United States could do without weddings altogether, simply registering partnerships the way they register births, voter status, automobiles, and patents; this is more or less the aim of the contemporary movement to extend legal and economic benefits to domestic partnerships or registered households. One might even expect to see long-term commitment dissociated altogether from state law, so that the decision to share living facilities, property, sexual pleasure, or child-rearing obligations with another person would be irrelevant to the governmental distribution of benefits and privileges.

Yet neither the reformist domestic partnership movement nor the more radical argument for disestablishing marriage takes seriously the need for whatever it is that weddings do: at the very least, they at once symbolize and multiply social ties, work in and with time, allow someone to be the star of a show, suggest the possibility of bodily and social transformations, and offer an elaborate series of visual icons to play with. Since the mid-1930s, the wedding industry has capitalized on these needs in order to promote an endless variety of goods and services. More recently, the national gay movement has tapped into these needs to advocate for the extension of rights and privileges to same-sex couples. Concurrently, the wedding seems to work as an emblem for the condition of belonging to constituencies *beyond* (if also sometimes constitutively connected to) the male-female couple: to proper gender, extended family, ethnic or religious constituencies, the nation, or a particular niche market. Yet, rather than producing these latter forms of belonging as homologous to couplehood—so that couplehood becomes, as Doris Sommer puts it, "the shorthand for human association"—the wedding often inadvertently plays forms of belonging against one another, so that the icons of one social configuration question the centrality of another.[5] Relatedly, some of the wedding's specifically temporal operations may actually undermine its seemingly monumental ability to reduce a variety of social matrices to mere extensions of the marital dyad.

One way to get at these possibilities is to separate the wedding, at least provisionally, from its ostensible purpose of inaugurating a marriage. For if marriage is still imaginable without a "proper" wedding—as in a common-law union or courthouse registration—a wedding is supposed to serve as the inevitable precursor to a marriage. Yet the examples above, and most of the texts this book examines, partially or completely sunder the wedding from its legal ramifications, reveling in the expressive, theatrical, and symbolic aspects of the ritual. Focusing on the wedding itself reveals possibilities that are

lost when the purpose and result of "wedding" is presumed to be marriage as domestic law defines it: a monogamous, enduring, opposite-sex dyad with biological reproduction as its ostensible raison d'être. By undoing this presumption, texts that foreground the wedding as a production return to and rework the possibilities embedded in the ritual itself, asking in what ways the kinds of weddings people have, or dream of having, or thought they had, might be indices for forms of social life made possible in one domain but impossible in another, or in one historical moment but not another—or might even be avatars for changes in what Raymond Williams calls "structures of feeling," new senses of collective being felt viscerally, in advance of their institutionalization in discourse.[6] In short, the desire for the symbolic apparatus that is the wedding and the legal apparatus that is marriage cannot be reduced to one another. It is important to at least momentarily unchain the wedding from marriage or even couplehood and to explore the dynamic between weddings and the marriages they supposedly stand for or produce.

In 1991, Su Friedrich made a film that did just that. *First Comes Love* premiered at that year's New York Lesbian and Gay Experimental Film Festival, where some audience members complained that it was merely an advertisement for the gay marriage movement.[7] Shot in shimmery black-and-white, 16-millimeter film, this twenty-two-minute montage of four Italian Catholic weddings, interrupted by textual statements about same-sex marriage, does at first glance seem to traffic in mere envy of heterosexuality rather than critique it and to promote couplehood over other forms of intimacy. In its central shot, for instance, the bride and groom are seen from high above, standing at the altar, with the white aisle runner bisecting the frame and Richard Wagner's "Bridal Chorus" as the sound track. This music fades into the sounds of Gladys Knight singing "It Could've Been Me." Here, the filmmaker seems to "fall into line with the ritual," as one reviewer asserts, aligning bride and groom, image and sound, visual splendor and emotional fulfillment in exactly the way that marriage is supposed to align two people with each other and the state.[8]

The altar scene cuts to an intertitle that reads, "If two men or two women wanted to legalize their commitment to each other, for any reason, they would be denied this privilege in the following countries." This text is followed by a three-minute-long, alphabetized list of nations from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe. In a white typeface against a black background, the intertitle creates a column in the very center of the screen, exactly matching the white aisle

runner, and then visually interrupts and replaces the wedding processional as the words stream upward and out the top of the frame. This text steals the whiteness and symmetry of the wedding to articulate what the viewer can now recognize as a new global political order. The alphabetical listing of these locales in a column aligns them along an axis other than the ones that officially conjoin nations, like geographic proximity, trade agreements, monetary systems, political theory, or religious ideology—specifically, that of monogamous heterosexual marriage. Depicting a "mass wedding" of individual countries into a world ordered by hetero-marital supremacy, *First Comes Love* is a momentary reminder that marriage is not only a relation between two people but also part of the process by which states ally with one another and create new citizens, especially through reciprocal immigration policies that naturalize "foreign" spouses.[9]

Thus Friedrich's elaborate engagement with the wedding ceremony might in fact serve a certain global sexual imperialism, promoting marital couplehood as a regime of sensation, subjectivity, and social affinity that can cut across existing registers of race, class, nation, and even sexual orientation to produce something like a spousal planet. But this possibility is exactly what the film slowly unsettles, for it actually dramatizes the wedding as a queer counterpossibility to what it has pointedly demarcated as a multinational association of hetero-supremacist countries. On the formal level, *First Comes Love* breaks down the wedding, providing opportunities for reading it as a scene in which identity and belonging can be complicated rather than simplified, and alternative affinities between people can be distinguished from rather than merged with a new marital world order.[10]

This breakdown begins with the film's opening. Over the words "First Comes Love . . . a film by Su Friedrich," children's voices chant a rhyme: "Lisa and George sittin' in a tree. K-I-S-S-I-N-G. First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes Lisa with a baby carriage." Narrating a male-female romance that ends as usual, with the woman doing all the child care, this chant is certainly a primer for compulsory heterosexuality. But the title "First Comes Love . . . " leaves the rhyme unfinished, substituting an ellipsis for the inevitable progression from kissing, to love, to marriage, to reproduction, to the asymmetrical allocation of gendered tasks. On the one hand, Friedrich certainly seems to intend the ellipsis to figure the lack of legal sanction for same-sex couplehood: for lesbian and gay partners, the title suggests, first comes love, then comes nothing. Certainly the chant that follows the title

might be filled in with new content, like "Wendy and Lisa" or "Gilbert and George." Yet the ellipsis also creates a space of possibility wherein the temporal logic of the chant might be undermined: "First Comes Love . . . " and next, or before, comes what? In other words, what is missing is not just the legal status of "marriage" but the seriality and causal logic of "then."

Rather than simply repeating the chant with a lesbian difference, though, Friedrich undermines its progressive narrative with her camera work. She shoots the weddings from the position of what one reviewer calls "part anthropologist, part kid at the candy-store window."[11] As an "anthropologist," of course, she reverses the power relations of ethnographic filmmaking by voyeuristically examining the dominant straight culture from a marginal point of view. But as a "kid," she also aims to suture the viewer into the "before," the infantilized subject position of someone who cannot enter into the wedding's symbolics or fits imperfectly into its pageant.[12] From the sound of children's voices chanting a progression they cannot yet enact, the film segues to its opening shot of two children. Later, the image of a little girl climbing rather laboriously up the church steps cuts to one of the bridesmaids ascending much more smoothly. In other scenes, Friedrich focuses on details that only someone of a child's height would see straight on or she positions the camera from about three feet off the ground. *First Comes Love,* in short, uses the child as a figure for the polymorphous desires as well as prior personal and collective histories that marriage aims to erase. The point of view of the subject left below or behind, in a position of longing and incomprehension, halts the developmental logic of the playground chant, for that "first" point of view returns again and again.

But the figure of the child is merely a psychoanalytic intervention, a form of narrative disorientation and temporal regression that has no immediate public coordinates. Perhaps the film simply suggests that lesbians and gays are like children, stupidly falling in love with a social form that requires our abjection in order to maintain itself. Or perhaps *First Comes Love* means to point out that our history is intertwined with that of juveniles insofar as both children and adult queers have a long record of being legally barred from acting on their sexual desires. Although age-of-consent laws and laws against "sodomy" are historically and structurally interrelated, however, *First Comes Love* does not explore this phenomenon; that is simply not the project of the film.[13] Instead, Friedrich's sound track, floating disjunctively over her image track, suggests psychic regression to "childhood" as a means of reanimating

lost historical moments and their corresponding kinship forms. The "juvenile" subject's displacement from the wedding, the sound track hints, is not merely a result of her emotional immaturity but of historically located institutional forces that promote married couplehood over other kinds of relationships.

With the film's sound track, Friedrich links her infantilizing camera work and images of psychological abjection to a horizon of historical and cultural displacement. The wedding footage is accompanied by a variety of bluesy songs from the 1960s and 1970s: Janis Joplin singing "Get It While You Can," Marvin Gaye's "Sexual Healing," and James Brown's "Sex Machine" over a shot of the virginally white-clad bride. Variously poignant and funny, these juxtapositions certainly interrogate the way that the wedding seems to sanctify heterosexual intercourse by erasing the individual erotic histories of the bride and groom: the songs interrupt the wedding ceremony with suggestions that the nuptial pair may have emotional and sexual ties that marriage law renders illegible, and that the ritual itself threatens to overwrite. But rather than simply celebrating a forbidden love object, these songs call forth sexual styles that monogamous gay or straight partnership cannot accommodate and that even mainstream gay culture seems to have renounced—ephemeral encounters, diffuse pleasures, flamboyant publicness, easy access to the technological mediations of pornography or sex toys. It is important, then, that several of *First Comes Love*'s songs come from the 1960s, an era whose vision of social justice was accompanied, some might even say propelled, by experiments in the forms and norms of intimacy. The songs also come from representatives of populations against whom marriage law has taken shape—straight black artists and queer artists of African and European ancestry, whose intersecting cultural history includes not only being barred from the privilege of marrying but also inventing and preserving associational forms other than monogamous nuclear families. The sound track thus expresses not only personal loss (the nuptial couple's loss of natal family, prior sexual ties, and peer culture; Friedrich's inability to marry her lover) but also the denial of kinship to whole cultures. In this way, the film implies that the wedding might work to consolidate not only heterosexual supremacy but more broadly, the hegemony of the Anglo-European nuclear family. The sound track also hints that the signs of the so-called white wedding—ivory gowns, pearls and diamonds, white flowers like orange blossoms and baby's breath, and long misty veils—encode racial meanings too, though the film

does nothing with the suggestions. Yet at the same time, Friedrich's sound track makes the wedding into a scene for a certain *social* melancholia—melancholia for effaced forms and practices of *relationality* rather than a singular love object—and the insistent return of what has been effaced.

These disavowed possibilities are actually part of the Anglo-American white wedding's history and contemporary form. For crucially, the wedding ritual predates the state's control of marriage. The history of control over marriage suggests that the residual customary and religious elements in the ceremony might provide imaginary ways out beyond the state's promotion of monogamous, enduring couplehood. Other scholars have concentrated on the continuities among these institutions of control, on the way that each succeeding institution takes over and modifies aspects of the previous one so that the meaning and function of contemporary marriage seems dependent on a synthesis of patriarchal, Christian, governmental, and capitalist aims. But I am actually interested in the *discontinuities* between these three domains—on the dissonance within the nuptial ceremony produced by what each historical moment has foregrounded as the definitive sign of a valid marriage, and on the question of whether and how these discontinuities might be worked against marriage law and toward a recalibration of social life as we know it. And importantly, the present form of the white wedding is thoroughly saturated with commodity capitalism. Though the wedding industry seems to promote heterosexuality and link romantic partnership to material plenty, it also partakes in capitalism's unmaking of the nuclear family, a process in which shopping, consuming, and advertising actually create constituencies that compete with family ties.[14] For these reasons, the wedding might have a more utopian or emancipatory place in theorizing about social change than marriage possibly could.

Something Old: On History

Why does the white wedding make the couple, especially the bride, look sacred and untouchable even as it puts them on an often embarrassing regulatory display? Why does it englobe the couple in mystique, and yet also seem to make them run a gauntlet of spectators and pass a series of tests? Why does the wedding seem to flaunt the sanctity of couplehood and yet also display competing social connections? Answers to some of these questions emerge from recent ethnographies of twentieth-century "Western-style" wed-

dings in Asian countries, which emphasize the wedding's function of coordinating Anglo-American and Asian notions of subjectivity and social embeddedness, a couple's "Western" romantic involvement with one another and their "Eastern" status as emblems for a broader set of communal obligations. For instance, the anthropologist Walter Edwards argues that the Japanese "new style," commercialized white wedding does not stress the mystery and privacy of the couple per se. Instead, when Japanese wedding planners appropriate the stylized, abstracted, and detachable parts of the commercialized Anglo-American wedding, they enhance the Japanese ideal of every activity and pose as a gestalt, a form detached from other activities, and therefore complete in and of itself.[15] At the same time, these weddings suggest the incompleteness of the individual, interrelatedness of human beings, and necessity of social respectability. While bodily gestures and actions are detached and folded inward, in other words, subjectivity and couplehood are folded outward and merged with a larger order. This paradox need not depend on an opposition between East and West, though: one can see in *First Comes Love*'s movement between spectacle and candid camera, between shimmery long shots and close-ups of rear ends, yawns, and other unsanctioned moments, that the Western-style wedding itself coordinates the ideal of an inviolable inward subjectivity with that of an ongoing outward responsiveness to the demands of an audience, the production of a private zone for the couple with the establishment of public authority over marriage.

Anthropologists have also noted the ways that Asian weddings, particularly Western-style ones, combine commercialized icons of "modernity" and those of invented national or local traditions, with the bride's body as the scene for these mediations. For example, Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni describes the contemporary urban Japanese wedding as a production of modern "Japaneseness," and Laurel Kendall calls its counterpart in Korea a "rite of modernization."[16] Yet oddly, in these and other analyses, "kinship" itself seems to remain beyond cultural change. Even when anthropologists use the wedding to capture the way that a given social group negotiates broad cultural continuities and discontinuities, they often treat the ritual as a relatively stable and straightforward index for the small-scale organization of humans through marriage and reproduction: each role in the wedding is presumed to express an ongoing, structurally significant relationship, as though the ritual's end product were always the same.[17] But no wedding works as such a transparent window onto the social structure. At the very least, even in the most ordinary

wedding, ephemeral identities and affinities are suddenly and momentarily visible: In the Anglo-American wedding these include the maid of honor, bridesmaid, flower girl, best man, usher, secular officiant, and so on. For most couples, these "extras" have no ongoing role or legal status beyond the ceremony; their functions do not carry into the future even to the same extent as other extralegal ties such as godparenthood or ritualized blood brotherhood. But they do provide glimpses of older models whereby the couple was both more formally supervised and enmeshed in larger kin and peer groups, and of possible futures in which dyadic partnership might be one unremarkable social form among many. In fact, as the disjunction between sound track and image track in Friedrich's film suggests, the wedding actually vacillates between restrictive and expansive visions of the social, between elevating the couple and displaying alongside them the very things that compete with couplehood—ties with extended kin, social and religious movements, friends.

This dynamic is a result of specific changes in the function and meaning of Anglo-American marriage: once a means of subordinating a couple's relationship to a larger social framework, marriage has become more and more a means of separating a couple from broader ties and obligations.[18] The wedding's contradictory restrictive and expansive, privacy- and publicity-making qualities, then, condense a millennium-long history of institutional and popular struggle for control over marriage in Western Europe and North America. To sketch this history simply and schematically, marriage has been regulated—and weddings officiated—by an overlapping sequence of institutions. Before the Christianization of Europe, fathers, families, and community customs regulated marriage, to be followed by priests and the church, then by magistrates and civil law, now inflected by a commercial industry, with the couple's authority over the formation of their own marriage waxing and waning alongside these institutions. Prior to the eleventh century, parents, and to a lesser extent the local lay community, supervised the courtship and betrothal process; the nuptial ritual involved friends as well. Shortly after the first millennium began, the Roman Catholic Church began to take control of marriage, first overriding parental prerogative by sanctioning the couple's authority to marry themselves and then installing the priest as the crucial officiant; the number of participants necessary to validate a wedding narrowed to the couple and perhaps a handful of others. During the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, the English state usurped this control, though only its American colonies actually exercised total civic power over

marriage. Protestant colonists in New England kept to small weddings, but widened the apparatus of supervision over betrothal and remanded this supervision to the provincial government. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth-century United States, state and eventually federal governments renewed their supervisory role over betrothal and marriage, and the ceremony expanded to include large numbers of lay witnesses.

Yet the wedding form did not necessarily change in complete isomorphic response to these shifts in authority. At any given historical moment, that is, the ritual itself contained residual elements that resisted or complicated the dominant institutional meanings and functions of marriage. This is partly what makes it so difficult to frame even the Western wedding as an object of analysis, for the defining elements and actors differ across time. The formula for a "proper," modern, Western-style wedding, even a secular one, is familiar: a special costume for the bride that distinguishes her from both her groom and attendants, a gathering of witnesses, a processional, some words from an officiant, an expression of consent spoken by the bride and groom, a joining of hands and/or exchange of rings, a kiss, a recessional, a reception, the couple's departure, and the giving of gifts. But with the possible exception of the couple's consent (and then only under certain conditions), no one of these things by itself makes a legal marriage, let alone a wedding. And several elements have historically specific, incommensurate meanings.

For instance, the modern bridal costume, processional, giving away of the bride, and postnuptial departure suggest the bride's movement from childhood to a kind of demi-adulthood, signaled by her transition from one guardian family to another and facilitated by other people as participants rather than mere spectators. This aspect of the wedding—the community's active role in "trafficking" a relatively passive bride from one place to another—is among the ritual's most archaic set of symbols.[19] To take a specific example from the West, the ancient Greek wedding focused on the bride's change in locale and status. According to historian John Boswell, it included sacrifices to Zeus and Hera, a ritual cleansing for the woman about to be married, and a banquet at her father's home. The groom and his best friend then transported the veiled bride, followed by chanting guests, to her new home, where she was brought to her bridal chamber and the marriage was consummated to the tune of attendants singing an epithalamium.[20] Preserving this sonic element, the oldest European popular ceremonies that followed always included public noisemaking to attract the community's attention to the marriage.[21] Early