasis), they represent how:

> the community that becomes *a single* thing (body, mind, fatherland, Leader . . .) necessarily loses the *in* of being-*in*-common. Or, it loses the *with* or the *together* that defines it. It yields its being-together to a being *of* togetherness. The truth of community, on the contrary, resides in the retreat of such a being. Community is made of what retreats from it: the hypostasis of the 'common,' and its work. (xxxix; original emphasis)

For Nancy, "communal," "communion," "communitarianism," or "communism" represents the ultimate misuse of the common, the pursuit of "essence" as the logic of community:

> [When] thinking of being-in-common [is folded] within the thinking of an essence of community . . . it assigns to community a *common* being, whereas community is a matter . . . of existence inasmuch as it is *in* common, but without letting itself be absorbed into a common substance. Being *in* common has nothing to do with communion, with fusion into

> a body, into a unique and ultimate identity that would no longer be exposed. (xxxviii; original emphasis)

Similarly, in disrupting the parochial function of commonality, Agamben uses the provocative expression "whatever" in his theory of community. "Whatever" stands as the central trope for a theory of community that is without any criteria of common attributes and properties, such as "being red, being French, being Muslim" (1). The kernel of "whatever" is "the idea of an *inessential* commonality, a solidarity that in no way concerns an essence. . . . Whatever is constituted not by the indifference of common nature with respect to singularities, but by the indifference of the common and the proper, of the genus and the species, of the essential and the accidental" (18–19; original emphasis).

Nancy's and Agamben's anti-instrumentalist theory of the common speaks directly to their anti-teleological theory of community. Just as commonality should not "work" as the logic of unity, community should not "work" towards a final objective—towards a more efficient and productive unity, or a "return" to a lost, "purer" community of bygone years, or towards the aspirational model of Gemeinschaft community. Yet, Nancy notes, the history of community is irrevocably a history of single body ideology and teleological thinking. "How can the community without essence (the community that is neither 'people' nor 'nation,' neither 'destiny' nor 'generic humanity,' etc.) be presented as such? That is, what might a politics be that does not stem from the will to realize an essence?" (xxxix–xl).

The answer, Nancy argues, lies in a community whose commonality says nothing about its "essence" and serves no final function. As any unity with a final objective locates its "strength" in the degree of its fusion, any community conceived in a teleological manner inevitably operates within a single body ideology: it moves towards ideological totality. Only a community that has no final objective, whose commonality has no function, can become a unity whose final destination is neither "progress"—achievement of an ideological goal, greater productivity, political reform—nor totalitarianism. As the rationale for a community that is inoperative, Nancy's being-in-common offers the most basic fact of coexistence as the originary community. Coexistence means that "there is no singular being without a singular being, and there is, therefore, what might be called, in a rather inappropriate idiom, an originary or ontological 'sociality' that in its principle extends far beyond the simple theme of man as a social being" (28). "Coexistence holds itself just as far from juxtaposition as it does from integration.

Coexistence does not happen to existence; it is not added to it, and one can not [*sic*] subtract it out; it is existence" (187).

By emptying the category of commonality of any use-value, the anti-instrumentalist theory of community offers a profound challenge to the functionality of the first-person plural "we" in the contemporary fictions analyzed in this study. As each literary deployment of "we" serves a specific function—that "we" are alike, that "we" are interrelated, that "we" are unique, that "we" understand each other, that "I" exist among a "we"—each fictional instance must justify the work of commonality in transforming many into one. The fine balance between community that works and commonality that oppresses finds parallel expression in contemporary intellectual and political projects with reformist, activist vision. What theory of community can sustain a theory of commonality without also valorizing oppressive homogeneity? Let me hold up feminist and cosmopolitanist discourses of community as they grapple with this challenge and, in the process, highlight the dimension of *deliberativeness* that distinguishes them from fiction's ambivalent community. This deliberative deployment of commonality is what enables feminist and cosmopolitanist theories to do what fiction's ambivalent community cannot do—to synthesize the competing politics of idealized and dissenting community.

Dissenting Community That Works

Feminist and Cosmopolitanist Community

As Iris Marion Young writes, her critique of the single body ideology is instigated by the fact that "feminists have been paradigm exponents of the ideal of community I criticize." At the same time, her intervention in imagining alternatives to community is inspired by feminist scholarship's attention to difference (300). There is no better site for understanding feminism's problematic relationship to community than in the debate over the trope of "sisterhood." As I addressed earlier, sisterhood is the dominant aspirational model of community in feminist discourse. Inversely, feminist critique of idealized community emerges most vocally through its critique of sisterhood. Emphasizing the fissures that render a single "female" community impossible, feminist discourses of dissenting community argue the dangers of assuming "natural" commonality among women—of biological, acultural, prediscursive sameness, affinity, and empathy. Feminist critique of the sisterhood ideal also

dissents from the single body ideology that holds consensus as a self-evident goal and, above all, from the elision of difference that takes place in the name of unity.[10]

However, while sharing many of the concerns raised in postmodernist dissenting community, the reformist politics of feminist dissenting community demands that community does *something* rather than do nothing. The horizon of feminist negative community cannot be anti-instrumentality, a commonality that has no function except that of observing coexistence. Indeed, the feminist break from postmodernist dissenting community articulates the complicated and uneasy relationship between feminism and postmodernism—their parallel inquiry into power, politics, and identity, and their irreconcilable intellectual and political aims. As Linda Nicholson writes in the Introduction to *Feminism/Postmodernism,* a central question for feminist use of postmodernist theory is whether the "theorizing needs some stopping points" (8) so as to enable the category of gender and to sustain the possibility of unity.

It is no little surprise, then, that feminist expressions of dissenting community critique the anti-instrumental community of postmodernist philosophy. Miranda Joseph's *Against the Romance of Community,* while criticizing the discourse of idealized community, notes that "the not-surprising truth is that the critique of community offered by feminist poststructuralists has made not a dent in the pervasive and celebratory deployment of community in popular culture and even on what used to be the left" (xxxi). Joseph reserves her strongest criticism, though, for Nancy and Agamben as instances of postmodernist philosophy that "promote political passivity or paralyzing relativism" (xxx). In particular, Joseph finds Agamben's provocative use of "whatever" as too easily dismissing the fact that "collectivities often persist in their project despite the catachrestical and disputed nature of the identity terms under which they are mobilized" (xxx). Likewise, Nancy Fraser balances her estimation of Nancy's theories of politics with a criticism that his scholarship walks a "tightrope" that involves a "rigorous exclusion of politics, and especially of empirical and normative considerations." Thus Fraser expresses a dissatisfaction with Nancy's "middle way of a philosophical interrogation of the political that somehow ends up producing profound new, politically relevant insights without dirtying any hands in political struggle" (87).

What these feminist critiques express is, first, how reformist politics needs to maintain the concept of unity as the basis of collective work and, second, how that project requires the deployment of commonality in some specific, particular sense (e.g., similarity of history, subject posi-

tioning, experience, or shared objective or interest). Indeed, feminist critique of anti-instrumentalist community recalls, and sheds a new light on, the strategies by which postmodernist feminist theorists in the 1980s maintained the concept of unity amidst criticism of essentialism. Butler's "contingent foundations," Gayatri Spivak's "strategic essentialism," and Satya P. Mohanty's "postpositivist realism" represent feminism's constructivist use of essentialism—as a modified, contingent, fluid use of commonality to enable strategic formations of unity.[11] In their balance of postmodernist fissures with the strategic use of commonality, these contingent deployments of essentialism may be read as modified arguments for dissenting community—a theory of community that negates the values and politics of idealized community while still maintaining a sense of unity that "works."

Furthermore, these gestures of feminist dissenting community represent a moderated answer to the paradox of achieving "a body of individuals": unlike the idealized community that supersedes the paradox with apolitical claims of commonality, or dissenting community that throws out the paradox as being impossible, feminist dissenting community argues for a *deliberative* body of individuals. In shoring up a theory of instrumentalist community, feminist dissenting community relies on the foundational concept of feminism: agency. By emphasizing the deliberative deployment of commonality, this instrumentalist community suggests that the *work of* commonality need not equate the *oppression by* commonality. As the following chapters will demonstrate, precisely this deliberative, contingent, and strategic view of commonality is what is absent in the ambivalent community under analysis, and it is what causes them to continually question their uses of commonality.

Like feminist dissenting community, the deliberative formation of unity is pivotal to recent cosmopolitanist projects that attempt to theorize unity without oppression. As a negation of the values and politics of idealized community, the new cosmopolitanist corrective to single body ideology theorizes the deliberative nature of unity by targeting the concept of *belonging*. As a keyword and central value in the discourse of idealized community, "belonging" describes a relatedness or connection to a specific unity, such as to a nation, a region, an ethnicity, a locale, or a family. Another way to define belonging is as a form of *limited* attachment. Thus the concept of belonging implicitly calls up a sense of restricted belonging—belonging to one nation and not to another, to one culture but not to another, to one region over another. Recent cosmopolitanist projects that negate the theory of single body community argue that altering this limited logic of belonging leads to a model of com-

munity with multiple attachments, belonging, and loyalties. As Amanda Anderson succinctly describes in her overview of contemporary projects of cosmopolitanism, cosmopolitanism "denote[s] cultivated detachment from restrictive forms of identity" ("Cryptonormativism" 266).[12]

The best-known example of cosmopolitanist corrective to the single body ideology is perhaps found in Martha Nussbaum's well-known citation of Plutarch—the call "to regard all human beings as our fellow citizens and neighbors" (qtd. in Nussbaum, "Reply" 9). Nussbaum's notion emerges as a response to Richard Rorty's call for patriotic ideas and American values in a *New York Times* editorial in 1994. Motivated by the fear of national chauvinism and jingoism that such a call risks, and by her belief that global problems of hunger, poverty, inequality, and ecology require an international basis of collectivity and agency, Nussbaum theorizes a "world citizenship" in which one's nationality is an "accident of birth" ("Reply" 133). As a prime example of a non-limited belonging, Nussbaum points to the multinational and multireligious nature of people who participated in the World War II rescue operations for Jews. The French, Belgian, Polish, Scandinavian, Japanese, German, atheist, and Christian and other religious people who took part in the rescue efforts represent an instance of a world citizenship—a "we" that is not forged out of a single attachment, a unity transcending specificity of belonging.

Like the political and moral utility that Nussbaum locates in multiple and expansive belonging, Ross Posnock's "post-identity cosmopolitanism" theorizes cosmopolitanism as a community that works. Locating the emergence of cosmopolitanism in eighteenth-century republicanism, most famously enunciated by Kant, Posnock argues the progressive utility of cosmopolitanism as a careful adjudication of Enlightenment liberalism and a simultaneous distrust of the ideal of progress. The egalitarian potential of cosmopolitanism emerges from the fact that the expansive and multiple nature of belonging translates into the fact that no ideal, practice, or tradition *belongs* to any specific body of people. For Posnock, the exemplary expression of this *post*-identity cosmopolitanism rests in black cosmopolitanism's claim of modernity, in which formally marginalized groups can appropriate, without consideration of "origin," all the world's cultures, ideals, and politics without being charged of "assimilation." "[A]s an instrument of cultural democracy that, historically, has been particularly congenial to those on the periphery," post-identity cosmopolitanism presents a mode of agency to those who wish to form a deliberative unity (807).[13]

By dethroning the specificity and the limited nature of belonging, cos-

mopolitanist community, like feminist negative community, postulates a vision of unity that is as instrumental as it is nonoppressive. These deliberative formations of community that "works," yet whose telos does not lead to a totality, represent a modified answer to the paradox of "a body of individuals." They represent a *synthesis* of the competing discourses of idealized community and dissenting community, a synthesis in which commonality is deployed deliberatively, not as a "natural" expression, in which unity is taken as a contingent, not as a given, and in which the instrumentality of community is not evidence of its totalitarian nature. This synthesis, I argue, is what distinguishes these moderated dissenting communities from the ambivalent communities of contemporary fiction. Reading contemporary fiction's *in*ability to synthesize the competing discourses of community reveals the difficulty of excising the paradox from the proposition of community.

Ambivalent Community in Contemporary American Fiction

In the face of all these possible responses to the paradox of community, what does it mean to be ambivalent about community? To be ambivalent is to simultaneously entertain two contradictory attitudes towards one concept. Put another way, ambivalence describes a unique vantage point, of acknowledging the appeal, as well as the undesirability, of any alternative. And because one is not fully "given over" to the attraction of one alternative, the state of being undecided elucidates the lingering call of the other. I am not suggesting that ambivalence offers an all-seeing vantage point, an unbiased perspective that is superior in its scope, depth, and balance to a more determinate position. Instead, I am suggesting that ambivalence holds valuable epistemological utility in the way it captures a conflicted stance, the moment of hesitation, in which the compelling nature of one alternative competes with that of another alternative.

Indeed, as they are pulled by the two contrasting answers to the paradox of community, these fictions express a multivocality in their manifestation of the literary "we." Their conflicted stance towards concepts central to the debate of community—such as commonality, sharedness, belonging, attachment, and difference—stands in contrast to the more or less stable discursive role of those key terms in the two competing visions of community. Is community is like family, kinship, friendship, and village? Or is community like totalitarianism, communism, and fascism? The discursive "fate" of concepts such as commonality,

belonging, and attachment is already predetermined by the figurative analogy employed to describe community. The multivocality of ambivalent communities is also different from the synthesized dialectic represented by feminist dissenting community or cosmopolitanist corrective to community. In contrast to these moderated expressions of dissenting community, ambivalent community retains the paradox of community as an unresolved challenge.

Each chapter examines the way the competing pulls of idealized and dissenting community manifest themselves through competing models for saying "we." The degree of that competition, and the degree to which the final "we" endorses one vision of community over another, informs the progression of the chapters that unfold. The first chapter, "What Ails the Individual: Community Cure in Toni Morrison's *Jazz* and *Paradise*," begins with the least ambivalent assertion of "we" in Morrison's use of identification. Pointing to the celebrations of Morrison's community in critical scholarship of her work, I suggest that Morrison's affirmation of identification is representative of the idealized community discourse dominating contemporary literary criticism. While identification in literature has been primarily approached psychoanalytically, as expressions of primary parent-child identification or of trauma, loss, or melancholia, I highlight the centrality of the term in the current debate over community. I explore identification as the key process by which commonality attains its transformative role as the binding agent of community. Identification, then, rationalizes the use of the question "How are you like me?" as the criterion of community formation. Upon the condition of likeness, a subject regards herself to be identical to another and, indeed, regards herself to be *one* with another in experience, feeling, and positionality. Conversely, as the centripetal force rationalizing the fusing of multiple individuals into one subject positioning, identification becomes the face of the oppressive single body ideology.

Like all the writers examined in this study, Morrison engages the competing discourses of community, and she explores vastly different deployments of identification, from the most benevolent "sisterhood" and "family" model of community that directly invokes the discourse of idealized community, to the most totalitarian and coercive community that manifests all the critiques of dissenting community discourse. However, what ultimately renders *Jazz* (1992) and *Paradise* (1998) the least ambivalent assertions of "we" in this study is the degree to which these novels ultimately return to and affirm the aspirational models of idealized community. Furthermore, dissenting community discourse, especially Lyotard's theory of the differend, highlights the vision of idealized

community and the telos of healing that dominate Morrison's novels and contemporary literary criticism.

Moving from the strongest endorsement of idealized community found in Morrison's novels, the next two chapters delineate the increasing power of dissenting community discourse to unsettle the central assumptions and values of idealized community. However, what groups these three chapters together is the way that the values of idealized community, especially the "work" performed by community, ultimately underpin their formations of the first-person plural "we." The second chapter, "'We Are Not the World'": Global Community, Universalism, and Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange,*" turns to the global "we" as another unstable site of the debate over community. The leap from the singular "I" to the plural "we," in this instance, rests upon the ideal of universalism—the condition of absolute inclusiveness that encompasses the whole of the world. This chapter engages the recent poststructuralist recuperations of universalism, such as those of Ernesto Laclau, Étienne Balibar, Judith Butler, and Slavoj Žižek, whose works argue a dialectic model of universalism: as a constitutive ingredient in any discussion of human rights or progressive politics, yet whose particular instantiations invariably fall short of an absolute inclusiveness vision. Precisely this impossible/necessary dialectic is central to Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* (1997). The novel presents a skeptical look at the "global village" sentiments that pervade discussions of globalization, and it critiques the First World's deployment of a global intimacy and shared fate as the latest rendition of imperialist—that is, unidirectional—universalism. In its place, the novel postulates another model of global community, a "romantic" universalism that asserts the transnational "we" without imperialist dimensions. However, the novel's fantastic representation of this global "we" aesthetically enacts the "romantic" dimension of universalism—as a quixotic, imaginary, unrealistic, indeed *impossible,* achievement. The multiple significance of the novel's global community, then, lends a deeper nuance to the incompleteness at the heart of universalism: as an ideal whose impossibility is essential to its perennial appeal.

Chapter 3, "Unlike Any Other: Shoring Up the Human Community in Richard Powers's *Galatea 2.2* and *Plowing the Dark,"* turns to Powers's novels of science and technology to examine the role of humanism in literary manifestations of the human community. I suggest that Powers's ambivalent but ultimately defiant allegiance to humanism is a rich instance of the human "we" as an assertion of *distinction.* These novels' central question, "What is uniquely human?" directly engages the issue

of commonality and differentiation at the heart of the community debate. As Chantel Mouffe puts it, constructing a "we" necessitates a "they," a "constitutive outside" that makes the "we" possible (12). "The human" has never been a stable category, of course, as other categories of being, principally "the animal," have perennially challenged those attributes purportedly exclusive to the human. In the late twentieth century, the biggest threat to the ontological stability of "the human" comes in the form of the intelligent machine, and posthumanist theories highlight those sites of fluidity between the machine and the human. I read posthumanist theories, such as those of Katherine N. Hayles, in light of the dissenting community discourse, and argue that humanism's pursuit of human uniqueness engages not only the singleness of the human "we" but the singularity—the essence—of the human "we." Powers severely tests his humanist-protagonists of *Galatea 2.2* (1995) and *Plowing the Dark* (2000) as they desperately try to maintain precisely this human essence that will absolutely demarcate the human from the machine. And as posthumanist arguments push the humanist defense to its very edge, dismantling its immanentist and essentialist logic, the human "we" seems all but defunct. But ultimately, Powers offers a startling response to buttress the human community: ineffability as the ultimate commonality that enables the human "we."

In contrast to the first three chapters, the fourth chapter examines a literary "we" in which competing values of community do not find a resolution through idealized community. At the same time, this irresolve presents a challenge to the dissenting model of "we" *as well as* to the reign of idealized community. "Motion in Stasis: Impossible Community in Fictions of Lydia Davis and Lynne Tillman" examines the ideal of communion as a rationale for community formation. Befitting a concept central to the etymology of community, "communion" describes a spiritual union or meeting of souls, and this meaning continues to inflect the prevailing understanding of community as a condition of intersubjective continuity and transparency. The fictions of Davis and Tillman interrogate this lingering influence of communion. In mundane, everyday settings, their characters feel the dual press of the other's contiguity as well as the other's opacity. However "close" one is to the other, relationally or physically, one cannot "know," "figure out," or "see through" the other. Indeed, the taunt of transparency remains the most pressing task for the prototypical protagonist of these writers. Furthermore, the two writers demonstrate the paradox of community in different and complementary ways. Davis's short stories and her novel *The End of the Story* (1993) explore the impossibility of communion through the concept of immea-

surability. The countless number and ways of knowing the contiguous other announce the fact of the other's opacity. If there are just too many ways of knowing the other in Davis's fiction, the inverse is true in Tillman's fiction: there are too few, and they are too predictable. Tillman's *Motion Sickness* (1991) explores how, at every turn, the protagonist's attempt to know the other falls upon congealed ways of knowing. In this task, Tillman applies the concept of recognition under Barthesean pressure and examines the ways in which recognition is a way of knowing by repetition. Ultimately, their inevitable failure invokes and dramatizes the rejection of communion, amply voiced by dissenting community—but with a crucial difference. I suggest that in these instances of ambivalent community, the expectation of and the desire for communion as the condition of "we" are not as easily banished as in the discourse of dissenting community. Here, "we" becomes an assertion caught between the desire for communion and the knowledge of its fundamental impossibility.

From an examination of community as an incomplete and an impossible project, this book turns to a literary instance in which community is understood in the most expansive manner—as the fact of coexistence. The final chapter on David Markson examines the most direct representation of dissenting community model of "we" and stands as a counterpoint to the most idealized model of "we" that began this book. Chapter 5, "Community as Multi-Party Game: Private Language in David Markson's *Wittgenstein's Mistress,*" studies Markson's novel, *Wittgenstein's Mistress* (1988), which engages the paradox of community by asking: Can one be absolutely alone? Can there be an "individual" outside "a body of individuals"? In one of the most philosophical and formally challenging treatments of the question, Markson presents a character who believes that she is the only person alive on earth. Most importantly for the argument of this book, she experiences her absolute-aloneness in antithetical ways: as a source of absolute freedom and as a source of absolute indeterminacy. Despite her freedom to do and say anything she wants, she spends her life "looking" for others, and her greatest concern is that she will be misunderstood because her language use is less than perfectly clear. Her dilemma invites the question: misunderstood by *whom?* Using Wittgenstein's theory of a private language game, I suggest that the protagonist's failure to play a private language game is an enactment of the impossibility of being absolutely alone. Attempts at evading a "we" simultaneously invoke the presence of a "we," and community becomes an expression of coexistence. However, in contrast to the anti-instrumentalist argument of dissenting community, the "we" that emerges in *Wittgenstein's Mistress* cannot be an expression empty

of all utility or "work." Like all the other "we" in this study, the "we" of coexistence can only be an assertion that serves some purpose or does some work.

This book concludes with that observation: all communities do *something*. All manifestations of first-person plural "we" serve a need, answer a desire, respond to an anxiety, forestall a fear, or guard against a threat. In concluding with the inevitability of community that "works," this book argues the limitations of dissenting community's anti-instrumentalist and anti-teleological view. A community that works is automatically an argument *for* something, an assertion rather than an expression of a given fact. And what these ambivalent communities demonstrate is the fact that assertions of community, like every other argument, are vulnerable to counterarguments. *A Body of Individuals* traces how the ambivalent community of contemporary fiction manifests community *as* an argument, and an argument that must wear its counterarguments on its sleeve.