“Be the red worm in the dirt. Be the honeysuckle on the vine”:

Queer Southern Place-Making in A *Dirty South Manifesto* (2020)

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Abstract

In light of homonormative narratives that privilege the urban as a future place of freedom, *A Dirty South Manifesto* (2020) by L. H. Stallings represents the manifesto’s function of disrupting hegemonic narratives in its reconfiguration of thinking futurity and its spatial dimensions for marginalized Southerners. I read Stallings’s manifesto as employing a place-making practice that condemns moral authority and aims at dismantling narratives based on Christian white heteropatriarchy and settler colonialist chronotopic social orders. Queer narrative temporality is the pivotal point through which linear progress can be countered. The manifesto’s case studies of sexual resistance in Southern hip-hop and activism create a queer archive of the South which merges artistic and political imaginations and rural and urban spaces into Southern places. *A Dirty South Manifesto* invalidates hegemonic linear progress narratives such as metronormative narratives and instead can be read to follow Judith Roof’s call for story systems. By prioritizing long-form discourse and literacy while embracing “obscene” sexual expressions, the text aims at utopian radical reinterpretations of what it means to be situated in the South.

Keywords

Creative Place-Making; Dirty South; L. H. Stallings; Manifesto; Narrative Systems; Queer Narrative.

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Introduction: Metronormative Narratives versus Hip-Hop?

In contemporary media representations of the US South, the rural is the focus of prevalent stereotypical tropes, which are used as shorthand in a media landscape that is affected by an economy of attention (Nunn 187). Specifically, when put in relation to queerness, the South is typically depicted in an essentializing way as white, backward, and often hostile. In contrast, queer futures are depicted as a possibility in a liberal, urban North. It is framed as the place to flee to where one can finally progress toward a more authentic lived identity, according to what Jack Halberstam calls metronormative narratives in his book *In a Queer Time and Place* (2005). These narratives privilege the urban as the quintessential place for coming out, thereby signaling a future of freedom for queer people, which contributes to hegemonic idealization of progress away from a stereotyped, othered rural United States "made to function as a closet for urban sexualities" (Halberstam 37). Meanwhile, the South, both rural and urban, remains home to queer folks, and their daily life is harmed by the structural inequalities that fuel these tropes. Metronormative narratives certainly do not contribute to improving the everyday lives of marginalized queer, poor, and BIPOC groups of people in the South and instead may more likely cement their feeling of isolation in rural areas, from which most could or would not move away due to a number of possible reasons, such as not having the economic means to do so. The South needs better narratives that depict it more accurately as a region characterized by rural as well as urban landscapes, by bigotry as well as compassion. Furthermore, new narratives are needed that offer perspectives for political and social change, which is desperately needed in the US in general and southern states in particular.

Hip-hop music is one medium through which southern BIPOC artists—mostly urban, and increasingly also queer—have been able to address and influence the mainstream pop culture of the US. L.H. Stallings takes the genre of Southern hip-hop—or Dirty South hip-hop—as inspiration for Southern practices of social transformation, which she formulates in her book *A Dirty South Manifesto: Sexual Resistance and Imagination in the New South* (2020). In this article, I will discuss the subversive potential of manifestary place-making through a narrative analysis and queer reading of this multifaceted text. According to the author, the book's premise is to "[comprehend] the significance of southern hip-hop to political and artistic imagination, as well as to the terrain of sexuality and gender studies" (Stallings 4). It uses styles, themes, and philosophies of the Dirty South hip-hop subculture in a way that counters hegemonic depictions of the South and simultaneously centers the urgent need for political and social change.[1] The author pinpoints the normative claim to moral authority as the origin of the contemporary (and historical)

"sexual dystopia" (Stallings 10) of the South. The two recent examples given in the text are the 2013 Texas HB2 bill to restrict abortion rights within the state and the 2016 North Carolina HB2 "a.k.a. the bathroom bill" (Stallings 27), which prompted several other southern states to attempt or even implement similar measures. I would add that Ron DeSantis in Florida is another major exponent of the South as a sexual dystopia, whose policies since the publication of the book exemplify fearmongering policies against queer culture and critical race theory that led to the introduction of discriminatory legislation, such as his so-called Stop-Woke Act. Stallings wants to counter the political trend towards further oppression in this dystopia by theorizing a new South, the Dirty South, as a place that is present, self-aware, and committed to practices of social resistance.

Therefore, the titular term dirty is not only used in the context of hip-hop but expanded into a larger multilayered metaphor of dirt. This usage marks sexual resistance as a dirty anti-thesis to the harmful demand for some ideal of sexual purity propagated in the South by moral authoritarianism. Early on the author maps out two modes—"above" and "below"—of sexual resistance in the South, for which the manifesto is a rallying cry. These modes are discussed mostly through subordinated images connected to the overarching metaphorical dirt: red worms and honeysuckle. Although as a tunnel-building animal and a vining plant the associations seem clear at face value, when one takes a closer look both images align with the two modes. This drives Stallings's point home that both modes are interdependent: Red worms practice geophagia (meaning they eat earth or soil) and are, therefore, utilized in the manifesto to represent the important factors of participation (here specifically in the context of place-making), of making something out of nothing, or of being nourished by what others may discard (from "above"). At the same time, the worms produce underground tunnels through their "dirty" sustenance, the mode of "below" is metaphorically engaged as well. Honeysuckle as a vining, parasitic plant native to the US represents unconventional, possibly illegal, acts of protest or solidarity against the institutions of moral authority ("below"). But their vines are also mentioned as being capable of building bridges to embrace and connect, which represents the aspect of collaboration ("above"). These metaphors are explored in six smaller manifestos within the book, each of which has a dedicated chapter that elaborates on the various layers of meanings: the Slow Tongue Manifesto, Dirt Manifesto, Geophukit Manifesto, T.R.A.P. (The Ratchet Alliance for Prosperity) Manifesto, WeUsIOurU Future Pronouns Manifesto, and Honeysuckle, Not Honey Sucka! Manifesto (Stallings vii-viii). The explanatory sections use an intersectional analysis to pinpoint the structural oppression of people based on sexuality or gender and also describe cases of activists exemplifying sexual

resistance in the South.

I understand the conceptualization of the Dirty South as a practice of creative place-making, and in this essay, I discuss the queer potential of the narrative form employed by this manifesto as a place-making practice. The form the book employs is crucial in regard to place-making, and therefore, I also want to contextualize Stallings's work within conventions of the manifesto form, which lend themselves to Stallings's practice of dirty place-making. In a second step, I propose a reading of its narrative structure as representative of Judith Roof's concept of queer narrative systems, which she formulates as an alternative to conventional narrative paradigms. Therein I localize the queerness of the narration of the Dirty South.

A Dirty South: Manifestary Writing and Place-Making

In her introduction to the book, Stallings calls the manifesto "suited for dystopias" (9), and this approach to the form, as a leading medium of political imagination in the face of dystopian domination and discrimination, is consistent with the work of other manifesto writers, scholars, and critics in the contemporary and past periods of increased manifesto publication. The fact that Stallings comments on the choice of genre is exemplary of the self-referentiality inherent to the manifesto. Breanne Fahs expresses a similar notion to Stallings in her tellingly named collection of feminist manifestos, *Burn It Down! Feminist Manifestos for the Revolution* (2020), by stressing the necessity of manifestos "in times of great social stress. How else are we to make sense of our own anger, our sense of confusion and implosion, our imminent feelings of doom and stifled possibilities?" (3). In general, the manifesto is a politicized text, which can effectively platform and channel emotions, and often directly demands emotional (re)actions from the reader.[2] I want to follow the trace of Stallings's premise by asking: If this manifesto's theses are suited to the political needs of Southern dystopia, how do the processes of manifesto formulation and emplacement come together and intersect in the creation of a Dirty South? By asking this question, we can conceptually relate manifestos and place to marginalization.

The Phenomenology of Marginalization and Place in the US South

Based on her research on the function of manifesto texts in modernism, Laura Winkiel views the form as indicative of "a crisis in narratives of progress" (2). I argue that Stallings's work undermines the essentialist narrative of progress away from a rural South. Current cultural scholarship on the US South agrees that there is a prevalent normative narrative that positions the South as a rural place where past unfortunate "missteps," such as homophobia and racism, are still belatedly present but also safely contained (Holland 168). The

South as an allegory for US sins has led to processes of Othering as well as a "memorialization" (and therefore also a romanticization) of the geographical place of the South, creating a myth of Southern exceptionalism (Bibler 154). Sharon P. Holland argues that mainstream narratives that mythologize the South in this way contribute to a disjointed Southern temporality. Being placed in this "removed" time in turn feeds narratives that are saturated with "a history that cannot be overcome" (Holland 168) back into the mainstream. This is how they bolster current political agendas that further discriminate against and erase southern Blackness, brownness, and queerness as well as effacing the multifacetedness of the South as a place comprising rural and urban cultures. These political trends in Southern states lead to legislative changes that further disadvantage those who are already marginalized by white heteropatriarchy.

Stallings's *A Dirty South Manifesto* articulates a crisis of hegemonic narratives about white rural individuals in the South: the author condemns the ways in which Christian moral authority shapes (and has shaped) US institutions of state and culture to enact systemic violence towards women and queer people. This violence crystalizes in the South, and Stallings develops a new framework for practices of creative place-making that resists increasing attempts to make the South unlivable for people with non-normative gender and sexual identities, especially when they are racialized as non-white. As Edward Casey reiterates: "*boundaries are where places happen*. If history is to occur as place, then it will do so most effectively in the boundaries that belong to places" (509; original emphasis). Therefore, I argue that the possibility for historically significant social change seems to be crucially mediated by marginalized people's relation to place. By taking the specific genre of southern hip-hop as a basis and foregrounding the works of women and queer people within this form, Stallings undoubtedly thinks political change from the perspective of the margins: to alleviate the suffering of marginalized people, the South as a place needs to be remade.

The history of theorizing place is long, including philosophical and human-geographical approaches,[3] and informs the comparatively much younger concept of creative place-making. It was proposed as a term in 2010 by Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa Nicodemus, and in the recent *Routledge Handbook of Placemaking* (2021), a variety of approaches that have since been developed in different disciplines are presented. In the context of this dynamic research field, Cara Courage's introductory definition in the handbook offers a useful theoretical framework: place-making is participation in "communities of practice" and demonstrates how arts and politics can merge to advance positive social change.

Communities of practice refers to a group of people who are

connected through three dimensions: sharing concern about a joint interest, or what Courage calls its "domain," collaborating in an engaged community, and creating a repertoire of practices, which ideally create value for the community by following ethical principles (Courage 4-5). One of the principles of this community concept is to create "a rhythm for the community" (Wenger qtd. in Courage 4). Stallings does this in the very first smaller manifesto of the book by introducing the practice of the slow tongue. This recurring method of the Dirty South, based on hip-hop artist Millie Jackson's performance style and oeuvre, fundamentally shapes the framework of the Dirty South as a place. Manifestos are firmly located in the same triangulation of arts, politics, and social change as communities of practice, making the form a fitting communication tool for these practices that form communities. The conceptual overlap of the manifesto and pamphlet as forms (pamphlets often use manifestary rhetoric and many manifestos have been distributed as pamphlets) also highlights the manifesto's engagement on the local level—it is close to the ground, if you will.

In the Dirty South, red worms and honeysuckle are metaphors for place-making practices of resistance, which also consist of taking on obligations for each other. Place in general can be understood as an amalgamation of three dimensions as well: "materiality, meaning, and practice" (Cresswell 169-70). Since these three concepts share a complex relation, which can reinforce "systematically asymmetrical power relations" (Cresswell 173), creative place-making may in turn subvert these exact normative spatial forces that saturate the dynamics of places. Moving through places in a marginalized body, and relating to other bodies through such movement, is shaped by discriminatory power imbalances in practice, meaning, and matter, which influences both bodies and places.[4] Resistance against social injustices in the South can therefore challenge hegemonic orientations on the level of place through practices. When it is practiced communally and embodied in the places we want to re-make, all three dimensions of creative place-making that are geared towards more ethical Southern places are addressed. That can feed back into the other two dimensions of place (matter and meaning) through embodiment and continued collaboration in practice. L. H. Stallings gives this place-making community the label Dirty South and uses the textual format of the manifesto. In this form, she combines art critique, academic theory, social activism, and intersectional analysis in one literary work. The manifesto was chosen deliberately as a communicative tool to introduce the Dirty South, creating meaning through the subversive potentialities of the form.

The Manifesto and Time

Manifestary texts aim to disrupt dominant historical narratives to resituate

the here and now, enabling reconfigurations of thinking about futurity and its spatial dimensions. In a recent article, Carsten Junker has observed an increase in manifesto writing and publishing since 2015/2016 specifically in the US context (1-3). These contemporary manifestos cover a wide variety of themes, but they mostly discuss social, cultural, environmental, and economic crises of the moment. The manifesto in general is characterized by performativity (Fahs 5), not only on the side of the author but also on the side of the reader (Yanoshevsky 264). For the political subgenre, this means there is a focus on initiating certain changes in the beliefs or behaviors of readers (even direct calls-to-action). Influential manifesto scholar Janet Lyon understands the genre historically as indivisible from the idea of the modern public sphere (8). Nonetheless, due to the form's wide cultural valences and dependence on historical conditions, it must always be contextualized within its respective time period. The temporality of the manifesto historizes the present, often creating alternative histories as well as signaling possibilities for future change. According to Lyon, the ambition of the form has been to "[break] up statist versions of 'progress' that justify modernity's historical narratives" (16), and Stallings continues this by countering homonormative progress narratives in *A Dirty South Manifesto*. An important aspect to stress, however, is the relation of manifestos to the realities they depict: they always maintain distance, an imaginative threshold, to the "real world" (Caws xxvii). Despite this, the texts aim to change reality, and I agree with Galia Yanoshevsky that "the manifesto may be viewed as a programmatic discourse of power because it aspires to change reality with words" (264). Stallings follows this pattern by integrating suggestions of utopian practices of communal place-making, but she is also self-aware about their utopian character, encouraging literacy not only for "reading" oppression but also for putting up resistance.

One of the "minor manifestos" (Stallings 5), titled WeUsIOurU Future Pronouns Manifesto, is arguably the most utopian of them all and uses the titular array of pronouns as a placeholder for whatever concept will supersede present pronouns in the future. WeUsIOurU makes the complications and paradoxes of queer temporality apparent without giving concrete solutions: it sparks reflection about different possible scenarios for the future cultural and social developments of pronouns. The text enacts a destabilization of temporality directly in the text through the use of grammatical tenses, specifically by using the empty, futuristic label WeUsIOurU in the present as well as the past tense (Stallings 135). This communicates the complications of queer temporality on an additional level. Furthermore, it represents the complex narrative temporality of the manifesto. Only the last line of this speculative text again circles back to the present by employing the metaphors for the two modes of emplaced sexual resistance in the much-repeated line:

"*Be the red worm in the dirt . . . . Be the honeysuckle on the vine*" (Stallings 137; original emphasis). Once more, a call materializes to actively participate in the imagination of futurities and thereby to also potentially shape the emerging future.

In recent years, scholars in Southern studies have also contributed to the general upsurge of the genre of manifesto: The journal *PMLA* published a collection of commissioned manifestos under the premise of imagining "other Souths"—"manifesting southern studies" (Bibler 156)—in a 2016 volume consisting of nine short texts by Southern studies scholars, including Kathrine A. Burnett, Keith Cartwright, Pippa Holloway, and R. Scott Heath.[5] Similar to *A Dirty South Manifesto*, many of these manifestos critique the progressivist narratives of "overcoming the South," such as Holloway's rejections of "a positioning of the South as a 'backward other' against which the supposed progressivism of the rest of the county is measured" (185).

As chair and professor of African American studies at Georgetown University, Stallings is firmly established in the academy and might be expected to produce a work with more similarities to other academic manifestos. Yet, the stylized *A Dirty South Manifesto* diverges, for example, from the *PMLA* manifestos by centering active participation through its focus on literacy and interaction. For Stallings's manifesto, the central question is how the subversion of normative narratives of the South can be achieved and it provides an answer by imagining a Dirty South: the guiding concept of the book. The author wants to enable critical negotiations of Southern cultural hegemony and simultaneously present practical options for disruptive resistance. To that end, the Dirty South is constructed as a queer archive of the South comprising case studies of sexual resistance in art, specifically urban Southern hip-hop, and local activism, as well as the minor manifestos themselves and their use of the rural metaphors of red worms and honeysuckle. I argue that this structure not only merges artistic and political imaginations but also, crucially, links rural and urban spaces into joint Southern places. The activist groups used by Stallings as examples are mostly based in urban spaces, while the scope of their practices also reaches into the rural. For example, BreakOUT! is a New Orleans-based organization advocating for LGBTQ youth in general, Atlanta's SisterSong advocates for reproductive justice for BIPOC people in Georgia, and Southerners On New Ground (SONG) from Durham, North Carolina aims to build and maintain infrastructures between specifically Southern LGBTQ organizers (Stallings 82, 191-92). In the explanatory chapters, Stallings analyzes the protests and campaigns of these organizations in her manifestos, which often center around acts of defiance against hegemonic moral authority.[6]

For example, through the Geophukit Manifesto, the author also directly addresses the audience, another manifesto convention, in an array of angry

non-rhetorical questions asking readers to relate their own position to the societal grievances of the South. Stallings asks, "[w]hat is your relationship to the land?" (67) and demands that readers think about their own accountability: "Did your ancestors steal people, or hang Black bodies from trees? // Or just watch the ones that did?" (68). These questions stir emotions and aim to activate readers to participate in the resistance practices of their communities, with the interjecting repetitions of geophagia and the neologism of geophukit conjuring up nauseous frustration. Like the already mentioned WeUsIOurU, as well as the multiple connected metaphors I have described so far, the *Dirty South Manifesto* repeatedly produces an image-laden style. This is a formal convention in manifesto writing (Kaplan 76), with the text often using a simple, "strong central image" (Caws xxiii), be this a tree (Klee 13), a spectre (Marx and Engels 14), or dirt. The meaning of dirt is manifold, shaped by its central surface-level reference to Southern hip-hop culture, as well as other allusions discussed throughout the explanatory chapters. Stallings uses dirt as an identifier for soil, land, and, most significantly, the nurturing of people who are marginalized due to their gender or sexual expression on the basis of moral authoritarian rhetoric and legislation. Because the conception of land in the US is inherently tied to the ongoing oppression of Indigenous communities, who in intersectional analyses always seem to be the most disenfranchised in any state, Stallings takes a clear position early on. The purpose of the South is found in "dismantling and reinventing southern public spheres largely erected out of the sexual economy of slavery and sustained by settler colonialism" (5). She explicitly criticizes settler colonialism in the same breath as slavery. The cultural and political heritage of enslavement and settler colonialism has a complex related history in Black and indigenous studies. In the introduction to *Otherwise Worlds: Against Settler Colonialism and Anti-Blackness* (2020), the editors state that the lived realities of Black and native communities are both characterized by suffering under white supremacy, and they urge readers and scholars to "think with one another about what healing and redress would look like on otherwise or decolonial and abolitionist terms" (King et al. 8). A *Dirty South Manifesto* follows this line of thinking by condemning the idealization of white-settler sexuality still present in institutions and cultures based on moral authority. The manifesto does this "work from the perspective of the land" (Stallings 7) and calls its readers to follow in its footsteps, to also "work" with and through the land—or more specifically, the dirt. This general metaphor and its connection to the images of honeysuckle vines and red worms center the rural South as essential in imagining an alternative place and different political futures. Thus, Stallings emphasizes an inherent cultural connection between Southern modes of identification and rural landscapes that nurture resistance.

The concluding chapter is preceded by the Honeysuckle, Not Honey Sucka! Manifesto. In this section, “calls for a moral revival” (Stallings 157) are the tempting honey of the Old South, and “Female, Queer, and Trans Insurgency” (Stallings 158), outside of a moral–amoral binary, “[must] grow, sometimes wildly, above ground and below ground” (Stallings 158). The closing phrase visualizes the final insight of the manifesto in the last chapter:

> if we begin with the premise that decolonial sexuality and gender are as important to insurgency as weaponry and intelligence gathering, especially as it relates to what have been classified as asexual or nonsexual political issues, then maybe the foundation of insurgency becomes a type of vigilante justice that understands that law and legal measurements are already corrupt and cannot be the basis of change alone. (Stallings 169)

The author reasons that unlawful but ethical measurements, which openly center issues of gender and sexuality, might be required when oppressive laws fail to bring about necessary change. This point is most perceptible in the T.R.A.P. (The Ratchet Alliance for Prosperity) Manifesto, which focuses on one of the most pressing current issues facing the rural South, the lack of access to abortion. With this issue, there is not only a need for sexual resistance from “above” (for example, legal activism) but also from “below”—outside of the systems Stallings assumes are contaminated by moral authoritarian thinking, such as the legal system. This is achieved by the author’s framing of the manifesto: it is written as a duet, a “ratchet” alliance, of the fictional hip-hop artist personas Lil La Laveau of Natchez and Midwife Mary. In the subsequent explanatory chapter, midwifery is identified as a historically important shadow institution that improves reproductive health with female practitioners employing “witchy” practices in the South (Stallings 121-24). On the manifesto track, therefore, Midwife Mary is the supporting featured act of an angry Lil La Laveau and their exchange is presented in the style of a genius.com page. Lil La Laveau introduces them, then gives shout-outs to a list of allies, and then proceeds to bemoan the intersectional discrimination that leads to a lack of bodily autonomy for queer people, BIPOC, women, and everyone in between (Stallings 99-103). This takes the form of a trap song, a hip-hop subgenre from Atlanta—trap here, however, also gestures at the metaphorical “entrapment” of people in need of reproductive health care by moral authoritarianism in the South.

By referencing this historical alliance of women seeking to broaden access to reproductive healthcare and bodily autonomy in adverse circumstances, the manifesto encourages self-reflective engagement

with moral authority. Due to such instances, I read Stallings's manifesto as employing and promoting creative place-making practices in the South; its goal is to resist notions of moral authority and dismantle narratives, which are based on harmful community practices in the South. Ultimately, what Stallings's template for creative place-making challenges, explicitly and implicitly, is Christian white heteropatriarchy. Within this structure, social orders are based on a settler colonialist chronotope, in Mikhail Bakhtin's sense, which Stallings acknowledges and addresses.

The Narrative System of the Dirty South

What actually inhibits a narrative from including marginalized experiences? One much-discussed aspect is the issue of narrative temporality, specifically the conceptual gap between queer temporality and narrative temporality. In the following section, I want to contextualize the *Dirty South Manifesto* within this discourse. Therefore, I compare Stallings's work to another manifesto about the US-American South that has been published recently. Charles M. Blow's *The Devil You Know: A Black Power Manifesto* (2021), similar to Stallings's text, expresses an urgent need to change the current reality of the Southern states. He also presents a possible model for Southern futurity: a reverse Great Migration. *The Devil You Know* presents an interesting foil to Stallings's manifesto, not only because of their close publishing dates but also in terms of the Southern narratives they both promote based on their knowledge of and approaches to the South. Blow's text makes the case for a new Great Migration, a "reverse migration" (39), arguing for its potential to empower Black people politically. The wording "reverse" is telling when put in the context of Judith Roof's conceptualization of narrative structure. Although Blow's manifesto is a counter-narrative to metronormative narratives, it proposes only an inversion as an alternative, but it is still paradigmatic. *The Devil You Know* again frames Black success as a linear narrative and neglects the intersectional aspects of gender and sexual orientation by obscuring their relevance.

Black studies scholar Michelle Wright uses the term "linear progress narrative," which I apply here as well, and notes that advocating for equal rights conceptually aims to be included in this narrative (293). However, Wright also shows how queer temporality is incompatible with linearity due to its inherent processual quality, its composition as a "multitemporal moment rather than a linear narrative" (301). In the field of narrative theory, Jesse Matz sees possibilities for queer narratives in the conceptual decoupling of linear narrativity— which is characterized by a narrative sequence, for example by watching audiovisual media frame by frame—and linear narrative temporality. The narrativity of a story, meaning the recipient's experience of an array of narrative elements, does not necessarily presuppose linear progress within the

narrative meaning. Jesse Matz theorizes this split using Paul Ricoeur's model of readers' narrative engagement based on processes of narrative mimesis (Matz, "Narrative and Narratology" 284-85). Elsewhere, Matz claims that "if we uncouple narrative temporality and teleological futurity, we may discover that the former can subvert the latter in the spirit of queer oppositionality itself—that the allegorical act opens futurity to antinormative alternatives" ("Queer Prospects" 233). Therefore, it seems to be necessary to find sustainable ways of engaging with non-linear narratives and the understanding of queer temporalities may be very helpful here. However, Matz does not really give a concrete approach or a practical implementation as to how this can be done in practice.

Roof's approach to narratives as systems is positioned at this vital intersection of queer narrative engagement, narrative temporality, and non-linearity, and I argue that *A Dirty South Manifesto* is a narrative that lends itself to and benefits from such a conceptual reading. Roof calls for a change in how narrative structure should be understood, from a paradigmatic to a systematic approach (47). Instead of tracing a linear paradigmatic narrative, at the end of which all tensions of the plot are resolved, in our analyses we should understand narrative as systematic. Roof draws on Deleuze and Guattari in her definition of narrative systems, more specifically from their concept of assemblages, insofar as we should always see their potential to already be or become self-repetitive. In other words, systems have affordances that develop versions and generate sets of narrative practices for future use. Roof summarizes narrative systems as "amalgamations of desires, significations, interactions, and transient meanings and functionings" (55). A narrative system consists of morphing nodal points, defined as moments when the narrative enters a meta-level of heightened self-referentiality, and these nodal points relate to each other based on "a system 'rule' or generating principle" (Roof 47). I argue that the generating rule of the structure of *A Dirty South Manifesto* is the metaphor of dirt, which, crucially, is also explained in the text itself. Dirt is examined in its own small manifesto, but it is also distributed throughout the other minor manifestos—the author's fractured vignettes on religious conservatism, dispossession and displacement, bodily autonomy, queer utopian thinking, and the nature of resistance in the South. The decision to write multiple shorter manifestos in different styles decentralizes the narrative to express and represent the multiplicity of narratives and practices needed to found and cultivate a Dirty South and resist injustice.

A multiplicity of narratives also needs multiple literacies, if we want to decode layered meanings, therefore the minor manifestos reiterate in practice what Stallings stresses from the beginning of the book. The author dedicates the first and shortest manifesto to the topic (Slow Tongue Manifesto) but also

makes clear that all of them are highly stylized and at times also difficult to read. The reader practices the same method that Stallings theorizes as being necessary: that "the marginalized and dispossessed require literacy practices situated in techniques of the arts to produce an imagination that will facilitate their survival and liberation" (19).

Therefore, with dirt as the generating principle, Stallings makes demands for literacy in word and deed: reading the meanings of the manifestos is intentionally challenging, which leads to a thorough interaction with the text, and the reader immediately engages with the manifesto's direct call for (multi)literacy in order to consider the multifacetedness of the South. The call for action in the narrative is not limited to participation in resistant place-making. Implicitly, the process of reading itself is an exercise of interaction with a communicative medium in a long-form and nuanced way.

Roof states that "story systems easily produce nonbinary, nonoppositional, nonhierarchical, and even potentially nonideologically driven dynamics of telling" and imagines future variations of narrative systems without any attempts at catharsis (49). Because there is no resolution on the ground, meaning the Southern sexual dystopia is an ever-present reality, there can also be no conventional narrative resolution. This tension and its affects remain.

Conceptualizing narratives as systems can lead to a better understanding of queer narratives that focus on individual representations of guiding concepts and generating principles in terms of narrativity, sequentially reiterated in each minor manifesto. Therefore, when the readers reach a textual nodal point, they alternate between a more active mode and a more passive mode. In practice, that means they switch from deciphering the metaphor in the manifestos by themselves to reading the author's elaborations on their potential overarching meanings. To indulge in a visual metaphor myself: Stallings zooms in—on the aestheticization of politics in the minor manifestos—and zooms out—to arrive at and anticipate a political interpretation of her poetry in the following chapters. One example of this, which I have already mentioned, is the T.R.A.P. Manifesto's use of two specific narrative voices, which aesthetically reflect the collaborative solidarity between midwives and people with unwanted pregnancies. It is the generating principle of dirt that keeps the *Dirty South*'s system so dynamic and avoids a fallacy that Lyndsey Ogle warns creative place-making thinkers against:

> Creative placemaking [. . .] cannot simply be concerned with the ways in which art may open the hearts and minds of those resistant to a progressive truth. Rather it must consider how the contexts and circumstances of those thought to be "the opposition," open space to

> question the essentialist narratives that exacerbate political divides. (127)

Stallings accomplishes this mainly through the openness of her narrative structure, which not only invites variation and reiteration but may in fact need both features to adequately accommodate queer temporalities. Overall, the metaphor of dirt is the key to reading each of the minor manifestos and the sexual resistance based on Dirty South music invites others to join in a dirty-deviant rebellion against the oppression of moral authority.

A Concluding Outlook into System Variations

The Dirty South Manifesto not only formulates an overarching framework for Southern activism and art, but it also encourages literacy and sexual resistance through direct engagement and theorization as well as by cultivating new reading practices for the minor manifestos. Narrative systems are prone to variability, and *A Dirty South Manifesto* actively invites engagement on multiple levels, within and outside the text. The conceptual disconnect between the narrative and queer temporality in general, I argue, is circumvented, because Stallings opens up meta-levels of reading and of practices in place, as Judith Roof's concept of narrative systems demands. Ricoeur's narrative theory, which is based on a process of mimesis and has been further developed by Jesse Matz, can be embedded in creative place-making and entails flexible literacy. In other words, by “equipping” readers with multiple reading lenses, political imagination on the basis of place can be furthered, wherein the separation of narrativity and narration is achieved. The meta-repetitiveness of the mimetic process follows the generating principle in places but enjoys freedom of variation.

The Dirty South has been picked up as a theory by Adeerya Johnson and is practiced in Dirty South music by artists such as, I would argue, GloRilla. Johnson highlights one topic connected with sexual resistance that gets somewhat drowned out by the tone and thematic focus of Stallings's manifesto: Black girls' and women's bodily expressions of pleasure, joy, and creativity independent of their connection to sexuality such as dance, which is also one of the essential elements of hip-hop culture. Meanwhile, GloRilla's summer hit of 2022 “F.N.F. (Let's Go)” embraces exactly the dirty ratchetness Stallings calls for to counter the sexual dystopia of the South (see Mamo and GloRilla). Basing a manifesto in hip-hop culture seems even more relevant now than in 2020, as the mainstream impact of contemporary icons from the South such as Megan Thee Stallion has grown since the publication of the manifesto. In a comparative discussion of Megan Thee Stallion and the music icons “Ma” Rainey and Bessie Smith, Nikki Lane asserts that the cultural

influence of hip-hop on Black studies and feminisms is analogous to that of blues (514). It is exactly the choice of hip-hop as material that makes Stallings's manifesto a challenge to ideas of a Southern place considered "backward" and possibly illiterate, marked both by deep-seated racism and (Christian) moral authoritarianism against queer people.

By collectively employing the minor manifestos, which each represent different facets of Black Southern culture, the author also furthers readers' literacy, which produces nuanced reading practices fundamental to this new Dirty South. This multiliteracy can be reiterated endlessly. Therefore, the last sentence of the final minor manifesto is again a variation of the recurring call to action: "Be the red worm in the dirt. Be the honeysuckle on the vine. / Honeysuckle . . . Not a Honey Sucka!" (Stallings 158). With this wordplay, a twofold meaning is conveyed: Firstly, it is a final call to action not be a "sucka" for moralizing honey, not to fall for the arguments of moral authoritarianism. Secondly, we see in practice that a narrative system rejects paradigmatic conclusions by exaggerating the fact that narratives always already contain new beginnings within an ending. It is the suspended "middle" of a narrative, where non-normative sexualities can be located, because narrative endings, death, and heteronormative orgasm always imply each other. The first part of Roof's book *Come as You Are: Sexuality and Narrative* (1996) is based on this very triangulation.

The Dirty South Manifesto embraces "dirty" sexual expressions, whether "obscene," absurd, empowering, or simply cathartic. It calls on its readers, Southern or not, to radicalize their imagination. Especially in the ways the narration of the Dirty South concept invites variations, the text engages readers' utopian reinterpretations of what it could mean to be situated in the South. This gestures at the political potential it holds for queer and feminist place-making.

Notes

[1] The term "Dirty South" was coined by the rap group Goodie Mob in 1995 and was always artistic as well as political to some degree from the beginning: it stood for a new understanding of Southern cultural and socio-economic historical contexts through a Black lens. As more diverse representation of artists in terms of gender and sexuality has increased since the 1990s, the influence of the Dirty South on mainstream music has led to a broader visibility of Black Southern people's self-expression.

[2] This essay is part of my larger project on the manifesto form at the intersection of affect theory, queer-feminist politics, and narrative theory within the context of the current US-centric upsurge of the (literary) manifesto.

Notes

[3] See, for instance, Casey, Edward S., *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, U. of California P, 1997; and Cresswell, Timothy, "Place," *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, edited by Rob Kitchin and Nigel Thrift, Elsevier, 2009, pp. 169–77.

[4] This point about the embodied effects of marginalized people living in and moving through places and encountering objects, which are not suited to them, is taken from my reading of Sara Ahmed's work on orientation in *Queer Phenomenology* (2006).

[5] See *PMLA*, vol. 131, no. 1, 2016, pp. 157-92.

[6] A notable example Stallings uses is the case of the "Cocks not Glocks" campaign initiated by Jessica Jin at the University of Texas, Austin, which protested the open-carry campus gun laws in Texas by open-carrying dildos to the university campus and therefore exposing the fallacies of moral authority through obscenity and absurdity.

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Biography

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