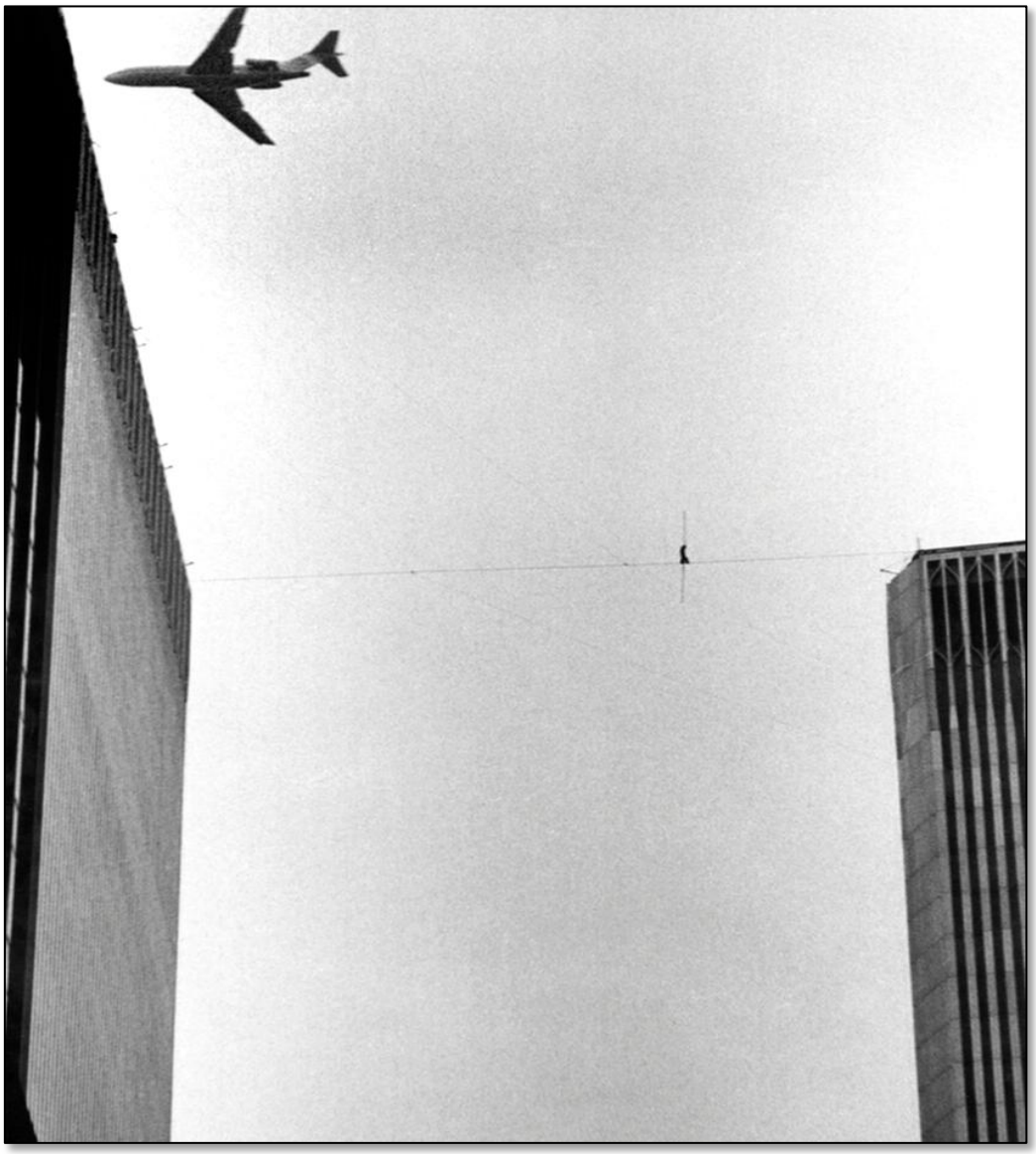
VIRTUAL FRONTIERS AND THE TECHNOLOGICAL STATE

CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN NARRATIVES IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT



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ABSTRACT

Virtual Frontiers and the Technological State:
Contemporary American Narratives in a Global Context

This thesis analyses a series of threshold states located within contemporary culture. It investigates the effects of technology on spatial relations and human conditions in recent centuries, with a specific interest in the rise of virtual phenomena and the ongoing process of virtualisation. Key to the discussion is measuring the extent to which America and its narratives have influenced the virtual layer attached to contemporary global technological culture. Prevalent within this framework is the idea of the frontier as an idealised outpost, a lingering threshold state that is scrutinised in terms of its metaphoric power and socio-historical relevance. The research examines the points of interaction between the frontier, the virtual, and recent technology, as well as the areas in which technology has been produced, distributed, and consumed, as a means of building on 'virtual frontiers' and the 'technological state' as original critical concepts.

Chapter one, from a socio-cultural and historical perspective, develops the idea of California as the location where the frontier spirit dispersed, transferring to an extent from land to body. Rich in posthuman ambience, the state functions as a hub from which to negotiate the position of the body in relation to the frontier: to look at the body as a frontier in itself, its virtualisation, and the now perennial dialectic between the positive and negative effects of technology on human/non-human interactivity.

From the ashes of the 1960s, pockets of urban youth living in America's inner cities gave birth to a subculture that is now globally recognised as Hip Hop. Despite Hip Hop always being a potent reflective surface, chapter two assesses its development and continuing capacity as a virtual and technological form of expression. In the decades between Malcolm X's assassination and the election of President Obama, how has Hip Hop changed as a virtual arena and mode of resistance, as it has simultaneously been incorporated into the American mainstream? Indeed, as a cultural object and virtual space with the potential to carry evocative messages across thresholds, did Hip Hop even survive this transition? And what were the ramifications of its transformation?

The third chapter examines the shadows emanating from the terrorist attacks on the US in 2001. The narratives from 9/11 are considered while investigating a diverse selection of transnational texts that touch on the subject, including works from Don DeLillo, Amy Waldman, Martin Amis, and Frédéric Beigbeder. Also considered is the day's social and historical significance, and its power as a virtual event. More specifically, the impact on time, perception, and narrative structure is observed, each element appearing in the shadows that stretch out from the decades before and beyond the events of that clear blue September morning.

Through characters in recent fiction by William Gibson and Hari Kunzru, the final chapter scans American consumption and the representations projected out from its brands and advertising. Within technological states now transmitted globally, the chapter reflects on the consequences of consumer culture as we venture further into the virtual and its realities, drawn through what Jean Baudrillard calls an irreconcilable conflict between 'total integration' and the 'dual form'.

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To the family…

For those who made it.

The rest, love, always.

Cover photograph taken by Vic Deluca (7th August 1974, Rex Images, Rex USA ©)

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Virtual Frontiers

> The first frontier was the water's edge…Our own births mirror that first crossing between the elements…The image of Armstrong taking his first moonwalk echoes the first movements of life on earth. In our deepest natures we are frontier-crossing beings.[1]
> Salman Rushdie, 'Step Across This Line' (2002)

> We live amid surfaces, and the true art of life is to skate well on them.[2]
> Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Experience' (1844)

In the following chapters I investigate a series of contemporary narratives emanating from the United States, and do so from a global perspective. Of particular interest is the effect of technologies that appear alongside and within these narratives, with close attention given to how technology is interacted with, implemented, and represented. Also key to the discussion is an analysis of the extent to which America and its narratives have infiltrated and influenced the shape of what can broadly be described as an interconnected and still-forming global technological culture.

My primary consideration is the critical relationship between what I seek to define as 'virtual frontiers' and the 'technological state'. The first part of the introduction fixes the chronological and geographic dimensions of the discourse, explaining what is included with regard to content and framework. I then move on to pinpointing the relevance of 'virtual frontiers' as a critical term: what is meant by the virtual, the frontier, and their relation to the 'technological state'. While what I am referring to as technology within the thesis is clarified here in the introduction, the full meaning of 'technological state' is hinted at throughout but remains an undertone. However, as a critical mirror to this introduction, what is meant by the 'technological state' and its bearing on existence through the first decades of the twenty-first century is made explicit after the four main chapters in the project's conclusion.

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[1] Salman Rushdie. 'Step Across This Line'. 2002. *Step Across This Line*. London. 2002. pp. 407-8.
[2] Ralph Waldo Emerson. 'Experience'. 1844. *Selected Essays*. London. 1982. p. 294.

Technology and State

Due to the nature of the subjects put up for discussion, it can be argued that the chronological reach of the study is, unavoidably, open-ended, that our associations with technology are as old as civilisation. Nevertheless, the time in which the majority of this thesis is set is fixed quite securely between the mid-nineteenth century and the twenty-first century moment: the period marked by the ascension of machine-powered technology. What I am classifying as contemporary American narratives, that is the texts and narratives found within the four chapters to follow, can be located within this timeframe. The reasons for the mid-nineteenth century being considered an appropriate framing device for the 'contemporary' are complex, and described in more detail below. But before addressing the epoch outlined, it should be noted a similar problem in terms of open-endedness is faced when attempting to lock in the project's geographic parameters. While the focus here is very much on American culture and cultural objects from the period, the porous nature of the country in terms of migration and settlement, as well as its relatively brief yet rich modern history, dictate that some time and space be given over to other influences that have shaped the country, influences which exist beyond its recognised geographic borders.

Principally the chosen narratives are analysed in a global rather than strictly national context for these reasons: in recognition of the transnational connection of historical events, as well as the further destabilisation of traditional borders by more recent technological developments. This perspective also accurately reflects my own position as a British writer analysing the influence of American culture from an external viewpoint. The following cluster of seemingly disparate political and socio-economic historical moments function as an example of this type of interconnectedness between global events, and act as an appropriate entry point to the era in question. In 1776, as Adam Smith theorised 'the invisible hand' (or unconscious policing of free-market relations) in *Wealth of Nations*, Thomas Jefferson and delegates from the Thirteen Colonies were adopting the United States

Declaration of Independence.[3] Back across the Atlantic, several decades into the development of the new nation, by 1834 the passing of the Poor Law Amendment in England had allowed for the introduction of the first fully 'competitive labor market'.[4] The introduction of a competitive labour market, the last of the markets to be organised under the new industrial system after money and land, brought about 'what is commonly regarded as the starting point of modern capitalism'.[5] Writing in 1944, Karl Polanyi saw this shift as the moment of arrival in English society of what he describes as 'fictitious commodities'.[6] In the commodification of human activity, with land subdivided from nature and the supply of money and credit shaped by governmental policies, Polanyi's proposition is that this is the stage when virtual (or in the Marxian sense reified) objects appear on the market for the first time, and in great number.

Though from an English purview, this transition out of the feudal and mercantile into a new phase of commodification is also applicable and vital to understanding the intense mobilisation of predominantly European migrants to the New World. The opportunity for exploration of an already populated land recalibrated as a blank surface made the American frontier and its expansion a ripe testing ground for the political and economic aspects of industrial capitalism and its closely-aligned technologies. An environment filled with utopian fantasy, as Marjorie Hope Nicolson explains, the first waves to settle and experience this new diverse land were 'like the imaginary cosmic voyagers who, from Lucian to writers of modern science-fiction, have travelled to the moon or planets to find worlds that puzzle, amaze, astound, enthrall'.[7] In more pragmatic material terms, the point here is that despite its basis in the rejection of European systems of governance, the founding and development of the United States of America is inextricably linked into the beginnings of free-market capitalism and the technologies of the Industrial Revolution.

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[3] Adam Smith. *Wealth of Nations: A Selected Edition*. 1776. Oxford. 2008. p. 292.
[4] Karl Polanyi. *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. 1944. Cambridge, Mass. 2001. p. 82.
[5] Ibid. pp. 82-4.
[6] Ibid. p. 76.
[7] Marjorie Hope Nicholson. *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite*. Ithaca. 1959. p. 32.

Whether it is posited as a trajectory that stretches from the first waves of modern capitalism to the here and now, or as an advance through modernity and postmodernity to the fragmented cultural fields and theoretical disciplines of the present day, it is these atmospherics that surround the core of the thesis, leading into the centuries covered by the research and its central themes. And yet, as the first of the two epigraphs above indicates, there are also influential strands within the discourse pertaining to thresholds and the development of human perception that stretch out further than the confines of recent centuries. Salman Rushdie's comments on the connection between the frontier and human perception are taken from 'Step Across This Line', a speech delivered at Yale University in early 2002 as part of The Tanner Lectures on Human Values. As an author preoccupied with human movement and the often turbulent transitions between East and West (and vice versa), the fact that Rushdie's meditation on the significance of the frontier should be presented in the chaotic months between the fall of the World Trade Center and the 2003 invasion of Iraq seems both fitting and poignant.

Demarcating the early stages of the twenty-first century as a 'frontier time', one of the great 'hinge periods' in human history, Rushdie also states that the 'frontier is an elusive line, visible and invisible, physical and metaphorical, amoral and moral'.[8] Though the elevation of one's own time suggests an egotistical turn in Rushdie's thinking, from a technological standpoint the statement on the formative years of the twenty-first century as a hinge period in human history is significant. As is the implication that various dialectical propositions remain constant, and have done through the adjustments made to human experience during many successive historical and technological phases. Like Rushdie, in the adoption of the frontier as a keynote for scrutinising the fluctuation between visible and invisible, physical and metaphysical, etc., I would say expansion and contraction, and security and terror are crucial additions to any contemporary series of dialogical examinations. Within these oscillations, and in the now questionable movements and unclear distinctions between

[8] Rushdie. 'Step Across This Line'. pp. 442, 411.

subject and object, it is possible to develop a dynamic critique of America and the narratives it has been influential in producing.

So, to begin to build an understanding of 'virtual frontiers' as a critical concept, it makes sense to first elucidate how this elusive line has been imagined. What perspectives, for example, have appeared in the environments either side of it? Who or what controls access to and traversal of these spaces? What role does technology play in this configuration? And how does this tie in with the economic and political power structures at work since the middle of the nineteenth century? I should qualify here that this thesis is not a strong Marxist/Leftist critique, even though it does raise and already has raised the issue of capital distribution. It is better perceived as an account of America and some of its narratives over the course of two centuries, the US history and culture dealt with reflecting westward movement and the restructuring of territories as the American frontier is imagined and crossed, and more importantly what happened after its limits were reached. It is also something more abstract: an appraisal of areas of the recent past, present, and near-future from a technological perspective.

'Technological' as a term is used interchangeably throughout, and necessarily so as technology flows in and out of the converging political and socio-economic spheres. Furthermore, from the many theoretical accounts of technology written in recent decades, this research takes on certain aspects of Martin Heidegger's highly influential essay 'The Question Concerning Technology' (1954). Heidegger's technological concerns were published in the aftermath of WWII, and stand in the middle of the contemporary period being discussed. Though Heidegger's account has been supported and renounced by a range of scholars in the years since publication, there are strands within the essay that were relevant prior to 1954, and remain so in our current century.[9] What Heidegger's philosophical perspective shares with the thesis is a desire to look into technology, to catch sight of 'what

[9] Heidegger's alleged early social and political affiliations with the Nazi party have been strongly criticised and his work discredited, by Jürgen Habermas and others. See Jürgen Habermas. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. 1985. Cambridge. 1987; and Richard Wolin (Ed.). *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*. Cambridge, Mass. 1993. pp. 186-300.

comes to presence in technology, instead of merely staring at the technological'.[10] Heidegger asserts that to understand technology one must look at its 'essence' rather than through purely technical modes of thought; that it benefits to think of technology as 'a mode of revealing' (*CT* 319). Humanity, or as Heidegger refers to it 'man', is 'challenged forth into revealing' in the 'technological age' (*CT* 326). But the way that it reveals is problematic. Nature and human beings are organised, ordered, turned into resources, what Heidegger refers to as a form of 'revealing through which the actual everywhere, more or less distinctly, becomes standing-reserve' (*CT* 329). In the transformation into standing-reserve our perspective is altered, so that everything in nature, including human beings, is viewed as merely another resource in a series of resources to be manipulated.

Mindful that navigation of this technological situation is precarious, the research seeks to look past the surface of technology while maintaining a free relation to the technological perspective, and to do so without romanticising nature or reacting negatively to technological progress during this process. Albert Borgmann's *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life* (1984) builds on Heidegger's analysis, his comparison of 'focal things' and 'devices' helping to clarify this free relation.[11] Borgmann contests the common view of technological progress as a 'more or less gradual and straightforward succession of lesser by better implements', stating that the underlying promise of the modern technological device – to free us from misery and toil – is false.[12] To escape the device paradigm and counter this imbalance, Borgmann suggests what is required is a renewed appreciation for focal things. For example, fast food is now abundantly available because of advances in (farming, preservation, transportation) technology. Though it may provide convenience and the same sustenance as a family meal, the fast food and the commercial environment in which it is served do not nourish or function as a social or experiential focal point in the same way. So it can be said that technology in this study is not interested in the practicalities of on-

[10] Martin Heidegger. 'The Question Concerning Technology'. 1954. *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings, 1927 to 1964*. London. 1978. pp. 311-41. Henceforth cited as *CT*.
[11] Albert Borgmann. *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry*. Chicago. 1984. pp. 40-210.
[12] Ibid. p. 41.

the-ground technologies (say, how the farming, preservation, and transportation technologies in fast food function). Instead it takes a heuristic approach, more concerned, as Philip Brey explains, with 'philosophical questions concerning the nature of technology, and the impact of technology on things of value: the human psyche, society, culture, and the environment'.[13] The conscious choice has been made, then, to make this technological and cultural rather than overtly political or economic, out of a wish to emphasise technology's infiltration and position of strength within these spheres. I am aware, of course, that the prioritising of the technological over that of full-blown politico-economic critique of the spread of capital in the chosen timeframe can also be considered a political gesture in its own right.

Through imbrication there is also a recurring play between the idea of narrative and narrativisation within the thesis. Narrative is applicable to all expressive culture, hence textual examples are taken from film, music and literature; narrativisation alludes more to the intersection of actual and virtual in the interpretation of decisions and actions taken by nation or state apparatus. Accepting that twenty-first century global flows and exchanges are more complex than base and superstructure, an alternative channel of communication is opened between frontier, narrative, and technology. There is also a virtual shadow to this arrangement: the marriage of nation, state, and capital that Benedict Anderson describes in *Imagined Communities* (1983) as the 'unified apparatus of power'.[14] A marriage which Kojin Karatani calls the 'capitalist nation-state', a triadic force has built up around human existence, all three vertices feeding into each other and mutually protective.[15] This thesis considers the unequal distribution of power and wealth within this arrangement, a lop-sidedness that hovers around the textual analysis in each chapter before fully manifesting in the latter stages of the thesis when discussing 9/11 and the effects of technological consumption.

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[13] Philip Brey. 'Philosophy of Technology Meets Social Constructivism: A Shopper's Guide'. *Techné: Journal for the Society of Philosophy and Technology*. Spring-Summer 1997. p. 1.
[14] Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London. 1983. p. 56.
[15] Kojin Karatani. *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx*. Cambridge, Mass. 2003. pp. 14-5.

The highlighting of the unequal distribution of power within such an apparatus brings issues of race and gender to the fore. And it should be emphasised that race and gender are fundamental to any assessment of American narratives, the frontier, and associated technological perspectives. Nevertheless, they are not the differential equations on which this thesis rests. This is not due to teleological erasure, but rather in recognition of them as ever-present issues in any discussion of artificial/virtual social constructions and power structures that seek to produce and profit from them. If the point of focus is weighted towards either, then it would be to race, as its lexicographic span encompasses motion, competition, and all humankind. Though biological specifics are by no means the main focus, an observation from Julian Huxley in *Biology of the Human Race* (1937) is instructive: inclusive of gender, race, *and* class, the larger concern here is as much for 'interaction between organism and organism' as it is 'organism and environment', an interplay with human values and technological events that range from facultative to obligate.[16]

Indeed, representations of race and to an extent gender are, for example, pivotal to the analysis of Hip Hop and the culture surrounding it in the second chapter. To give some idea of the constraints placed on the project by time and space, even this discussion of musical genre as virtual frontier is but a single filament in a much longer African American (and more generally migrant) engagement with technology and the US. Although it appears in flourishes – in the first chapter as a mirror of the westward movement of the American margin, etc. – a full and in-depth study of the experience from the other side of the virtual frontier, be that African, Mexican, Japanese, or other, would warrant another thesis in its own right. As would, say, a thorough review of the lives and living conditions of the women brave enough to face the harsh realities of life on the American frontier itself.[17]

The case studies included, then, are selective rather than exhaustive, the criteria for selection being that they all deal at some level – imaginatively, ideologically, technologically

[16] Julian Huxley and H.G. Wells. *Biology of the Human Race*. London. 1937. pp. 1-2.
[17] See Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith. *Pioneer Women: The Lives of Women on the Frontier*. Oklahoma. 1996; for experience of women on the frontier through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Sandra L. Myres. *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience, 1800-1915*. Albuquerque. 1982.

– with America and existence within its physical and virtual spaces. Though taken from different generations, the texts chosen centre on protagonists engaged in repeated attempts to cross thresholds as they steer a course through American and American-influenced environments, environments populated by what is real and what is manufactured. The critical incentive here is to pinpoint the crossing of the boundaries set up between signs and things, between subject and technological object, between reality and its mediation. What is questioned is the 'how and why' in the ordering of what is present and what is absent, this particular set of texts bringing out the peculiar (often overlooked and changing) character of technological reality. For this reason I have intentionally not attached all of the texts looked at to a particular era or critical movement. For example, in the first chapter F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) is cited as a contemplation of technological identity, growing addictions, and the virtualisation of the American margin. By looking at *The Great Gatsby* in this way it is positioned as a text that illuminates the conflict in the creation of virtual and actual American selves within its period, rather than being a mere regurgitation of its obvious position on a well-trodden path towards a canonical definition of American modernism. Similarly, in the second chapter Hip Hop as an American cultural form takes centre stage. As the first musical genre to make electronic equipment and electronic media into an instrument, it is not only interpreted through the influence of the music produced but also as a political, technological, and virtual, platform.

If a dissonant tone is sensed in the texts and case studies chosen, it is because they are hung together for this very reason. A different group of texts in the same subject area could have been chosen but would not have achieved the desired effect. For instance, a similar argument could have been moulded around the works of William Burroughs, Kurt Vonnegut, and Thomas Pynchon. Yet this would have limited the timeframe to the last fifty years, consisted only of literary material, and had a strong emphasis on the postmodern and the American interior. Alternatively, a single director study of the films of David Cronenberg would also have been enlightening. As a Canadian filmmaker working in a US-dominated global market, Cronenberg shares the viewpoint of the outsider looking in on American

culture, in a directorial career which has consistently embraced the questions and fears to arise from the intertwining of technological commodity and human subject. But again, the discussion is not solely based in the present, but seeks to juxtapose the conflicting signals emanating from a series of undulating waves of technological innovation that build towards the global technological culture we see in Cronenberg's films and experience in the contemporary moment.

It should also be noted that many of the texts are from the perspective of the Western male. Or at least this may seem to be the case. While there are texts and themes from non-White, non-male perspectives, the critical decision to focus on representations from the hegemonic core was taken as a means of highlighting the complications that arise when such narratives are placed in a global and circuitous framework. The point of interest is not to easily pick away at where they conform to cultural hegemony or globalising agendas, but to reflect on the virtual dimensions and residual narratives that appear when the texts are deregulated, the rays of reality projected back out from them illuminating what Heidegger classified as the 'essence' of contemporary technology, its states, and its virtual frontiers.

The Virtual and Virtualisation

I want to briefly break here to elucidate what is meant by virtual when referring to 'virtual frontiers'. The separation of virtual from frontier is somewhat problematic as it nullifies the level of abrasion produced when the two words are used in conjunction. As an oxymoron akin to 'free market', 'holy war', or its close relation 'virtual reality', the vitality of 'virtual frontiers' as a term is born out of its contradictory qualities and the paradoxical space created around it. The frontier brings to mind centuries of human migration and its limits, the occupation of land, and the marking out of physical borders: the virtual stands against it as an expansive non-material presence. Much of the thesis is fuelled by the questions and possibilities that arise within this paradox, the chosen texts further illuminating the clash between material and non-material perspectives. With the other key term for the thesis being

the more pessimistic 'technological state', an appropriate first step into a more precise delineation would be to clarify that for the purposes of this discussion the virtual has certain depths and complexities that stretch beyond its use as a buzzword within popular culture, and the word's association with technological developments, systems, and products of recent decades.

John Wood notes that the Latin root word for 'virtue' and 'virtual' is *virtus*, a predominantly masculine term combining 'the semantic idea of "truth" with the ethical idea of "worth"', used to express an attained level of public civility, respectability, and social status.[18] Brought further into the English language by the old French word *virtu*, we arrive at what we now deem to be virtue, a trait or type of behaviour in a person or group that is chaste, highly ethical, or morally good. Stemming much later but from the same etymological roots we have the Medieval Latin word *virtualis*, which is closer to the more morally obsolete contemporary notion of the virtual. First and foremost *virtualis*, or the virtual, describes something that is 'in effect' but which is not in reality or its entirety, something that is almost but never quite absolute. What they share is intangibility, something not totally quantifiable in material terms.

To borrow from the modern French usage of *virtuel*, be it human or technological the semantic interchange between virtue and virtual is cemented in its measuring of potential, to which you could also add hope. Yet, despite these optimistic overtones, where the moral virtue of a particular individual or social structure can be agreed upon, it may not ever necessarily be unanimous; virtual realities created from technology are invariably infused with the good or bad traits, behaviours and proclivities of those who interact with or participate within them. For better or worse the values placed on such potentialities are of course gauged in the realm of perception. The importance of perception and its relation to the virtual cannot be underestimated, especially the ways in which perception is made tangible and then prismatically dispersed and manipulated.

What I am expressing here is that there are a series of historically and philosophically deep-rooted exchanges and reversals between the material and virtual (the tangible and

[18] John Wood. *The Virtual Embodied: Presence, Practice, Technology*. London. 1998. p. 4.

intangible) that are mediated by human perception. While these are pertinent to the current technological era, their origins can be traced back much further. To summarise using Karatani's reading of Immanuel Kant's *Dreams of a Visionary* (1766), the idiosyncratic traversal between subjective and objective viewpoints in the reflective approach, indeed also in the 'critique of reflection', highlights a philosophical tendency towards 'optical delusion'.[19] This is what I deem to be the process of 'virtualisation'. In Adolf Wuttke's overview of Christian ethics, for example, the Aristotelian conception of friendship is linked to pleasure, not seeing it as a duty but 'rather as a virtualisation of the striving after happiness'.[20] So virtualisation can also provide an intangible concept with a virtual or material existence. To give a more solid example, faith in many religions is expressed through prayer, which can be viewed as the virtualising of a perceived communication between subject and God, a church or religious building being another material manifestation or virtualisation of this faith.

Tied to this impression of virtualisation is the more recent equally valid technological understanding of it as the conversion of something material (be it reality or object) into a simulation or digitised form. Without inferring a direct correlation between the two, the rise of the simulation and proliferation of digitised virtuality has mirrored the deflation and fragmentation of previous Aristotelian and Christian ethics as virtual has overtaken virtue in terms of everyday experience. The strong links between religious faith, frontier crossing, and technology recur frequently and are cultivated as the thesis progresses. So too the similarities between religion and the global spread of capital, or rather as Karatani notes the concept of 'money as substance' as an 'illusion'.[21] However, despite any perceived fluctuation in their degree of influence, what virtue and virtual or the process of virtualisation are underpinned by is projection. Virtualisation does not just happen. It requires something to be projected onto or through another subject or object in order to become 'real'.

As will become apparent, these points of exchange can take many forms, including but not exclusive to the mind and body, prayer books and political parties, the V.R. headset, the

[19] Karatani. *Transcritique*. pp. 1-47.
[20] Adolf Wuttke. *Christian Ethics Volume 1: History of Ethics*. 1862. New York. 1873. p. 111.
[21] Karatani. *Transcritique*. p. 6.

MP3 player, and technology that allows entry into the imaginary spaces behind the screen that are now commonly referred to as cyberspace. As Thomas Foster puts it, when defining what is meant by virtuality as it oscillates between the concreteness of computer interface technologies and the philosophical discourse that emanates from it, these 'points of interimplication' and the system of 'feedback' created 'between the virtual and the material are necessary for virtual experiences to function critically'.[22] In other words, one is unavoidably given more definition by comparison with what it opposes. To give a very brief example, to stand virtual reality only in opposition to material reality becomes highly problematic, because they bleed into one another and are in many ways inseparable; in the current technological climate virtual reality is still at its most potent as metaphor or interconnecting transparent overlay, what is referred to in the third chapter as a second nature. The virtual also brings with it the fantasy of a world without imperfection. When the airbrushing of human imperfection dissolves back into the material world, the effects become highly noticeable within popular culture and its aspirations. It is here that we begin to go beyond just the definition of virtual/virtualisation, and venture into more complex issues like the hollowing out of cultural forms.

At this point it feels appropriate to introduce theorist Jean Baudrillard's position as main interlocutor in relation to these complex issues, and explain his influence on the analysis of the virtual throughout the thesis. In the last four decades of his life Baudrillard concentrated on the prevalence of the sign in modern technological societies, his theoretical work tracing the ubiquity and mastery of scientific and computerised (DNA, binary, digital) code and its influence on the reproduction of the object. The relation of code to reproduction is vital to Baudrillard and the thesis, as it brings into question the measuring of the distance and difference now, if there is any, between an original/natural object and its copy. This measurement is not only relevant to the consumable object, but also to the interpretation of and differentiation between actual and virtual reality. The credibility of the original/natural object is challenged in the move from production into an age of simulation in the

[22] Thomas Foster. 'Virtuality'. *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*. London. 2009. p. 318.

contemporary period considered. Be it the entertainment industry or systems of governance, reproduction and artificiality seep into all areas of the social fabric.

Baudrillard takes an extreme theoretical position to project the possibility of existence reproduced within a closed system. This can easily be misinterpreted as a fixed position rather than as a means of venturing into the many virtual layers at work in modern technological societies: an exaggeration meant to illuminate the claustrophobic and implosive potentialities such a system can create. As we see though, especially in chapter three, the predictability and interchangeable qualities of such a system can still be ruptured, can still be knocked off-kilter. What then becomes crucial is observing the responses, reparations, and amendments to the system that occur after such events have taken place. Baudrillard's interpretation of consumer society also features in the discourse: that alongside its promotion and abundance, within the same system stands a virtual layer that critiques and parodies consumption, with both aspects feeding off each other and aiding its continuation. For Baudrillard, if there is still such a thing as dialectic between subject and object, then it is dominated by the object, the subject trapped in a world of virtuality and simulation where reproduction has gazumped production as the force around which technologically-advanced societies are organised.[23]

The question over how far we have moved into a stage where technology directs capital, and simulation has replaced production, remains open. As do the effects of the virtualisation of consumer goods on the depth of our perception and where this leaves us in terms of how we interpret identity, ownership and worth. If simulation dominates the social, political, and economic spheres, is technology capable of instigating the type of historical junctures once caused by social uprising? If the collapse of these spheres into the circuitry of simulation is so extensive then are such things still possible, or are the adventures into virtual territories and the new ways in which they are projected an indication of the gradual disappearance of material reality and so too opposition? Their importance escalating as we move into the

[23] See Jean Baudrillard. *The System of Objects*. 1968. London. 2005; and *Simulacra and Simulation*. 1981. Michigan. 2004.

latter stages of the thesis, these are the questions raised as we reach for a better understanding of the existing global conditions in twenty-first century technological societies.

Frontiers

To reconfigure what John Mack Faragher states in his rereading of Frederick Jackson Turner's influential essay *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (1893), working within the 'loose regional boundaries of today's West proves as problematic as the 'contingency of the term West itself'.[24] Here, reference to America's west coast as a geographic region will be clearly stated, with the artefacts and situations appearing from an arrangement of nations tied together historically, socially, by politics and economics, termed the West or Western culture. The tacit attention in this thesis is not so much on the West as fact as its validity as a twentieth-century American invention inherited from Europe and spread globally. Traditional forms of national identity are in fact destabilised in favour of a commentary on US-infused transnational intersubjectivity. Part observation, part interrogation of the contradictions inherent within such a system, the project endeavours to show the potential of the technological object. By potential I mean the capacity of the technological object to ebb and flow, between emancipation and transcendence on the one hand, entrapment, anxiety and sublime terror on the other, the verdict arrived at very much dependant on experience and where each reader positions themselves on their own particular utopian-dystopian axis.

By just naming 'the West', a space or presence appears that remains prior to or beyond it. Hence the decision to approach the critical material from a global perspective, 'the West' remaining loaded with the suggestion that outside a network of privileged nations there is something 'other than' that is excluded from – put in opposition with – its amorphous entanglement of historical, political, mythic, ethnic, economic, geographic and social strata. To cite an example pertinent to the frontier, Victor Turner, in a career-long interrogation of human journeying through liminal spaces and ritual states, notes that the 'Indian

[24] John Mack Faragher. *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner: The Significance of the Frontier in American History and Other Essays*. New York. 1994. p. 238.

acculturation story was part of the American dream, the expansion of the frontier, the conquest of the wilderness, and the Americanisation of immigrants'.[25] In the mistreatment of the Native American population – painted as savage, another natural object on a wild landscape that needed to be tamed – new migrants were shown in totem what decisions and performances had to be made to not be outcast from the newly calibrated American surface. A focal point in the discussion of 9/11 in chapter three, the influence of American preoccupations and vernacular during this Western development on entities bound to the United States is what Samuel P. Huntington refers to in his cultural partitioning of civilisation(s) as 'an extraordinarily complex network of formal and informal institutional ties'.[26] Despite Huntington's theory acknowledging a collection of societies enmeshed in a system driven by the production of global capital and absorption of US cultural imperialism and political policy, its warning of an imminent shift from ideological to cultural attacks on that system accretes a distinct type of paranoid American thinking, reifies the West, and confirms its position at the apex of a perceived global hierarchy. East set against West, human against machine, the clash of genders, civilisations or other, this study has no interest in bluntly reinforcing or debunking such monolithic centuries-old binaries.

Whether acted on or theoretical, the persistent sense of superiority and a belief in closer proximity to a higher power is tangible in the Western perspective. Two examples enlighten the smooth transition of this attitude across the Atlantic and through generations. Firstly, in *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764), Kant, lost in the reflective labyrinth of sexual distinction, claims: 'above all there lies in the character of the mind of this [female] sex features peculiar to it which clearly distinguish it from ours and which are chiefly responsible for her being characterised by the mark of the beautiful'; in men 'the sublime should clearly stand out as the criterion of his kind'.[27] Secondly, less than a quarter of a century later at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia (1787), a compromise was

[25] Victor Turner. *The Anthropology of Experience*. Illinois. 1986. pp. 60-152; see also Victor Turner. *The Forest of Symbols*. Ithaca. 1967.
[26] Samuel P. Huntington. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. London. 1996. p. 53.
[27] Immanuel Kant. *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*. 1764. Cambridge. 2011. p. 228.

reached between Northern and Southern states, the Federal ratio or Three-Fifths Compromise written into the constitution confirming that 'three-fifths of slaves were to be counted in a state's population to determine representation in Congress'.[28] In spite of the many dissenting voices, the slavery clauses made it to the legal document. With the Civil War decades away but brewing, one of those voices, Luther Martin, fatefully proclaimed the decision to be 'contemptible to every true friend of liberty in the world': the harbinger of 'national crimes' that 'can only be, and frequently are, punished in this world by national punishments'.[29]

The objectification and legal-political value attached to ownership of human beings are made, in the passing of time, to look like symptoms of megalomaniacal illness. Kant's observations on sexual difference also read as little more than philosophical pseudoscience to contemporary Western societies free, technologically and in theory at least, to explore the full range of what were previously structured as the separation of appropriate feminine and masculine emotions. As shown in the above examples, whether, greed, power, or control, important to the discourse on the frontier is what drove the need for differentiation and the ways in which it was, and indeed still is, justified. If benignly, it is even evident in an important work like 'The American Scholar' (1837). In a speech which arguably inaugurates the modern interpretation of US intellectual style and thought, from a thinker as reflective as Ralph Waldo Emerson, the dozens of references to 'man' and 'mankind' tower over, conflate with, and undermine the call for recognition of the human in the vision of a new American identity.[30] Granted, for Emerson, as well as in many other philosophical perspectives, 'Man' is used as shorthand for humanity: a certain brand of Western humanism still in use as recently as 1969, when Neil Armstrong made his famous proclamation to the world as he stepped onto the moon's surface.[31] Nevertheless, this does not divert from it being a deeply

[28] Gary B. Nash. *The Forgotten Fifth: African Americans in the Age of Revolution*. Cambridge, Mass. 2006. p. 77.
[29] Luther Martin. 'Genuine Information'. 1788. *The Complete Anti-Federalist: Volume II*. Chicago. 1981. pp. 63-71.
[30] Ralph Waldo Emerson. 'The American Scholar'. 1837. *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Selected Essays*. New York. 1982. pp. 83-105.
[31] '[O]ne small step for [a] man…'. See Buzz Aldrin. *Magnificent Desolation*. 2009. London. 2010. p. 31.

problematic term, and increasingly so as the incorporation of information technologies into our existence further impacts on gender distinctions and the mutability of identity.

What does maintain its relevance from Kant's tract on sexual difference, especially in terms of the US and its formulation, is the importance of the sublime as an integral feature of contemporary consciousness. If 'fear is a central element of the sublime response', as David E. Nye maps out in his research into the *American Technological Sublime* (1994), then from the remnants of Kant's gender division the meaning of the sublime has been transposed, preyed upon even, in the virtual territories of our now highly mediated world.[32] Fear, aligned with anxiety, manifesting now in the promotion of terror, is a state that builds momentum through the technologically sublime age, many of the chosen texts using it as a central motif and marking its chronological progression as we travel towards representations of the twenty-first century, 9/11, and the decades after it.

Looking back, in the severance of ties with Europe, and in a bid to encourage the development of a pluralistic society, Nye deems the 'technological sublime' to be one of America's 'central "ideas about itself"', the sense of awe and inspiration from technological objects a 'defining ideal'.[33] What Nye is saying is that the desire for the sublime in its unmediated sense is an American trope, and that as a nation the search for sublimity drives technological innovation. One element in the American embrace of the technological was geographic necessity. Another was a further severance of ties with European ideals. Countering English voices cynically warning against technological advance, mechanisation was advocated as emancipatory, leading to approximately two centuries in which 'the American public has repeatedly paid homage to railways, bridges, skyscrapers, factories, dams, airplanes, and space vehicles': the desire to consume the 'sublime' underlying that enthusiasm for technology.[34]

Emerson underlines the inclination in a journal entry from 1843, recognising that 'Machinery and Transcendentalism agree well', a visionary nod to the connection of

[32] David E. Nye. *American Technological Sublime*. Cambridge, Mass. 1994. p. 55.
[33] Ibid. xiii-xiv.
[34] Ibid.

movement and motivation in the grasping for something other than just material reality.[35] In fact the desire for the sublime and growing dependence on technology (or rather the corruption of it), is tackled in 'The American Scholar', Emerson petitioning America to 'look from under its iron lids and fill the postponed expectation of the world with something better than the exertions of mechanical skill'.[36] Admonishing the nation for being 'a people too busy to give to letters', Emerson was acutely aware that in the nation's myths and idealistic tendencies there was a proclivity to favour action over the 'Reflective' (thought, contemplation).[37] Indeed, looking back on the period, Rushdie corroborates and then inverts Emerson's position, stating that the 'American frontier affected to despise words, but it was a landscape built of words. And it's gone now, but the words remain': and so we have the ongoing conflict between the order of words and things.[38] This is the case in terms of the now closed frontier, but the preference for action over theory or language also lingers in the American present, appearing in many diverse spaces: from its gun laws, to military decision-making, to the publicly traded billion-dollar shoe company Nike's trademark 'swoosh' logo and demand for its customers to 'Just Do It'.

Sensitive to these parallel physical and cerebral states in America's expansive technological stage, in 1844's 'Experience' Emerson introduced a language of surfaces to a nation where '[a]ll things swim and glitter', where 'life is not so much threatened as our perception…amidst this vertigo of shows and politics'.[39] Most commonly positioned at the vanguard of the Transcendental movement (some of his writing in this area featuring in the discussion of margins in the first chapter), as a body of work Emerson's writing from the middle of the nineteenth century is perhaps better described as a detailed exposition of the politics of perception. What may seem a jarring comparison at first considering their distance in temperament and life experience, poet Walt Whitman was also a diviner of perceptive fields, another linguist cultivating repeated attacks on expanding American materialism and

[35] Ralph Waldo Emerson. *Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. 1843. London. 1914. p. 397.
[36] Emerson. 'The American Scholar'. p. 83.
[37] Ibid. pp. 83, 100.
[38] Rushdie. 'Step Across This Line'. p. 418.
[39] Emerson. 'Experience'. pp. 286-95.

the consequences of its technologies. In 'Years of the Modern (1871-2), written in the destructive aftermath of the Civil War, Whitman takes the revered technological trinity of the era – the 'steamship', 'newspaper', and 'electric telegraph' – and boldly tags them as 'the wholesale engines of war'.[40] If Emerson was at work shaping the nation's intellectual identity, then Whitman drew poetic images from its spirit, both writers feeding omnivorously off their mutable surroundings. Whitman turns questioner following the statement on the corruption of Western machinery in 'Years of the Modern': 'Are all nations communing? is there going to be but one heart to the globe?'.[41] It is not so surprising that the questions Whitman posed have held their currency into the age of information. As Scott Bukatman notes in his work on the virtual subject, the 'representation[s] of electronic technology' often reflect previous outmoded material objects from the 'enormous discourse on technology that cuts through American history'.[42]

Deliberated by Lloyd Pratt in *Archives of American Time* (2010), in 'recent theories of modernity' the period is marked by the severance of 'the relationship between time and space', the increasing 'sophistication of travel technologies' and 'rise of mass communication technology symbolized by industrial technologies of print' especially important in the restructuring of nineteenth-century 'time-space distancion'.[43] Moreover, print was so vital to the nineteenth-century communications network that the printer-journalist figure rose in social status, and the printer's office as node emerged as key to sustaining 'North American communications' and cultivating 'community intellectual life'.[44] From the first wave of inventions to come out of the Industrial Revolution, which was itself set in motion and powered by the application and virulent spread of steam technology, the railroad system began in 1830 with the successful opening of the Baltimore and Ohio line. To give some idea of the rapid geographic – and so also an indication of economic – growth across the nation, the last pieces of track laid at Promontory Point in Utah in 1869 completed the

[40] Walt Whitman. 'Years of the Modern'. 1871-2. *Leaves of Grass*. Boston. 1959. p. 339-40.
[41] Ibid. p. 340.
[42] Scott Bukatman. *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction*. London. 2003. p. 4.
[43] Lloyd Pratt. *Archives of American Time: Literature and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*. Philadelphia. 2010. p. 25.
[44] Anderson. *Imagined Communities*. p. 62.

Transcontinental Railroad, linking the American coasts and ensuring 'the rest of the West' would now be entwined in a 'national system of commerce'.[45] The possibility of direct rail travel from coast to coast hastened human movement, provided a 'spine' to the nation, and created an infrastructure if not a lifeline after the Civil War, as popular points along the new technological arteries of America encouraged further settlement.[46] Of equal interest, though, is the constellation of often unheralded Irish and Asian labourers that made the endeavour possible, the transnational complexion of the workforce – arriving from Pacific and Atlantic – signalling the porous qualities of both coastlines.

Note how the task of completing the railroad network breathed life into the nation's fascination with expansion and mobility. And yet, the partitioning of the land, speed of travel, and decrease in proximity between individual and settlements also brought about the contraction of possibilities and material finitude. Ever the contrarian, in *Walden* (1854), in a rare excursion from the pond's shoreline, Henry David Thoreau bemoans the new network, viewing it a waste of human energy to earn money 'in order to enjoy' the 'questionable liberty' afforded by the linear progression of the railroad, its influence on our behaviour, sense of time, and distance-perception, cunningly described as being 'as broad as it is long'.[47] Paul Auster called Thoreau's sentiment a 'determination to reject everyday American life': recognition that the search for the autonomous self in this environment can only ever end in disappointment and deflation.[48] This is an enduring theme in US narratives, and one that runs counter to the more propagandist and commercially accepted Odyssean tales of successful heroic rebirth and (re)integration. As we shall see, time and again the protagonists in the texts discussed fail to satisfy the desire to extract themselves from the conditions imposed upon them.

Consistent with the simultaneous sense of fear and awe apparent in the formation of the sublime, and not yet fully realised but latent in Thoreau, is the simultaneous suspicion of and

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[45] Rodney P. Carlisle and J. Geoffrey Golson. *Manifest Destiny and the Expansion of America*. Santa Barbara. 2007. p. 70.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Henry David Thoreau.*Walden*.1854. New York. 1968. pp. 69-97.
[48] Paul Auster. *The Red Notebook and Other Writings*. 1987. London. 1995. p. 110.

alertness to the schismatic potentialities of technological expansion. Thoreau prototypically captures the American writer's increasing awareness of a situation Tony Tanner outlines in his discussion of mid-twentieth century fiction as an 'inescapable paradox'. In the paradox the subject moves between the individualist presupposition that 'an unpatterned, unconditioned life' remains possible in a frontier country built historically on a pursuit for freedom, and an 'abiding American dread that someone else is patterning your life', that malevolent institutions have 'all sorts of invisible plots afoot to rob you of your autonomy of thought and action'.[49] The derivation of the paradox and reasons for its persistence can be given some further context by a brief compendium of historical events from the nineteenth century. Accompanying the development of material technologies (print, railroad), ten years prior to the publication of *Walden*, Samuel Morse assembled the first electric telegraph along the right-of-way for the nation's aforementioned first railroad. The first flicker of virtual communication technology, the message 'What has God wrought?' was sent through the wire from Baltimore to the Capitol Building in Washington. Taken from *Numbers* 23:23, the words spoken by Balaam amid upheaval and sacrifice towards the end of the Israelites' forty years in the wilderness gives this oblique yet profound statement a diffident resonance: an uncertainty over what implementing such technology may bring, and a prophetic note on what lengths it may take to get there.[50] Propelled by the largest peaceful migration in recorded history, an estimated thirty-five million people travelling and settling on the new land, nineteenth century America was defined by the negotiation of internal divisions paired with, or rather against, the topography of the landscape.[51] But wholesale reorganisation of any social system often comes at a terrible cost; in the lust to acquire and reorganise the land, swathes of the indigenous population were slaughtered. Atrocities like the Sand Creek Massacre (1864) in Colorado occurred, in which volunteers ignored the peaceful gestures of the Cheyenne killing over two hundred people including women and children.

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[49] Tony Tanner. *City of Words*. London. 1991. p. 17.
[50] Andrew Blum discusses the enabling of virtual online activity through fibre optics laid alongside existing material travel pathways ('road', 'railroad tracks') in *Tubes: A Journey to the Center of the Internet*. New York. 2012. pp. 1-34, 191-226.
[51] Hugh Brogan. *The Penguin History of the USA*. 1985. London. 2001. p. 394.

The forceful cessation of American Indian culture continued as the exponential growth of the rail network from 35,000 to 200,000 miles between 1865 and 1897 pushed new settlers and the limits of the frontier out beyond the plains and into the extremes of the American West.[52] Why all this historical detail? In the rationalisation and steady imbibing of such circumstances we find the anxieties that feed into Tanner's paradox: a fear that the energies expended on turning the nation into what it is could, at any time, become entangled, stall, implode. During the twentieth century we see the apocalyptic leanings of American individuals sieved through in all manner of texts, from the sci-fi invasion narratives of the 1950s appearing in chapter one, to the disaster cycles that have been a popular staple of Hollywood cinema since at least the 1970s. Of course, on a wider scale, these texts reflect on and offer catharsis from a century in which humanity was forced to accept the limitations of the Earth and its resources, but was also coming to terms with advances in the form of military and nuclear technology that could take life beyond the planet's atmosphere, at the same time as containing enough destructive power to destroy it entirely. And although patently American in origin, the sediments of Tanner's paradox – the aftershocks of the savage trialling of new weapons during and since the Civil War, the thirst to acquire borders and new territory – were not felt in isolation. These components, combined with devastating boom-and-bust economic cycles, also defined the shape of Europe and its direction throughout the twentieth century.

From an American perspective, the first explicit theorisation of this ongoing spatial and cartographic enervation can be traced back to Jackson Turner's 1893 essay on the frontier:

> And now, four centuries from the discovery of America, at the end of a hundred years of life under the Constitution, the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history.[53]

[52] See Howard R. Lamar. *The Far Southwest*. New Haven. 1966. pp. 109-35; and George Brown Tindall and David Emory Shi. *America: A Narrative History*. 1984. London. 1999. p. 840.
[53] Frederick Jackson Turner. *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*. 1893. London. 2008. p. 38. Henceforth cited as *SF*.

If this conclusion sounds like a lament, it is because Turner's words are tinged with the realisation of the American land as a final possible frontier on a seemingly fully mapped globe. An elliptical essay, ending where it begins, the 1890 bulletin from the Superintendent of the Census is used by Turner to claim a frontier line has been reached, and with it so too the unavoidable 'closing of a great historic movement' (*SF* 1). Turner's hypothesis, however, does not rest on the validation of frontier closure, but on the crisis of what he adroitly refers to time and again as the acquisition of 'free land' (*SF* 3) and the reaching of that land's limits. As we have already seen, and will see many times, Turner is quick and correct in his assessment that the 'humor, bravery, and rude strength, as well as the vices of the frontier in its worst aspect, have left traces on American character, language, and literature, not soon to be effaced' (*SF* 33). Given the events of the last century Turner's assessment (that it is 'a rash prophet who should assert that the expansive character of American life has now ceased' (*SF* 38) because of frontier closure), seems a shrewd – even prophetic – evaluation. What could have been viewed as a cessation was more, to use Rushdie's term, a historical and technological 'hinge period', the elasticity of the frontier and its redefinition stretching over this project and out into other nations, space, and further out again into the virtual territories created in our contemporary techno-social environments. What Turner articulates is not just the closure of a particular historical period, but a point at the end of the nineteenth century where a nation had to stop and reassess its global position. It is a coming of age in which the country could no longer fall back on movement and action for progression but finally had to look inward, to reflect on its philosophical stance and temperament, revise its systems and values, and stabilise its socio-economic infrastructure and resources as a means of moving forward.

Put simply, if modern America was born in the aftermath of the Civil War and grew up through the age of industrial capitalism, then it reached middle-age, matured, began to flex its full weight globally in the approach to the era of information. In terms of structure, power, and influence over global organisation, it is the transition between the economic phases that finds the geographic frontier desiccate at one level of reality. At another level the expansion

has continued far beyond the limits of the nation's own borders. As well as impacting on wage structure and the concentration of wealth (both hierarchically and geographically), of interest in the upcoming chapters is the profound effect of this maturation on human perception in advanced capitalist countries, a band of territories that now includes large parts of south and south-east Asia and areas of the Middle East. What happened to the United States as it accrued vast quantities of surplus value, and what were the consequences to stem from its reinvestment? All above zones still receiving cultural products from the United States, key themes attached to these developments, and the thesis as a whole, are the critical and cultural interpretations and anxieties surrounding the perception of a movement towards human redundancy.

It is on this point that the thesis separates from Turner's hypothesis. Though *The Significance of the Frontier* marks a crucial hinge period for American culture within the thesis framework, due to its historical situation it rhetorically invokes the robustness and flexibility attached to imaginings of American national identity without the global dimensions expected in contemporary critical thinking. As Philip Fisher indicates, Turner's hypothesis evoked and conceptualised the frontier spirit in order to align it with an 'image of the closing of the frontier', and so 'the potential exhaustion of ownership rights over all limited resources'.[54] The time since has shown any fears over the drying up of the resources available to capitalism were, to say the least, premature. Of vital importance, however, are the continuing ties between frontier, material, and virtual, and the persistent appearance of settling and displacement, and mobility and exchange, within those fields. This is not an idealisation of the frontier spirit, but an interrogation of the behaviours, choices, and actions justified through the claiming of frontierism (or indeed expansionism); behaviours, choices, and actions that have been coded, recoded, but never went away.

To give a brief example of the critical distance travelled since Turner: where nation building and physical environments could once be analysed at their surface, now, as

[54] Philip Fisher. *Still the New World: American Literature in a Culture of Creative Destruction*. Cambridge, Mass. 1999. p. 7.

sociologist Bruno Latour remarks, the motivation is to magnify images from technological thresholds, to question what resides in 'the blind spot in which society and matter exchange properties'.[55] America, the globe's hegemonic centre for fifty years, and a territory projecting fantasies and potentials onto human existence for much longer, has acted as a mirror through which global culture has reorganised and defined itself. In this global reorganisation, what can at first glance be perceived as a single surface is in fact a series of fissures, this thesis mapping the contours of some of the reflective shards found on that cracked mirror.

Situated in and around the geographic extremities of the American frontier, and as an extension of the themes raised in this introduction, chapter one stresses the idea of California as the location where the frontier dispersed, and measures the extent to which that spirit and its ideals transferred from land to body. Using California as a hub and entry point, the position of the body in American culture is assessed in relation to the frontier and its virtualisation. A variety of texts are cited – ranging from *The Great Gatsby*, to the cinematic alien invasion narratives of the 1950s, to Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) – and held together by a critical motif which I seek to define as the American margin. In short, the American margin functions as a sliding scale, tracing the positive and negative effects of technology on individual/collective state, in a period of contraction after what Turner defined as the closure of the geographic frontier. Perhaps better described as an American phase of simultaneous expansion and contraction, points for consideration include: the coding and hybridisation of the body; the growing connections between technology, consumption and transcendence; alienation and sexual exchange; and what can be termed the destabilisation of the solid object.

Containing historical and technological slivers from the previous discussion, the second chapter reviews the influence of technology and its relevance to the elevation of African American art forms into the – firstly US and then global – cultural mainstream. From the ashes of the war in Vietnam, and the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s, a generation coming of age in the 1970s and 1980s gave birth to a multifaceted

[55] Bruno Latour. *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*. Cambridge, Mass. p. 190.

(metaphysical and non-physical) subculture we now know as Hip Hop. Feeding off other music forms, sampled and manipulated with scraps of available technology, the addition of vocals to these raw mesmeric soundscapes gave the movement a form of oratory that uncompromisingly encapsulated many of the fears, desires and fantasies at work in American culture. It provided a voice against unjust and unacceptable aspects of political and social policy affecting the Black and Hispanic communities, also serving as a medium of exchange for every poor and disenfranchised section of US society. But this is not the whole story; Hip Hop now has a stranglehold on global popular culture. Still as potent a reflective surface as it ever was, in the transition from the margins to the corporation, and with it an ever-increasing capacity for profit generation, the previous socially-conscious outpourings have in the main been superseded by tales of guerrilla capitalism, urban warfare, and lethal power struggles more closely aligned with the nation's international policy and economic directives. Released in 1989 by the Jungle Brothers on independent label Idlers Records, 'In Time' begins:

> In time this rhyme will be more than just a fantasy,
> A Black man will be the man to claim the Presidency.
> Is it hard to see?
> So try to see as I see,
> In time I see a better Black reality.[56]

Penned in New York at the tail-end of the Reagan era, in a state still being ravaged by a nationwide crack cocaine epidemic, what just over twenty years ago seemed a fantastic notion or sublime prophecy has now been realised; but to what extent? In the decades between Malcolm X's assassination and the election of President Obama, how has Hip Hop changed as a virtual arena and mode of resistance as it has simultaneously been incorporated into the American mainstream? Indeed, as a cultural object and virtual space with the potential to carry evocative messages across thresholds, did Hip Hop even survive this transition? And what were the ramifications of its transformation?

[56] Jungle Brothers. 'In Time'. Idlers Records, 1989. All tracks cited have been compiled onto data CDs, as MP3s, and placed in Appendix A. p. 275. Tracks are supplied for reference only.

Chapter three examines the shadows emanating from the terrorist attacks on the US in 2001. The narratives of 9/11 are considered while investigating a diverse selection of transnational texts that touch on the subject, including works from Don DeLillo, Amy Waldman, Martin Amis, and Frédéric Beigbeder. The social and historical significance of the attacks is considered, as is the day's power as a virtual event. More specifically, the impact on time, perception, and narrative structure is observed, each appearing in the shadows that stretch out from the decades before and beyond that clear blue September morning.

In a reversal of the position taken in the first half of the thesis, instead of concentrating on texts originating from America the final chapter focuses on treatments of global techno-culture that, while implicated, view the US from the outside-in. Refracted through some of the philosophical ideas and critical models put in place by Friedrich Nietzsche and Jean Baudrillard, the virtual territories of America and American consumption, and the representations of its brands and advertising, are analysed using recent fiction from William Gibson and Hari Kunzru. With a dominant metaphor of the mosaic, saturated in advertising and surface value, both authors refer to the technological states transmitted globally as 'mirror worlds'. Scanned through what Jean Baudrillard calls an irreconcilable conflict between 'total integration' and the 'dual form', the chapter reflects on the consequences of consumer culture as we venture further into the twenty-first century, to further unmask its virtual frontiers and artificial realities.

1.

Contact and Contract: Frontiers of the Flesh and the American Margin

> Have you seen the fool that corrupted his own live body? or the fool
> that corrupted her own live body?
> For they do not conceal themselves, and cannot conceal themselves.[1]
> Walt Whitman, 'I Sing the Body Electric' (1867)

> The Western World ends on a shore devoid of all signification, like a journey that loses all meaning when it reaches its end. The immense metropolis of Los Angeles peters out here in the sea like a desert, with all the nonchalance of a desert.[2]
> Jean Baudrillard, *America* (1986)

The emphasis in this chapter is on the impact of frontier energies as they shift between land, mind, and body, and the relationship of these shifts with technology. It begins in the American West, and as such a lot of the texts and images analysed are from authors familiar with the location as a frontier and margin. Some of the works used to contextualise the embodiment of technology and virtualisation of frontier include *The Great Gatsby*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), and Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1984).[3] As we venture further into analysis of the decades since 1945, a series of filmic texts loosely bracketed as science fiction are folded into the discussion, the margin reappraised and sifted through as it spreads back inland before going global: harnessed, commodified, and then sold.

The following three sections chart a chronological yet overlapping course, predominantly through events from the twentieth century. Extending the themes from the latter stages of the introduction, the first section adds historical detail to the idea of the 'American margin', the contraction of the frontier, and the aftermath of its dispersal. From there we move into a second section that concentrates on the anachronistic distillation of the frontier in the decades after World War II. With an apparent absence of any more land to colonise, I look at the melting away of traditional frontierism and its effects as expressed through the

[1] Walt Whitman. 'I Sing the Body Electric'. 1867. *Leaves of Grass*. 1959. Boston. p. 75. Titled and revised for the 1867 edition, much of the poem appears in the original *Leaves of Grass* (1855). pp. 76-82.
[2] Jean Baudrillard. *America*. 1986. London. 1989. p. 62.
[3] While Fitzgerald's *The Last Tycoon* (1941) resonates because of setting, depiction of Hollywood interior, and unfinished status, *The Great Gatsby* is preferred because it is complete, for its symbolic imagery, and representation of entire nation-state.

emergence of the alien invasion narrative. The third section interrogates the immersion of mind and body with technology as a substitute for and extension of territorial expansion. Tweaked, punctured, the body is caught in a reflective exchange with a series of technological innovations. This final part of the chapter takes fleshy themes (representations of prosthetics, artificial intelligence, addiction, and sexual exchange), and assesses how far what Paul Giles deems 'a posthumanist sensibility' has indeed 'filtered into the everyday consciousness of American life' in the twenty-first century, and by osmosis the broader global structure over which it still has influence.[4]

After Whitman, the opening citation is taken from Jean Baudrillard's hallucinatory account of his journey across the many territories and surfaces of the US at the height of the Reagan era. Part of a larger discussion of freeways and Californian culture, this passage is inspired by a view of Santa Monica pier at dawn, the 'grey sky over Venice' helping to paint the Pacific ocean as an abyss into which Los Angeles, and in turn American culture, begins its gradual entropic dissolution.[5] It suggests that while there may be an ordered veneer of hyperreality in which technology vies with capital, and reproduction, or the sign, replaces production as the force around which society is organised, beneath this construction a larger disordered emptiness exists that seemingly keeps us as vulnerable to the elements and the majestic sweep of time as the desert sands.

Though critically fixed in the realm of visual media and postmodern technological development, *America* finds Baudrillard performing the same role as a cast of literary 'characters' – from Melville, to Fitzgerald, to Kerouac – that Gilles Deleuze sees as captivated by 'departure, becoming, passage', 'deterritorialization', and the tracing of lines critical to creating 'a new Earth'.[6] Baudrillard is embroiled in the same techniques as a canon of American literature operating 'according to geographical lines: the flight towards the West, the discovery that the true East is in the West, the sense of frontiers as something to cross,

[4] Paul Giles. 'Sentimental Posthumanism: David Foster Wallace'. *Twentieth Century Literature*. Fall 2007. p. 328.
[5] Baudrillard. *America*. p. 62.
[6] Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet. 'On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature'. 1977. *Dialogues II*. New York. 2002. p. 37.

to push back, to go beyond'.[7] Baudrillard's poetic vision of American (that is to say Western and also frontier) energies cooling as the Pacific stretches out and deepens is, however, somewhat at odds with the degree of American influence over – its political and cultural penetration of – areas beyond this imagined abyss throughout the twentieth century.[8] The perceived dissipation of tightly constructed technological culture is stimulated further by geographic location, Baudrillard asserting that a landscape like that of California where the 'desertification of signs and men' can be dreamt up, brings with it the chance of a 'mental frontier' being reached 'where the projects of civilization run into the ground'.[9]

Such fantasies of American dissolve find their counterpoint in material and technological progress, in the adaptability of global capital and its markets. With a quarter of a century now passed, it is possible to view Baudrillard's sentiments as overblown and apocalyptic, to see them as a symptom of and allergic reaction to an era in which events such as Reagan's implementation of the 'Strategic Defense Initiative', the explosion of the Challenger Space Shuttle over Cape Canaveral mere seconds after launch, and the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl, helped infuse the technological imagination of the time (and the cultural artefacts to emanate from it) with images and ideas that were as paranoid as they were bold and spectacular. In theoretical terms, this is the moment Donna Haraway synthesised a number of critical currents into the figure of the 'cybernetic organism'; coined by Clynes and Klein in 1960 in their research into 'self-regulating man-machine systems', the cyborg in 'A Cyborg Manifesto' (1985) is a 'creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction'.[10] The cyborg is used as a critical vehicle in a sustained attack on firmly fixed binaries in the hegemonic

[7] Ibid.
[8] The American-led coup d'état in Hawaii, (1893) and its history until Bill Clinton's passing of the Apology Resolution (1993), is one example of further frontier ebullience. The area around the Marshal Islands was also used as a nuclear testing ground from 1946. The evolving twentieth-century military/cultural/economic exchange with Japan is also crucial to discussions of US and Pacific. See Gary Y. Okihiro. *Island World: A History of Hawai'i and the United States*. Berkeley. 2009; Jane Dibblin. *Day of Two Suns: US Nuclear Testing and the Pacific Islanders*. London. 1988; Gavan McCormack. *Client State: Japan in America's Embrace*. London. 2007.
[9] Baudrillard. *America*. pp. 62-3.
[10] Donna Haraway. 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century'. 1985. *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London. 1991. p. 149; Manfred E Clynes and Nathan S Kline. 'Cyborgs and Space'. *Astronautics*. September 1960. p. 27; the dystopian splicing of man/machine is vividly acted out in films like *Blade Runner* (1982), *The Terminator* (1984), and *Robocop* (1987). For Reagan see William H. Chafe. *The Unfinished Journey*. Oxford. 2003. pp. 455-81; for gendering and embodiment see Susan Jeffords. *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan era*. Toronto. 1994.

system: male and female, mind and body, science and society, to name just a few. Though Haraway's manifesto is built as an 'ironic myth faithful to feminism, socialism and materialism', what it shares with Baudrillard is the questioning of the role of human agency in the 1980s and in the decades since, the human or 'cyborg' still appearing as a liminal creature in a 'border war', a virtual war in which the stakes are the 'territories of production, reproduction, and imagination'.[11]

The point here is to highlight Baudrillard and Haraway as technological narrators, or rather as negotiators of the narratives dispersed by the scientifically-emboldened system defined in the introduction as the unified apparatus of power. As narratives which often serve to perpetuate inequalities within that system, the intention is to frame such reflections on American-led Western significance within a larger historical trajectory that goes back to at least the nineteenth century. Key to the discussion is the modulation of certain areas, like Los Angeles and California, and their relevance in terms of aesthetics and national identity, as well as the states and psychological responses produced in the wake of social and technological expansion. This expansion of state and location, as we see in Baudrillard and in Turner in the introduction, also acts as geographic outer edge and enigmatic final outpost of the frontier. As a region, California and its limits make available a form of blank space unlike any other in the US, onto which writers, directors, sociologists and theorists have projected any number of different fictions, realities and extremities. Indeed, its prismatic potentialities are summed up well by Kevin McNamara, who sees Los Angeles as not merely a city or county but as 'a state of being', positioned 'squarely in the collective imagination of utopia, dystopia, and, more recently, the urban future'.[12] The focus within this particular argument is on the connections between twentieth-century technological advance, this state of being within the American margin, and the sustained validity of an expanding frontier. For Baudrillard it is a margin that conjures up premonitions of a mental frontier or expansion limit

[11] Haraway. 'Cyborg Manifesto'. pp. 149-50.
[12] Kevin R. McNamara. 'Introduction: landmarks'. *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of Los Angeles*. Cambridge. 2010. p. 1; to give recent examples of California represented as the quintessential technological/urban/postmodern space on screen, see *Strange Days* (1995), *Collateral* (2004), and *Drive* (2011).

reached. In reaching that limit the social and psychological consequences for a centuries-old Western civilisation dependant on progress and movement are brought to the fore. What I propose is that housed this, site and the culture born from it, are the continuation of a particular variety of American mythology that translated the taming of a wilderness into a sense of destiny. In reinventing the creation myth that fuelled the original desire to populate the land, along with it came a persistent need to investigate, capture, and civilise what Henry Nash Smith describes as 'the vacant continent beyond the frontier'.[13]

Whether you regard this inexorable spread across the United States as either an extension or severing of political, religious, and economic ties from a temporally deeper and equally relentless colonisation of lands that made up the European frontier experience, the eventual settlement within California can be seen as a poignant physical and metaphorical point beyond which no further westward progress could be conceived.[14] This is why Fredrick Jackson Turner's frontier hypothesis is an important document. It is one of the first notable instances of an individual stepping back and reflecting on what the US had achieved and the places it had reached, not just intellectually, socially, or politically, but in terms of space. As a critical device it gives freedom from a sedentary position within a single artistic movement, and allows for remapping spatial and temporal coordinates as a means of opening up the possibility of new and vibrant correspondences between texts and eras. However, while the following enquiry uses Turner's essay as a springboard into a discussion of twentieth-century frontiers, it refutes this sealing off of frontier movement, paying closer attention to the allusions Turner makes to an on-going 'American energy' that 'will continually demand a wider field for its exercise' (*SF* 38). What was once deemed closure can be reinterpreted as dispersal, forces pushing the frontier to its material limits transferring from prairies and settlers' paths to other spaces, be it in military-industrial advance, the rise of the urban metropolis, or eventually, as I will argue, through technology back to the body.[15]

[13] Henry Nash Smith. *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*. Cambridge, Mass. 1950. p. 4.
[14] See Ray Allen Billington. *America's Frontier Heritage*. New York. 1966; and *Land of Savagery, Land of Promise: The European Image of the American Frontier in the Nineteenth Century*. London.1981.
[15] Howard R. Lamar. 'An Overview of Westward Expansion'. *The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier*. Washington. 1991. pp. 1-27.

I say through technology back to the body as there is an argument to say it never left, the body always functioning as metonym for expansionism in the American mythos.[16] An early example of the American connection of body and margin can be found in the following passage from Ralph Waldo Emerson's first essay 'Nature' (1836):

> Standing on the bare ground,-my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space,-all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God.[17]

Epitomising what Leo Marx correctly calls the 'pastoral impulse' within Transcendental thought, the complexities of a new phase in urban living are rejected in favour of the rural, in a return to the basic elements of existence via a kind of metaphysical – if not entirely fictional then at least highly aestheticized – withdrawal back into nature.[18] Yet there are more layers of meaning at work here than just Emerson's uneasy relationship to the idea of an anthropomorphic God, or a mere ecstatic expression of omnipresence brought about by integration with the forces of the land. The assimilation of agrarian obsession is of course fundamentally tied into the nation's origins, Emerson at once linking this connection with an attempt at severance, the land a stage on which to perform it through an evocative conversion of the body, the self, into a 'transparent eyeball'. And while Emerson's work may have lacked the wit and dexterity of Thoreau, the transparent eyeball remains an arresting early example of the imaginative distances artists were prepared to travel to try and arrive at new virtualised territories.[19]

The beauty of the image is that it casts off the American appetite for consuming or owning physical objects or space while also preserving the idealistic notion of discovery associated with the frontier. The eye, then, is the perfect symbolic apparatus for reaching infinite space. By this I mean limitless as well as untouched. Not only does the eyeball take in and see out

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[16] For one early cultural/artificial (as opposed to natural/organic) US example, see Nathaniel Hawthorne. *The Scarlet Letter*. 1850. Oxford. 2007.
[17] Ralph Waldo Emerson. 'Nature'. 1836. *Selected Essays*. London. 1982. p. 39.
[18] Leo Marx. *The Machine in the Garden*. Oxford. 1964. p. 232.
[19] Emerson likened Thoreau's skill for loading the natural object with physical and symbolic meaning, particularly in *Walden* (1854), as 'an irritating habit of paradox'. See Gary Scharnhorst. *Henry David Thoreau: An Annotated Bibliography*. New York. 1992. p. 98.

(transmit and receive information), but its transparency hints at total dematerialisation at the same time as being seen straight through. What we have is the combined fantasy of harmonious incorporation or even absolute dissolve of consciousness and perception into a preordained system. Echoed by the premise on which religious belief systems function and maintain influence, it is a naturalised variation on the human yearning to become integrated into an unbridled matrix of interconnectivity. Despite the First Amendment seeking to distance the governance of the nation from attachment to any official state religion, technology and bodies in which people put faith have remained inseparable.[20] As the US constitution would not allow political attachment to religion, it looked for it in other ways, be that in technology, transcendence, or capitalism. Karatani describes capitalism as 'a certain force that regulates humanity beyond its intentionality, a force that divides and recombines human beings. It is a religio-generic entity'.[21] Capitalism in a phase of commodity exchange relies on credit. Much like religious faith, the investment is speculative. The cycle of search, division, and recombination reoccurs many times in the texts throughout the thesis and the timeframe, from Emerson to Brecht's Galileo and the decade of post-9/11 narratives analysed in chapter three. The yearning is also recreated and used as the unique selling point for much information and cyber technology. As detailed in chapter four, many cyberspatial nodes of connectivity now offer versions of disembodied communication that could once only be imagined, movements and connections that are now accepted almost unquestioned into our everyday existence.

As Marx rightly claims though, the pastoral fables from Emerson and his contemporaries emanate from early and uniquely American psychological responses to 'the magnitude of the protean conflict figured by the machine's increasing domination of the visible world'.[22] The crux of Marx's argument is that in spite of exposing the creeping effects of a production-line – in Thoreau's words 'factory system' – mentality towards human existence, through the

[20] The First Amendment states 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof'; Nathaniel Hawthorne parodies the condition in 'The Celestial Road' (1834).
[21] Karatani. *Transcritique*. p. 5.
[22] Marx. *Machine in the Garden*. p. 364.

attachment of theological and mythic tropes to the alienated figure these works in many ways still mirror the artificial constructions they seek to critique.[23] Though Emerson, in 'The Poet' (1844), elegantly states 'the poet turns the world to glass', the stimulation of instinct, the 'new passages opened up for us into nature', and the search for 'passage out into free space' are equally applicable to the motivations of the frontier capitalist or entrepreneur.[24] To reiterate Marx's point, the possibilities of open territories project out from the body of materialist *and* transcendentalist, America at this time 'a poem' in both sets of 'eyes'; if its 'ample geography dazzles the imagination', then the frontier was the imagined object that floated tantalisingly in their peripheral vision.[25]

An imminent shift away from the purity of this perception is illuminated in the post-1867 poetry of Walt Whitman. In comparison with Emerson, as the epigraph to this chapter suggests, the exploration of the body (hence also land) in 'I Sing the Body Electric' is ecstatic and sensual; but this is juxtaposed by impressions of it as controllable, corruptible, and based on limits. Excised from *Leaves of Grass* (1855) and sculpted into shape in the aftermath of the Civil War, the poem maintains its vigour because of an ominous sense of enclosure in the movement between physical and virtual realities, in the transition from nature to second nature and pastoral to urban. If not the official heir to Emerson's call for a 'genius in America', Whitman is at least the personification of America as modern technological state.[26] Emblematic of the inescapable paradox defined by Tanner in the introduction: from one angle can be viewed idealism, democracy, and the freedom to explore; from another angle that perspective can be re-viewed as oppressive, fraudulent, and constricting. With this in mind, it is time to return to the complications of the geographic frontier and its narratives.

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[23] Thoreau. *Walden*. p. 25.
[24] Ralph Waldo Emerson. 'The Poet'. 1844. *Selected Essays*. London. 1982. pp. 270-5.
[25] Ibid. p. 281; albeit from different perspectives, the desire for what Nye refers to as the 'American sublime' appears here.
[26] Ibid.

The American Margin

Like all narratives, the population of the territory now known as California is not made up of one but many truths. From a frontier perspective, the South Pass from Wyoming was more than likely traversed as early as 1814, but it was not until the trappers and traders of the 1820s and 1830s popularised the route that the opportunities for settlement in Northern California were fully opened.[27] Then in 1848, or so the story goes, while building a sawmill carpenter James Marshall discovered gold in the water flowing through the millwheel. Within a year of the discovery ninety thousand prospectors had entered the territory; twenty years later that figure had increased by another two hundred thousand.[28] The rapidity of the settlement in direct correlation with the lucrativeness of the natural resources available, the chase to buy into and benefit from the possibility of one final bonanza chimes with Turner's recognition of the reasons why:

> American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character. The true point of view in the history of the nation is not the Atlantic coast, it is the Great West (*SF* 2).

There are connotations in the use of a phrase like the 'continuous touch with primitive society' that jar and linger. Yet Turner leaves it undefined, the frontier as 'meeting point between savagery and civilization' (*SF* 3) suggestive of negative American behaviours as much as those of communities on the other side of the margin consumed in the force of its movement.

It is intriguing that California could have been approached and populated by sea, and so its plentiful resources plundered by west-moving agents much earlier than the middle of the nineteenth century. Instead it was entered primarily by land as part of a more systematic 'perennial rebirth' of westward movement across the continent. Though there is allusion in Turner to a consensual American tendency to look west, what needs to be considered is the

[27] Dale L. Morgan. *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West*. Indianapolis. 1953. pp. 78-92.
[28] Paul W. Rodman. *California Gold: The Beginning of Mining in the Far West*. Cambridge, Mass. 1947. p. 9.

artificiality of a perceived linear progression as metaphor collides with empirical fact, the authenticity of the straight line challenged by the loops and circuitry within the apparatus and its movements. As lived history blends with mythological construction it becomes more difficult to contemplate the individual strands that gave rise to the region, its legends and archetypes often unavoidably absorbed into and made dominant within a larger idealised American narrative. For example, the pioneering entrepreneurialism of the gold prospectors is brought to the fore, less so the subtle infiltration of the *gente de razón* by 'Yankee shipjumpers' of the 1820s who entered Southern California by sea and settled, inveigling their way to fortunes by marrying into the families of indigenous wealthy land owners.[29]

The fact that California was still part of Mexico at the beginning of 1848 when the first gold was discovered is also smoothed over in such processes. Signed over to the United States in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo at the end of a bloody imperial war with Mexico (1846-8), it remained a lawless void of conflicting traditions and personal wealth accumulation, occupied by the American military until its admission into the US as a free state on September 9th 1850. Prior to this, it is worth remembering that in the first quarter of the nineteenth century Mexico and the United States were comparable in 'size, total population, and economic output'.[30] And despite geographic and economic minimisation, the unbreakable connection between Mexico and the US make the margins of its blurred border territories dangerous and contestable even in the first decades of the twenty-first century.[31] What in the eyes of the law is 'illegal' entry into the US still occurs daily, the complexities of the territory and its relation to the US still articulated from a wide range of perspectives.[32] Showing that the most serious issues are often smuggled into texts through the absurd, the

[29] Mike Davis. *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*. 1990. London. 2006. p. 106.
[30] Andrés Reséndez. *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850*. Cambridge. 2005. p. 15. www.wall-maps.com/classroom/HISTORY/World-History/w67_Latin_America_1830.gif shows a comparative map of Latin America and the US in 1830.
[31] For an in-depth investigation of Mexico under Spanish rule, see Alexander von Humboldt. *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain*. London. 1822; for its economic decline see John H. Coatsworth. 'Obstacles to Economic Growth in Nineteenth-Century Mexico'. *The American Historical Review*. February 1978. pp. 80-100; for critical appraisal of the border from a transnational perspective see Andrew Grayball and Benjamin Johnson (Eds.). *Bridging National Borders in North America*. London. 2010.
[32] For snapshots from the treacherous journeys of 'illegal' migrants, see Duncan Campbell. 'Nowhere to Run'. *The Guardian*. 17 October 2000. http://www.guardian.co.uk/g2/story/0,3604,383506,00.html; and Chris McGreal. 'The Battle of the US-Mexico Frontier'. *The Guardian*. 20 February 2011. http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/feb/20/us-mexico-border-fence-immigration.

situation is here, with the limitations put on the thesis, perhaps best encapsulated in Robert Rodriquez's exploitation film *Machete* (2010). Between the gore and deliberate play on stereotypes from either side of the margin, federal Immigrations Agent Sartana Rivera (Jessica Alba) extricates herself from the system, shedding her American self while stating that its laws are just 'lines drawn in the sand', before bellowing the often heard phrase of the transborder transmigrant: 'we didn't cross the border, the border crossed us'.[33]

As we shall see in chapter four, attempts to limit movement across borders have, if anything, been increased by technology put in place across the globe in the current information era. But to turn back to the US and its history, as the 'unrelenting stream of migrants flowed into the largely Indian and Hispanic West', transforming mid-nineteenth century California into a region of get-rich-quick schemes and rampant materialism, the states to the east were metamorphosing in the approach to the Civil War.[34] While the new thresholds were being gauged, inland in other parts of the country the trade in human beings was still highly profitable; while elsewhere Lucretia Mott was simultaneously promoting women's rights at the Seneca Falls Convention, as major Northern cities continued to be wired together more closely by transport links and advances in industrial technology. All these disparate strands were played out and emboldened against a climate centred on expansionism and Manifest Destiny. The Civil War (1861-5) ran parallel to this migration of bodies and spread of techno-industrial invention. As well as perhaps the first display of the true capacity for destruction housed within the lethal technology of advanced modern warfare, the victory of the mainly Northern free states brought the prospect of a nation 'integrated into one political territory' and consolidated into a single 'continental edifice': the opportunity for the US to emerge as the world's leading economic power.[35]

Though human rights and territory were important factors in the clash between the Union and Confederacy, the loans supplied to the Union by the national banks are a reminder that

[33] Other recent films to deal with the border include *Traffic* (2000), *Bordertown* (2006), *Borderland* (2007), *No Country for Old Men* (2007), *Sin Nombre* (2009), *Skyline* (2010), and *Battle Los Angeles* (2011).
[34] Tindall and Shi. *America*. p. 858.
[35] Paul Giles. *The Global Remapping of American Literature*. Princeton. 2011. p. 9.

this was also a war over minerals, silver gazumped by gold in the introduction of the gold standard as a monetary system and the creation of a unified national currency. The case with most warfare, it should be noted that corporations and private companies profited greatly from the Civil War, and that the rise of what we consider the modern American corporation occurred during this decade and the ones to follow. In an ironic turn, the Supreme Court case of 'Santa Clara County vs. Southern Pacific Railroad' (1886) led to the Fourteenth Amendment – one of the Reconstruction Amendments put in place to protect the rights of American citizens and freed slaves – being enacted by corporations to give themselves *personhood*, thus transforming them from an 'extension of state power to accomplish publicly useful projects', into a 'sanctuary from state power' and 'institutional basis' for 'private accumulation' of wealth.[36] Preposterously, with the body mapped onto it, the decision took a virtual concept – the corporation – and made it party to a legal fiction: personified it, and gave it the same legal rights as citizens.

Frontierism in different guises, in this sense the frontier is and always has been reflective of the technological and politico-economic mood of successive generations. To look broadly at the first generation to come after what people perceived as the apparent closure of the frontier, it was an era defined in socio-economic terms by the assembly line, and the mass-production and distribution of products based on previous technological discoveries in the fields of transport and communication: a new stage of technology and streamlined capitalism that William Leach labels as 'the democratization of desire', with 'money value as the predominant measure of all value in society'.[37] These fractal inland bursts of frontier desire meshed with capital accumulation took various new shapes and forms. Previous symbols elevated from the collective unconscious such as the rancher, pioneer, or transcendentalist, were superseded by the industrialist, the celebrity, the urban developer.[38]

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[36] William G. Roy. *Socializing Capital: The Rise of the Large Industrial Corporation in America*. Princeton. 1997. p. 3.
[37] William Leach. *Land of Desire*. New York. 1993. p. 3.
[38] Reflected in texts such as William Dean Howells. *The Rise of Silas Lapham*. 1885. Oxford. 1996; and Theodore Dreiser. *Sister Carrie*. 1900. London. 1994.

The move in from the margin continued in the first decades of the twentieth century as frontier energies were woven into industrial projects and a linked national infrastructure. Taken from a series of daily telegrams for *The New York Times*, writing in Beverly Hills on 1st July 1931, part-Cherokee performer and humourist Will Rogers wryly quipped that 'America is a land of opportunity and don't ever forget it'.[39] Such a loaded statement could be in reference to the vagaries of, to use an Americanism, dumb luck and circumstance, and yet it also harbours the more cynical notion that in a land of opportunity there will always be opportunists and opportunistic behaviour based on self-interest and the exploitation of others. Rogers also made this remark against the grain, as it were, as the national economy continued its steep decline in the midst of the first phase of the Great Depression.

Delivered in San Francisco on September 23rd 1932 as part of the presidential campaign that would see him elected to office the following year, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's address to the Commonwealth Club threads together these conflicting tendencies while advocating the need for federal government to play a more active role in national affairs, contrasting the democratic right to 'a never-ending seeking for better things' with a population slowly being forced to accept 'the bitter with the sweet' in the development of the 'machine age'.[40] In what unfolds into a scathing critique of the ruthless and selfish practices of high industrialists, Roosevelt reiterates that:

> Our last frontier has long since been reached, and there is practically no more free land. More than half of our people do not live on the farms or on lands and cannot derive a living by cultivating their own property. There is no safety valve in the form of a Western prairie to which those thrown out of work by the Eastern economic machines can go for a new start.[41]

The call here is for diversification in the face of adversity. The image given is of the American West as a refuge now closed, the entire speech a rallying cry against the proposition that no price was 'too high to pay for the advantages' to be drawn from a

[39] Cited from *Will Rogers' Daily Telegrams Volume 3: The Hoover Years 1931-1933*. Oklahoma. 1979. p. 44.
[40] Franklin Delano Roosevelt. 'Commonwealth Club Address'. 1932. www.americanrhetoric.com. http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/PDFFiles/FDR%20-%20Commonwealth%20Club%20Address.pdf.
[41] Ibid.

'finished industrial system'.[42] What Roosevelt captures, in this speech in particular, is the anxieties of a nation that held aloft freedom of movement in a land of opportunity as a right and a virtue, as they begin to come to terms with the fact that at some level frontier expansion across the land was always finite, and underpinned by 'ambition', 'ruthlessness' and the unequal distribution of wealth and resources. Roosevelt's intention to regulate big business through the introduction of codes of conduct comes to the surface when stating that '[o]ur task is not discovery or exploitation of natural resources, or necessarily producing more goods. It is the soberer, less dramatic business of administering resources and plants already in hand'.[43] This call for more balanced structuring of industry and socio-economic solidification through administration may have been exactly the type of austere rhetoric required at the time of the address. However, the years since have proven that even beyond the closure of the geographic frontier, many of the imperatives on which frontier success were based – such as human control of surroundings and resources, as well as the control and exploitation of other humans and indeed most other living creatures – have remained key factors in the shaping of America and the West throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The demand for more regulation and more even distribution of resources inevitably met with resistance from some quarters as it jeopardised the imaginative possibilities of an unending frontier: the possibility of unhindered spatial, financial, or individual growth. The address, on the one hand, is another in a long line of possible solutions put forward throughout the history of the United States that recognised and sought to temper the appetites of more rapacious individuals within the nation. And yet, on the other, it is the summation of a very modern set of fears, Roosevelt voicing the still prevalent dilemma in literature and culture of how individuals respond when freedom and fluidity is compromised, altered by existence within the vice-like grip of steadfast political, economic or technological systems. Analogous with these newfound systems of power and energy – from steam and

[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.

steel, to oil, nuclear fission and beyond – came a quickening in national development that saw America accrue too much history too quickly. From a technological perspective, I would argue that the events of the twentieth century can be read as both a playing out of and hangover from this acceleration.

Furthermore, the wealth of resources available to those in power is always to an extent balanced out by the population's instinctive trepidation over their ability to control it. Here we are again brought back to the positive and negative forces that funnel into the creation of the inescapable paradox Tanner describes as fundamental to understanding American writing in the twentieth century. The paradox being a fascination for Tanner, it is not surprising that one of the texts he wrote on in great detail was Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Set in the Twenties, two years after the introduction of The National Prohibition (Volstead) Act but just prior to the Crash, *Gatsby* is an immensely rich meditation on the circumstances that left writers like Fitzgerald feeling the need to make what Arun Mukherjee describes as 'a serious comment on the modes of socialization promoted in American society and the human product that they create'.[44]

One such characteristic that Tanner ascribes to narrator-agent Nick Carraway is the 'very American oscillation' between enchantment and disgust.[45] While it is certainly not a west coast novel as such, *Gatsby* helps to define the American margin through its unflinching dissection of this type of vacillation between actual and virtual extremities, and the consequences of it on the construction of identity. In a text dominated by contrasting perceptions of what is real and what is not, reality is turned over like an hourglass as the fate of a seventeen-year-old from North Dakota is slowly revealed. Forced to reinvent his own 'conception', in a thoroughly modern observation James Gatz realises that to truly 'be-Gatz' he must become Jay Gatsby, in a 'new world' that is 'material without being real'.[46] This kind of phraseology is now common parlance as simulation increasingly vies with what used to be deemed unchanging forms and ideas under the sign of technology.

[44] Arun Mukherjee. *The Gospel of Wealth in the American Novel*. London. 1987. p. 118.
[45] Tony Tanner. 'Introduction'. 1990. *The Great Gatsby*. London. 2000. p. xxiv.
[46] F. Scott Fitzgerald. *The Great Gatsby*. 1925. London. 2000. pp. 94-5, 153-4. Henceforth cited as *GG*.

Although already well-trodden theoretical ground, this is what makes *Gatsby* maintain its importance in the canon of American texts. The question it attempted to answer, continues to answer, is how do humans respond when given the opportunity to fill a blank canvas? Fitzgerald concludes that America's choice when handed this privilege, 'the greatest of all dreams', has been to fill that canvas with a society of pretences, a society where, as the 'owl-eyed' man in Gatsby's library observes, 'if one brick' were removed 'the whole library was liable to collapse' (*GG* 171, 47). One might here justifiably ask whether the continent was ever truly virgin land, was ever free or blank in this way. However centuries on from the nation's inception, be it New York or Long Island as it is in *Gatsby*, the fragility of the façade is forced home in the valley of ashes that connects and underpins the various social arenas. The Wilson's Garage is a technological oasis in this ashy wasteland. And it is watched over by an advertising hoarding of Dr T.J. Eckleberg, a simulation of God looking 'out of no face', eyes 'dimmed a little' (*GG* 26) by the carnage; no better, no more reliable than an impotent sign with the same faulty perception as the flock over which he presides. Far from emancipatory, Fitzgerald implies that a society of changing forms and ever-shifting identities is in fact a false sense of freedom, that the index of possibilities can be stifling, fatal, a state which finds Carraway flitting between 'grotesque reality and savage, frightening dreams' (*GG* 140).

By grotesque I mean in the monstrous attributes and distortions of reality that accompany excess, the first nervous signs of addiction appearing in Tom Buchanan's proposal that 'a quart bottle of whisky' wrapped 'in a towel' (*GG* 115) may be required to perform the simple task of driving to the city. Cars and alcohol, the addictive (technological, consumable) extravagances and fuels of the period become interconnected and lead to a chain of fatalities based on negligence and misidentification, needless violent acts propelled by carelessness and personal interests. The violence in *Gatsby* is indicative of a building apprehension over the interaction of human beings with a new wave of mass-produced social technology, and yet it also functions metaphorically as an overview of something more primal that percolates through the US and its evolution. Nowhere is Tanner's concept of the

very American oscillation between enchantment and disgust more eloquently depicted than in the juxtaposition between Fitzgerald's plaintive concluding prose, which imagines 'an old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes – a fresh, green breast of the new world', and the description of Myrtle Wilson's mutilated body, the collision with the yellow Rolls Royce driven by Tom Buchanan leaving 'her left breast…swinging loose like a flap…no need to listen for the heart beneath' (*GG* 171, 131). Tanner likens the mirroring and transition between the two representations to the 'rape' metaphor used by Imagist poet William Carlos Williams to elucidate the 'multiple and various spoliations of the American land'.[47] What Fitzgerald was trying to uncover, and Williams in contemporaneous works like *In the American Grain* (1925), was the significance of touch and infiltration – contact with and exertion of control over land, technology, other bodies – in an increasingly industrialised world.[48] In the changeover from predominantly industrial nineteenth-century capitalism to a technological phase of mass-consumption, Fitzgerald perceives that identities can 'break up like glass' (*GG* 141), as the frequency of mortality and decay appearing as underlying themes in other cultural artefacts at this moment also noticeably increases.

As we shall see in the following sections, the 'quality of distortion' (*GG* 167) that appears numerous times in *Gatsby* is paired with a note of pessimism that lingers through the rest of the twentieth century. A miasma that edges west, an atmosphere masked by the sweet scent of capital and technology, Baudrillard likens the covert intermingling of decadence and decay to the 'gentle hell of the Roman Empire in its decline'.[49] As already noted in the introduction, if Turner picked at their edges, then World War I tore down many of the theoretical and intellectual principles of the nineteenth century on both sides of the Atlantic, the frontier energies that were present prior to the conflict reappearing in an everyday social context alongside the work of writers like Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, and other modern artistic movements. For example, in a phase of revised perspectives, whereas frontier progress had

[47] Tanner. 'Introduction'. p. i.
[48] See William Carlos Williams. *In The American Grain*. 1925. New York. 2009; and 'The Use of Force' (1938) in *The Collected Short Stories of William Carlos Williams*. New York. 1996. pp. 131-6.
[49] Baudrillard. *America*. p. 17.

previously been dominated by horizontal passing across the land, the new era was looking upwards for fresh spaces and ideas, to flight, urban architecture, and a new sense of verticality. Lev Manovich calls attention to the revitalising search for new thresholds succinctly when discussing the later effects of software and hardware on subjectivity, venturing that we now very much 'live in a spatial era'.[50] A truism, what has changed significantly is the shape of the lived space, how spatial dimensions are viewed and configured. Bonded to the movement from horizontal to vertical, the filling of natural spaces and production has been supplanted by modes of reproduction, elevation, and technological mimicry. The switch from horizontality to verticality in American culture also correlates with the dispersal of the frontier: urban development a necessity, but also an extension and virtualisation of the frontier beyond its geographic limits.

The skyscraper was born from a combination of geometrics and techno-industrial innovation. The steam-powered 'self-braking electric elevator' exhibited by Elisha Otis at the Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations held in New York (1853) brought never-seen-before possibilities to movement within buildings and their scale.[51] Standing alongside New York's Crystal Palace, rising to 315 feet, the Latting Observatory took over from Trinity Church as the city's tallest structure. As Rem Koolhass notes in his architectural study of Manhattan, the imaginative effect brought about by the 'cross-fertilization' of urban geometry and techno-industrial innovation opened up the potential for a series of 'hybrids' mirroring the organisational shift of capital-state apparatus towards vertically integrated corporations.[52] Coney Island the laboratory, Manhattan the testing ground, for Koolhass it is technology as 'instrument and extension of the human imagination', its motivation the 'support and production of fantasy'.[53] Borrowing from surrealism and psychoanalysis, Koolhass refers to the spatial relationship through the metaphor of body and birth, Coney Island as 'incubator' and Manhattan as 'foetal'; the area also deemed to be akin to New York's 'clitoral

[50] Lev Manovich. *The Language of New Media*. London. 2001. p. 61.
[51] Matthew Wells. *Skyscrapers: Structure and Design*. London. 2005. p. 10; Judith Dupré. *Skyscrapers*. 1996. New York. 2008. p. 46.
[52] Rem Koolhass. *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan*. London. 1978. p. 20.
[53] Ibid. p. 46.

appendage'.[54] Technological, sublime, the architecture of awe and science fiction, other than the body the skyscraper's floors also artificially mimic the layers attributed to thought and consciousness, prestige and status always attributed to its highest levels.

Cecelia Tichi uses the skyscraper as endpoint in her own treatise on the shifting gears of technology, to highlight the 'spiritual anomie' and 'social fragmentation' of the modern era.[55] A 'machine-structure that became a fact of life throughout the United States by the early 1920s', the skyscraper is not just 'paradoxically static and soaring', but an intriguing manifestation of American attempts to problem-solve the anxieties produced from the contraction of spatial possibilities.[56] Completed in 1931, the Empire State Building is a cognitive reflection and embodiment of a language of upward mobility and desire for a new direction. If not advertently phallic then at least overtly masculine and inorganic in its linear Art Deco shape and structure, the building elicits all the over-compensatory hallmarks of a structure of its time. Aspirational, reminiscent of a church steeple but profane in its dwarfing of all other religious constructions, the Empire State Building functions as an arrow-like sign pointing directly to the heavens. In an environment of growing wealth and global influence, it is a powerful rhetorical structure reflecting the strength of American social hierarchy. Once again the tallest building in New York (at least until the new World Trade Center discussed in chapter three is complete), it is an enduring monument to the American perspective, a geometric national indicator that frontier expansion need not perish if redirected towards alternative spaces. Like Haraway's cyborg, the skyscraper is a hybrid of 'machine and organism', a 'condensed image' of both imagination and material reality.[57]

In his seminal work on 'The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', Fredric Jameson seeks to differentiate between postmodern architecture and 'monuments of high modernism' such as the Empire State Building, that seek to insert a 'distinct, an elevated, a new Utopian language into the tawdry and commercial sign system of the surrounding city'.[58] It is

[54] Ibid. p. 23.
[55] Cecelia Tichi. *Shifting Gears: Technology, Literature, Culture in Modernist America*. London. 1987. p. xv.
[56] Ibid. p. 289.
[57] Haraway. 'Cyborg Manifesto'. p. 150.
[58] Fredric Jameson. *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. London. 1991. p. 39.

intriguing that Jameson and Baudrillard use the puzzling interior spaces and reflective 'glass facades' of the (now Westin) Bonaventure Hotel, opened in Los Angeles in 1976, to highlight the geographic and architectural shift from high modernism to the hallucinogenic 'pure illusionism' of so-called postmodern constructions.[59] However, the stress on disorientation and depthlessness in both readings – Baudrillard left with a 'dizzy feeling', Jameson tempted to state that 'such space makes it impossible to use the language of volume or volumes any longer, since these are impossible to seize' – would seem to tell us as much about the position and perception of the theorist as it does the hotel itself.[60] For Jameson the experience educes an 'alarming disjunction between the body and its built environment'.[61] But can a singular viewpoint on this type of disjunction be generalised? Can it be made culturally dominant to the extent that a sweeping statement such as '[*w*]*e* do not yet possess the perceptual equipment to match this hyperspace' can be read as anything other than a personal fear of obsolescence or outmoded individual subjectivity within the space?[62] I am implying here that the reaction of the body, modes of thought, and built environment, as they have adjusted to the technological and economic shifts in the twentieth century, are in fact far more interlinked than Jameson suggests. While it can be argued that the 'glass skin' of the Bonaventure Hotel 'repels the city outside', could this 'repulsion' of the external not, from a different perspective, be interpreted as an emblem of the seductive interplay of internal and external that now exists between city, building, and subject?[63] Seen in this light the Bonaventure is a digital continuation of the same American desire for fluidity of frontier movement as expressed in the Empire State Building, in this instance a shimmering commercial monument that exemplifies a screen-based era centred on the tenets of reflection and absorption.

Before traversing its infiltration of mind and body, the reason for this brief foray into architecture has been to underline some of the concrete manifestations of American frontier

[59] Baudrillard. *America*. pp. 59-60.
[60] Ibid. p. 59; Jameson. *Postmodernism*. p. 43.
[61] Ibid. p. 44.
[62] Ibid. p. 38. My emphasis.
[63] Ibid. p. 42.

dispersal and its vertical reorganisation. It would be disingenuous, though, to say this century of reorientation (distortion, disorientation) due to the sealing off of horizontal expansion has caused a complete shift to verticality. For example, we see old frontier meandering amalgamated with a fascination for the screen and re-enacted in US car culture, travel along the circulatory paths of the Los Angeles freeway a heightened version of this national trend for a population that David Wyatt describes as 'sick of moving and yet wedded to motion'.[64] The cultural and theoretical engagements with car and freeway as allegory of 'American reality' in the last fifty years are in such abundance to render it almost passé.[65] Yet it endures, especially in relation to Los Angeles, because it is such a strong projection of – and accompaniment to – a territory with a language of mobility and imminence, steeped in financial, cultural and technological excess. In an updated postmodern interpolation of the themes Fitzgerald teased out in *Gatsby*, Bret Easton Ellis's fictional engagement with the bland debauchery of 1980s Los Angeles teens in *Less Than Zero* (1985) reveals the persistent allure of the freeway, its relation to the American margin, and the morally questionable motivations of a nation thrust into another cycle of economic prosperity and advanced hedonism. The advertising that watches over the connecting arteries of the American city is no longer the 'eyes of T.J. Eckleberg' (*GG* 26), but a billboard, 'probably an ad for some resort' emblazoned with the slogan 'Disappear Here'.[66] Returning from a college in the east, the numbing – and like Carraway detached – minimal first-person narration of eighteen-year-old Clay is riven by sightings of the unerring billboard, the leitmotif of disappearance further accentuated by the character's repeated references to '[n]othing', to the fact '[t]here's nothing here' (*LZ* 3-190). Near the end of the novel Clay and his on-off dealer Rip stop and survey a valley of 'wrecked cars' that had 'sailed off into nothingness' below 'one of Mulholland's most treacherous turns' (*LZ* 182). As they leave to the sun rising,

[64] David Wyatt. 'LA fiction through mid-century'. *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of Los Angeles*. Cambridge. 2010. p. 35.
[65] Baudrillard. *America*. p. 52-5. See also Reyner Banham. *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*. London. 1990; and William Alexander McClung. *Landscapes of Desire: Anglo Mythologies of Los Angeles*. Los Angeles. 2000; *Easy Rider* (1969), *Crash* (1973), *Collateral* (2004), *Drive* (2011), and so on.
[66] Bret Easton Ellis. *Less Than Zero*. 1985. London. 2010. p. 30. Henceforth cited as *LZ*.

and turn into a street Clay 'was pretty sure was a dead end', the scene concludes with the following conversation:

> 'Where are we going?' I asked.
> 'I don't know,' he said. 'Just driving.'
> 'But this road doesn't go anywhere,' I told him.
> 'That doesn't matter.'
> 'What does?' I asked, after a little while.
> 'Just that we're on it dude,' he said. (*LZ* 183)

The victims that add to the 'obscene' pyre of cars below Mulholland are 'people who misunderstood the road' (*LZ* 182), who could not navigate its contours or appreciate it for what it is. The insinuation being that those that look for something more from it or for something outside the comforting confines of its circuitry face death. Here the use of the freeway is not a testament to the vitality of techno-industrial progress, nor is it a celebratory regeneration of frontier movement. The channels in and around Los Angeles, as laid out by Ellis, are populated by 'people who drove on the street and saw ghosts; apparitions of the Wild West' (*LZ* 194). The melded body of car and subject are always moving but never going anywhere. It is a state where people are afraid to truly connect – where '[p]eople are afraid to merge on freeways in Los Angeles' (*LZ* 1) – because they are caught between apparitions of the past and the soothing hypnotic illusion of progress and sense of detachment the experience provides.

Amongst the mundane lines, Ellis offers the vision of a city hollowed of meaning, run dry, the characters left to negotiate a chasm of metal, concrete and neon surfaces that defer absence, connected by ambient saloons with names like '*Nowhere Club*, *Land's End*, *The Edge*' (*LZ* 95). A tourist, like Baudrillard, Clay also contemplates the Pacific, 'staring out at the expanse of sand that meets the water, where the land ends', the view – along with a shared state of intense ennui – bringing the ubiquitous '[d]isappear here' (*LZ* 64) slogan into focus as it morphs in the mind from banal advertising, to question, to invitation. Taking its title from a 1977 Elvis Costello song that cuts to the core of the perversions at work in the rise of British fascism, *Less than Zero* ironically toys with the morbid excesses of a cultural

fascism that stalks the blank areas of the American margin. Whether sought through mindless hedonism, the lust and chase for personal gratification, or the pursuit of untapped frontiers, the path of progress and paths to oblivion intersect and can be reached in many ways. And as we shall see in the following sections, the journey along them not only affects the way environments are perceived, but also changes how we perceive the body. As Baudrillard crisply records in his travels across the States, and pertaining here most strongly to the liquidation of boundaries into bodies, machines, and the notion of the frontier, '[e]verything is destined to reappear as simulation'.[67]

Trips through Space, the Edge of Panic

In *America and the World War* (1915), published seven years after his decision not to run for a second term as President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt devoted a chapter entitled 'Utopia or Hell?' to outlining what he considered 'a working and realizable Utopia', a 'world league' of militarily 'efficient civilized nations' functioning post-conflict under a defined set of shared ideologies.[68] Peppered with barbed attacks on other nations, on certain non-American ethnicities, and on Wilsonian principles, Roosevelt's symposium is a curious forerunner to the League of Nations that sketches out a form of virtuous global imperialism. Vying with the Turnerian approach to frontier closure, Roosevelt's extended rediscovery of the frontier as 'grand theme', that stretched back to *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman* (1885) and *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail* (1888), is still present in the league and its telling elevation of 'the White or Anglo-Saxon race that represent progressively higher stages of [civilised] development'.[69] Repeated multiple times, Roosevelt refers to those nations worthy of inclusion in the proposed league as 'contracting powers'.[70] Although an innocuous term for the nations deemed suitable to be formally bound to the league, when given historical and

[67] Baudrillard. *America*. p. 32.
[68] Theodore Roosevelt. *America and the World War*. London. 1915. p. 221.
[69] Richard Slotkin. *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*. New York. 1992. p. 38.
[70] Roosevelt. *America and the World War*. pp. 220-44.

biographical context Roosevelt's overuse of 'contracting powers' becomes more complex and can take on other extra layers of meaning. It hints, for example, at Roosevelt's building anxiety over the American nation's presence on the global stage and its capacity to accumulate more global power independently, the phrase also suggesting that consolidation through the union of nations may be palliative to an underlying concern for the constrictions being placed on previously unhindered American expansionism at this juncture in the early years of the twentieth century. There is also the cachexy of Roosevelt's own state to consider: 'contracting powers' is if not an unconscious reflection then an appropriate summary of a figure whose physical condition and influence over political affairs were markedly on the wane.[71]

In or out of its context, Roosevelt's 'contracting powers' articulates the way in which inner space and outward projection can be so interlinked, this dialectical interchange between internal (individual) condition and external (national) motivation being vital to understanding the US and the rationale behind the regeneration of its frontier(s) throughout the twentieth century. Especially after World War Two, the demarcation of what is kept inside and what remains outside becomes pivotal. Compare the situation in the first decades of the century, for example, with the unfurling of 'The New Frontier' slogan that John F. Kennedy introduced as part of the Democratic Party acceptance speech delivered from the Memorial Coliseum, Los Angeles on 16th July 1960:

> For I stand here tonight facing west on what was once the last frontier…Some would say that those struggles are all over, that all the horizons have been explored, that all the battles have been won, that there is no longer an American frontier. But I trust that no one in this assemblage would agree with that sentiment; for the problems are not all solved and the battles are not all won; and we stand on the edge of a new frontier – the frontier of the 1960's…Beyond that frontier are uncharted areas of science and space…Can we carry through in an age where we will witness not only new breakthroughs in weapons of destruction, but also a race for mastery of the sky and the rain, the ocean and the tides, the far side of space, and the inside of men's minds?...That is the question of the new frontier.[72]

[71] See William N. Tilchin. *Artists of Power: Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and their enduring impact on U.S. foreign policy*. Westport. 2006; for a comprehensive overview of Roosevelt, and information on the last phase of his life including the contraction of malaria, see Nathan Miller. *Theodore Roosevelt: A Life*. 1992. New York. 1994. pp. 236-66.

[72] John F. Kennedy. 'Speeches Accepting the Democratic Nominations'. *New York Times*. 16 July 1960. p. 7.

As pure rhetoric unfastened from domestic economic concerns over the purported freezing of taxes and increases in federal spending, this is the language and myth of the American frontier being boldly reopened, with Kennedy as mouthpiece and conduit for an exuberant generation once again looking, albeit virtually or through a technological intermediary, for ways to explore and magnify the nation's margins.[73]

Of course the fifty year cycle between the presidencies of Roosevelt and Kennedy contained a seismic increase in American influence over global affairs. So far the implication has been that the transmission of the new alternative frontier was largely economic and political. But this section is not wholly about the politico-economic motivations for rekindling interest in new frontiers. Stripping away all other decisions and events leading up to the introduction of the 'New Frontier' as national signature, most of which lie outside the scope of this thesis, if a single technological occurrence broadcast America's might and arrival as the new global power it was the success of the Manhattan Project and the decision to unleash nuclear weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, effectively bringing about Japan's surrender and ending World War II.[74] The unprecedented direct (and to date unrepeated) atomic assault on populated urban targets – on land only just the other side of the Pacific and the old frontier limits – accelerated two very distinct phases in American culture. At one level the late 1940s and 1950s became the apex of an unabashed American consumerism that eclipsed what had been present and interrogated by Fitzgerald twenty years earlier. This was futuristic and fantastic consumption based on technological commodities that drove and enhanced the promotion of family values, home ownership, fiscal prosperity and suburban relocation.

And yet, at another level there was also a strong undercurrent working against this seemingly irresistible acquiescence to the magnetism of mass consumption (and with it

[73] For responses to the domestic impact of 'The New Frontier' see *Kennedy: The New Frontier Revisited*. London. 1998. pp. 1-19, 222-77; and Irving Bernstein. *Promises Kept: John F. Kennedy's New Frontier*. 1991. Oxford. 1993. pp. 118-217.

[74] Written by its director of operations, for a bold account of what lies behind the Manhattan Project, see Leslie R. Groves. *Now It Can Be Told: The Story of the Manhattan Project*. 1962. New York. 1983. pp.253-358.

conformity to a variety of constructed social norms). With the collapse of feasible utopian ideas and political alternatives, the discrepancy between mainstream values and lived experience led to what M. Keith Booker designates as a 'loss of utopian energy' in the years after World War II, a 'decline of the American utopian imagination' that was further exacerbated by a growing constellation of national anxieties.[75] Psychologically one would think that some of these anxieties stemmed from a sense of guilt caused by the fear and long-standing devastation the United States inflicted upon parts of the Japanese population: like radiation from nuclear fallout, the consequences of the attacks reverberating back across the Pacific to where they were launched.[76]

However, this is speculative, a distant consideration when listed alongside the many ominous events in the 1950s that were more immediate to the US. The mounting nervousness among American citizens could be attributed to many contiguous factors, including changes in sexual/social mores, the rise of McCarthyism and ensuing witch-hunts against 'supporters' of conspiratorial communism, the associated cold threat of a Soviet attack, the 'Korean war', and the 'return of the brainwashed…the spiralling arms race, loyalty oaths, fallout and the rising fear of cancer'; all ricocheted through the texts of the era, becoming conspicuously enmeshed with the 'rising interest' in such phenomena as flying saucers, space travel, 'science fiction, cloning and the spiritual supermarket'.[77] Reflected through texts imbibed with the extreme concerns emerging from techno-containment culture, like *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) or Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961), a 'cultural topography of the atomic age' appears that ties in with the global protectionism discussed in chapter three.[78] David Seed explains it as an ambience radiating across the United States at a social level, an ambience capable of inducing 'a national neurosis of suppressed fear'.[79]

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[75] M. Keith Booker. *The Post-Utopian Imagination in the Long 1950s*. London. 2002. pp. 3-5.
[76] First published in 1946, the 1985 edition of John Hersey's *Hiroshima* expands the original account of six stricken survivors, covering a harrowing forty years of recovery from the blast.
[77] Arthur LeGacy. '*The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*: A Metaphor for the Fifties'. *Literature/Film Quarterly*. 1978. p. 292. These themes return, especially in Kunzru, in chapter four.
[78] Alan Nadel. *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism and the Atomic Age*. Durham. 1995. pp. 1-37.
[79] David Seed. *American Science Fiction and the Cold War: Literature and Film*. Edinburgh. 1999. p. 15.

As its hegemonic influence spread over the globe, the type of real and imagined threats outlined above still, somehow, flooded into the consciousness of American citizens. Paranoia clashed and melded with prosperity. To paraphrase Susan Sontag's essay 'The Imagination of Disaster' (1965), many film genres of the era – from noir, to horror, to the cycles of hybrid monster movies – 'bear witness' to these invisible traumas, and in many instances try to 'exorcise' them.[80] Materialising as part of a first wave of anxiety in a post-war American narrative acted out on a global scale, the alien invasion as cultural product was a mirroring of interior conditions and diffidence based on exteriority caused by its new role in international affairs. Although films like *Destination Moon* and *Rocketship X-M* (1950) attempted to depict modernised outward movement through clinical exploratory adventures into space, the upwelling of alien invasion narratives provided a more accurate reflection of the frontier as an ideological referent that lacked weight throughout the 1950s. Of the plethora of alien invasion narratives to reach the screen, *Invaders from Mars* (1953) and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) are two excellent examples of films within the genre that, although bearing witness to trauma and the dialectical conflict between exterior and interior states, refuse to provide the viewer with any kind of cathartic resolution.

Set in the small fictional town of Santa Mira, California, Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* begins with a shot of an incessant rolling cloud formation, given gravitas by Carmen Dragon's portentous score. As the action begins we are introduced to hysterical protagonist Dr. Miles J. Bennell (Kevin McCarthy); within the confines of an emergency ward, after repeatedly bellowing 'I am not insane!' Bennell begins to recount the events of the previous three days leading up to this moment, the shot dissolving into a picturesque vision of Santa Mira where 'at first glance, everything looked the same'. Being the town's GP, Bennell returns early from a medical conference to investigate what their 'one and only psychiatrist' Dr. Danny Kaufman (Larry Gates) describes as the outbreak of 'a strange neurosis, evidently contagious; an epidemic of mass hysteria' that causes family members to

[80] Susan Sontag. 'The Imagination of Disaster'. 1965. *Science Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays*. New Jersey. 1976. p. 124.

identify the conduct of other relatives as detached, abnormal. Those at first considered neurotic for, as Kaufman explains, worrying 'about what's going on in the world, most probably', turn out to be a diminishing group of still human townsfolk that have not yet been taken over by 'the pods': pods capable of replicating the cell structure of an individual before finally consuming its consciousness, personality, and memory, during sleep.

In a cunning reversal of roles, in the sudden switch in perspective between complacency and imminent danger, the true reality of the pod invasion forces Bennell to unsuccessfully make contact with authorities outside the community in the form of the F.B.I. in Los Angeles. While contact with agencies beyond the border is blocked by what is already a seemingly pod-controlled telephone exchange, Bennell explains to old-flame and love-interest Becky Driscoll (Dana Wynter) that '[s]o much has been discovered these past few years, anything is possible…it could be the result of atomic radiation' or 'some weird alien organism'. Unsurprising given what Alan Lovell sees as Don Siegel's fascination with 'the ambiguity of appearances', the motivation for the pod takeover is never revealed as anything other than a cold emotionless survival instinct.[81] Told to Miles and Becky, the town's only remaining unaltered humans, the explanation that the invasion is a result of 'seeds drifting through space' – conveyed by an already converted Kaufman, acting as a stereotypical vessel for this type of exposition – is symptomatic of a text imbued with all sorts of open-ended allegorical connotations.

Non-figuratively these are simply 'alien' seeds. But what type of seeds are they, and what is meant by 'space' (astral, social)? How long have they been 'drifting', and from where? Booker notes that depictions of aliens in films like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* often bear 'suspicious resemblances to Cold War depictions of communists', David Seed also stating that the growth and behaviour of the pods can be read as 'a metaphor of perceptions of Communism as emotionless regimentation'.[82] So these are seeds of automatous communism drifting across American space. Perhaps, but the motifs here are wilfully

[81] Alan Lovell. *Don Siegel: American Cinema*. London. 1975. p. 24.
[82] M. Keith Booker. *Monsters, Mushroom Clouds, and the Cold War: American Science Fiction and the Roots of Postmodernism, 1946-1964*. London. 2000. p. 9; Seed. *American Science Fiction*. p. 134.

ambiguous. The pod's responses and means of interaction are also concomitant with what Herbert Marcuse defined in *One Dimensional Man* (1964) as homogenisation and slavish subservience caused by 'wholesale incorporation' into an 'established order' of corporate consumerism, the pod bodies reborn 'into an untroubled world where everyone is the same'.[83] Both versions maintain the sort of neutrality that allows for equally valid political and apolitical readings dependant on the partiality of the viewer. Also noticed by Barry Keith Grant, in a mise en scène littered with suggestive symbolic imagery is a poster for an unmade film entitled 'Mirror Noir'. The central image in an ironic triptych hanging above the Belicecs' fireplace as the first pod-person is unveiled, it concisely summarises the text's power as a reflective emulation of a society in which the initially terrifying realisation that not just groups of human beings, but also human fate, was now for the first time bound up with the power of its destructive technology.[84]

In the American 1950s, coaxed into existence by films like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *Invaders from Mars*, the considerable distance that had always constituted the binary opposition between human and inhuman, in place since Descartes, becomes very short. Unlike Jack Finney's novel which concludes when the alien force capitulates and flees Earth, Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* ends with the authorities believing the story of the pods and calling through a state of emergency to stop the 'malignant disease spreading across the whole country'; an exhausted Bennell drops back against the wall in a final close-up, knowing that with sleep only hours away conversion into something non-human is at this point inevitable. Even an ending this optimistic was forced on Siegel by Allied Artists, who thought anything else would be a financial disaster, the director's preferred cut being Bennell, just out of the clutches of the chasing horde, screaming 'You're next' while ignored and dismissed as a lunatic by the lanes of commerce passing along Highway 101.[85] With the framing flashback sequences removed and nobody to validate his story, the version Siegel

[83] Herbert Marcuse. *One Dimensional Man*. 1964. London. 1972. p. 57.
[84] Barry Keith Grant. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. London. 2010. pp. 50-62.
[85] For an in-depth account of the production and tensions surrounding the film's release, see Al LaValley (Ed.). *Invasion of the Body Snatchers: Don Siegel, Director*. New Jersey. 1989.

wanted to release gains a very different complexion. The audience – sharing the viewpoint of the unrelenting traffic on the Californian highway – is left with the alarming possibility that Bennell was merely a fantasist invaded with the fears of a paranoiac, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* not a film about fear of the alien as such, but rather a calculated depiction of mid-century frontier collapse and American alienation.

Directed by William Cameron Menzies, *Invaders from Mars* thematically precedes and reiterates much of what is covered in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* but from a child's perspective, the young protagonist David Maclean (Jimmy Hunt) living out the fear of what can be found just under the – geographic, political, technological, dermatological, and in this instance domestic – surface, as his small town experiences extroversion through the actions of an alien invader. The scientifically-curious David witnesses the collision of an alien craft with the land outside his bedroom window. His father (Leif Erickson), inspecting the site the next morning, returns changed and agitated, a mark or scar having appeared on the back of his neck that is later shown to be an implant. As David rushes to warn the rest of the town of his discovery, it is made clear that the series of protective layers within the community – family, friends, police force – have all already been infiltrated by agents displaying the same traits as his father. Shielded from danger by surrogate parents from scientific backgrounds (a physician and astronomer played by Helena Carter and Arthur Franz), the 'hush-hush' work 'at the plant' that his father is involved in but 'can't talk about' is explained to David as, amongst other things, the construction of a nuclear powered rocket that will allow the planet (or rather US) to attack and protect on a universal scale, humanity pushing further into space via a series of proposed space stations. Threatened by the potential of this development, the alien arrival is diagnosed as an attempt to scupper further techno-nuclear frontier progress, the carefully chosen lobotomised automatons remotely controlled by the Martian presence in order to gain access to and sabotage preordained targets, each vassal destroyed by a detonation within the implant if their task is completed or compromised.

There are glaring similarities between this précis and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, substantiating Cyndy Hendershot's claim that a discernible subgenre within the genus of

invasion narratives exists 'which deals with the internal invasion of the human body by an alien force'.[86] This effect is doubled in *Invaders from Mars* when, as the townsfolk flee and the American army make one final attempt to destroy the craft prior to take-off, it is made known to the viewer that everything since the UFO's arrival has been a figment of David's imagination. Furthermore, once woken from the nightmare, the stability of the nuclear home restored, the boy returns to sleep only to be woken once again by the craft's rearrival. The film's coda remains open, David either having a premonition of the actual alien invasion and its consequences before it commences, or trapped between two realities in a hellish recurring dream dominated by the demolition of the safety of the social structure by the contamination of the body.[87] Ingeniously, the tagline that accompanied the 1978 re-release of *Invaders from Mars* billed it as 'A Nightmarish Answer to the *Wizard of Oz*'. What the protagonists of both *Invaders* films are faced with is a version of America they thought to be safe and stable, converted into an uncanny arena that requires nothing less than a total rethinking of what it means to be American and human. In the shadow of the nuclear age, internally adrift in an unbreakable cycle that turns from innocence, through fear, to acute awareness, the truly horrifying aspect in these particular narratives is not the invading alien per se, but that what differentiates human from alien simulation (or perhaps more accurately the corrupted human) is, for the majority, barely perceptible.

By the end of the century the genre could, as Neil Badmington notes, 'circulate only as comedy in the 1990s', the motifs and meanings of the 1950s alien narratives reinterpreted as objects of parody in films like *Mars Attacks!* (1996) and *Men in Black* (1997).[88] Nevertheless, this neglects the recrudescent significance of the earlier texts as portraits of a time and location-specific opposition between us and *us*, with regard to conflicts between Eastern and Western spheres as well as within America itself. If taken at face-value, texts that were once cutting-edge crossbreeds of horror-noir and science fiction can – due to temporal, social,

[86] Cyndy Hendershot. *Paranoia, the Bomb and 1950s Science Fiction Films*. Bowling Green. 1999. p. 39.
[87] Considered too downbeat by UK censors, only eight years after WWII, the British release of *Invaders From Mars* offers a linear narrative arc and therapeutic finale in which the alien craft is destroyed.
[88] Neil Badmington. *Alien Chic: Posthumanism and the Alien Within.* Abingdon. 2004. pp. 1-23.

technological advance – now, indeed, look more like overblown melodramas. Yet they stand as the early psychological responses of characters exploring a neoteric doubleness that meant any legitimate threat from the outside to the 'new' American way also had interior fears mapped onto it. What was supposedly invading from without was also a manifestation of what was within. After all, behaviour aside, the invaded characters are unchanged at their surface: the same people viewed from a different angle in a terrain alight with unstable signification.

For all their presumed lack of sophistication, the alien invasion narratives personified the collapse of the frontier and the erratic modes of displacement and projection that permeated through American society after 1945. From a Marxist perspective, they ask serious questions about who runs the social machine in an age of technological transformation, transmitting fear of the effects from the 'fundamental mechanism of capitalist accumulation'.[89] Other personifications were more local and benign, like the drudgery of the petty bureaucracy Sergeant Finlay (Walter Sande) admits to in *Invaders from Mars*, where, unlike the activities of the alien menace, all calls had 'to be reported' and 'in *quintuplicate*'. The devil may be in the detail, but there is some distance within the larger system between the collation of information on events reported and what is, if ever, made available.[90] In explicating the similarities in structure between (and logic behind) powerful hierarchical civilisations from 'the Pyramid Age' to contemporary American presidencies, Lewis Mumford names the collection of individual ('political and economic, military, bureaucratic and royal') components that have exerted control over recent civilisations as the 'megamachine'.[91] Crudely put, Mumford viewed the two forces spearheading the megamachine as the kingship and priesthood. Entities still reliant on human technology (on physical labour), the latter authenticated the former's claims of proximity to the divine, with the pair forming a reciprocal relationship to subjugate populations through the suggestion of cosmic or religious

[89] Stanley Aronowitz. 'The Production of Scientific Knowledge'. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Basingstoke. 1988. p. 519.
[90] Hence the ever-growing and increasingly fantastic American fascination with conspiracies.
[91] Lewis Mumford. *Technics and Human Development: The Myth of the Machine, Volume I*. New York. 1967. pp. 188-9.

retribution. The 'power complex' still present, the threat replicated with mechanical parts and technologised (what was once a supernatural/divine threat made real), in America's completion and deployment of 'absolute weapons' of destruction we find what Mumford describes as the appearance of the 'far from innocent hallucinations of the "Nuclear Age"'.[92]

Hallucinations strikingly evident in films like *Invasion of the Body Snatcher* and *Invaders from Mars*, Hendershot specifically posits the alien presence in the 1950s as an incarnation of the 'real dangers associated with radiation contamination', a metaphor for – and tangible manifestation of – an invisible corruption of frontier, land and body.[93] Dystopian, implosive, fragmented, these films, amongst many texts of the time, reflect a nascent postmodernism, while also channelling the volatile impact of the splitting atom. Be it corruption through radiation, or through understanding the nature of 'classified information' that Mumford describes as 'the key to any system of control', some of the principal underlying concerns to have plagued the United States since 1945 cluster within this fluctuation between concealment and the danger associated with all forms of exposure.[94] To illustrate this dichotomy, take the language of the 1959 advertising campaign run by the US Atomic Energy Commission (AEC)-approved Union Carbide Corporation, entitled 'Probing the atom…for you':

> Every day brings the benefits of atomic energy closer to our daily living…A longer, healthier life is hopefully ahead, as radiation is helping doctors learn more about the basic processes of life by revealing how certain elements are put to work by the body…The people of Union Carbide will continue their pioneering research in atomic energy…to bring you a brighter future.[95]

Now compare the federal-approved magniloquence of the chemical manufacturer Union Carbide with the AEC documents of the period that photographer Carole Gallagher discovered while researching the military-industrial complex. Declassified in the early 1980s, the documents describe the 'people living downwind of the Nevada test site' as surplus, 'a

[92] Ibid. pp. 198-9.
[93] Hendershot. *Paranoia, the Bomb and 1950s Science Fiction*. p. 41.
[94] Mumford. *Technics*. p. 199.
[95] 'Probing the atom…for you' is taken from *The Saturday Evening Post*. 18 July 1959. See Appendix B. p. 276.

low-use segment of the population' left prone to the vagaries of atmospherics and the fallout from 928 nuclear tests performed there – above and later below ground – between 1951 and 1992.[96] Many that suffered the downwind effects were dismissed as neurotic, or in the case of workers suffering ill-health at the Hanford Site in Washington State merely labelled as 'troublemakers' or 'unpatriotic', it taking almost fifty years for Energy Secretary Bill Richardson to admit that 'workers in 14 nuclear weapon plants had been exposed to harmful levels of radioactive and chemical contamination'.[97] The duplicity of the post-WWII American government is backed in the language of scientific research. In the same year as the Union Carbide advert (1959), Harvard-based medical researcher Henry Beecher published an article entitled 'Experimentation in Man'. In the article it is stressed that under the 'International Code of the World Medical Association', under 'no circumstance should a doctor be permitted to do anything which would weaken the physical or mental resistance of a human being, except in the interests of the patient himself'; yet Beecher bluntly confirms that 'certain types of experimentation in man are essential'.[98]

The traversing of the tightrope between ethics and experimentation within the American power structure seems extremely precarious. Including the cases of human rights being abused in the type of research that Jay Katz would later analyse in *Experimentation with Human Beings* (1972), it would seem that by the 1960s various bodies within the medical profession were willing to resist the Nuremberg Code in the name of further experimentation.[99] They argued the extent that 'significance of consent' played when compared with the value of information gleaned from clinical trials; an absurd position when viewed in the light of the 'human radiation experiments' conducted on around four thousand civilians, children and military staff 'from 1944 to 1974' unearthed by the President Clinton-

[96] Carole Gallagher. *American Ground Zero: The Secret Nuclear War*. Cambridge, Mass. 1993. p. xxiii; for statistical information and history of the tests in Nevada see 'United States Nuclear Tests July 1945 through September 1992', available online at www.nv.doe.gov/library/publications/historical/DOENV_209_REV15.pdf.
[97] Kim Murphy. 'Government Finally Hears a Nuclear Town's Horrors'. *Los Angeles Times*. 5 February 2000. http://articles.latimes.com/2000/feb/05/news/mn-61337/2.
[98] Henry K. Beecher. 'Experimentation in Man'. *J.A.M.A.* 169. 31 January 1959. pp. 461-78. Beecher is best known for his study of placebo effects. There is still speculation over Beecher's understanding and implementation of Nazi techniques in his research into the effects of drugs on patients.
[99] Jay Katz. 'Human Experimentation and Human Rights'. *St. Louis University Law Journal*. 1993. pp. 7-54.

appointed Advisory Committee in 1994.[100] Mumford likens the 'Khans of the Pentagon' and their behaviour to that of the 'divinely appointed founders of the first machine civilization[s]':

> With every increase of effective power, extravagantly sadistic and murderous impulses erupted out of the unconscious. This is the trauma…that punctuates the entire history of mankind with outbursts of collective paranoia and tribal delusions of grandeur, mingled with malevolent suspicions, murderous hatreds, and atrociously inhumane acts.[101]

Mumford's sentiments may be bellicose, but the reality is that factions within the American government encouraged testing and experimentation en-masse on its own people, the vicious cycle of trauma – this time defined by the split atom – acted out both zonally and on individuals. At the zenith of its power and influence, the frontier myth and principles on which it was based had been corroded, the possibility of legitimate expansion decimated in a nation rife with cognitive dissonance. It could be said that while the firmly engrained frontier myth never really went away, the barely concealed methods of exploitation that always drove movement and occupancy – like genocide and slavery – merely became more visible to more people.[102] Russell Jack Dann, one of the military participants in the nuclear tests to be interviewed by Carole Gallagher, equates the nation's actions to being 'like the Holocaust'.[103] Perhaps unknowingly, Dann corroborates the opinions of utopian theorist Ernst Bloch and other Marxist cultural critics like Theodor Adorno, many of whom fled the country, appalled by the effects of mass culture and what they saw as distinct similarities between Nazi Germany and the new post-1945 United States. An opinion that has waxed and waned through recent decades, a recent strain being the 'fascist shift' Naomi Wolf perceives in post-9/11 government policy and charts in *End of America* (2007), is it irrational to offer up the US as technological totalitarian state?[104]

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[100] See Ruth Faden (Ed.). *The Human Radiation Experiments: Final Report of the Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments*. 1995. New York. 1996. pp. 43, 91, 139-420.
[101] Mumford. *Technics*. p. 204.
[102] For examples of the kind of negative profiling of indigenous populations used to justify the clearing of land, see the journals that run alongside the woodcuttings of Theodore De Bry in *Discovering of the New World*. Michael Alexander (Ed.). London. 1976.
[103] Gallagher. *American Ground Zero*. pp. 69-70.
[104] Naomi Wolf. *The End of America: Letter of Warning to a Young Patriot*. Vermont. 2007. p. 21.

Mumford, a native New Yorker who attempted to mask political bias in his writing, concurred with this viewpoint, citing the firebombing of Tokyo during World War II – the testing of the first version of napalm sanctioned three years prior to the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and killing 'nearly 100,000 civilians' in a night – as comparable to 'the practices employed by Hitler's sub-men in extermination camps like Buchenwald and Auschwitz'.[105] Though one was bent on the brutal and methodical attempted extermination of an entire race or religion, Mumford saw distance as the only differentiator when the concern was en-masse destruction of the human body. Albeit an extreme position, Mumford voiced tangible fears over the course of American progress after World War II. For example, in terms of the path of the nation's scientific and technological development, former Nazis including rocket technologist Wernher von Braun were brought in from the European margins to work on government-backed incentives like Operation Paperclip. In von Braun's case this assimilation moved from work on ballistic missiles to leading the development of the technology that would allow Americans to land on the moon.[106] While ideologies can be weakened, denounced, broken apart, Mumford worried that the bloodthirsty trait entwined within such power games, though at times dormant, benign, keeps its allure and remains intact.

At the end of Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove*, Major Kong (Slim Pickens) laughs at his fate and quite literally embraces the nuclear bomb. By 1960 the American nation shared this emotion and sought to move beyond the nuclear jeremiad to Kennedy's New Frontier. No longer insular, they were preparing to 'stand on this frontier at a turning point in history' and again look to the skies, to extend human discovery and once again use technology to explore, or rather exploit, the new possibilities offered by expanding the 'capacity to dominate space'.[107] Here one is reminded of Ralph Waldo Emerson's journal entry from the 20th January 1832: 'Don't trust children with edge tools. Don't trust man…with more power

[105] Lewis Mumford. *The Pentagon of Power: The Myth of the Machine, Volume II*. New York. 1970. p. 256.
[106] See Michael Neufield. *Von Braun: Dreamer of Space, Engineer of War*. New York. 2007. pp. 167-413.
[107] Kennedy. 'Kennedy and Johnson Speeches'. p. 7; in a press conference held on 17th July 1963, Kennedy puts across his enthusiasm for a moon flight, tentatively hinting at cooperation with the Soviet Union to reach space. See John F. Kennedy. *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the President, January 1st to November 22, 1963*. Washington. 1963. pp. 567-8.

than he has, until he has learned to use that little better. Put a button on the foil till the young fencers have learned not to put each other's eyes out'.[108] Short-lived as they were, even Kennedy's symbolic projections of reopening the frontier and creating spatial abundance through a new utopian vanguard housed within them costly attacks on Cuba and south-east Asia.

In *Machine Dreams* (1984), Jayne Anne Phillips juxtaposes the astronauts manning the Apollo 11 'moon landing', an event that would posthumously cement Kennedy's legacy, with the image of 'guys flying Hueys in Nam' at the same moment, making a connection between acquisition of the moon and the military involvement in south-east Asia, and suggesting that if America wholeheartedly embraces the former then it should also face the dystopian reality of its actions in Vietnam.[109] The son (Billy) of the small-town family in *Machine Dreams* disappears while serving in Vietnam, the narrative a cross-section of reactions to his disappearance. When assessing the fight with the Vietnamese, Billy considers it to be analogous with the 'cowboys and Indians, except the Indians are ghosts and they can't lose because nothing really kills them'; with the proximity of war eclipsing the 'far frontier', it is the vernacular of the myth that is extended, in a nation haunted by centuries of violent triumphs and ghosts from its margins.[110] Baudrillard envisioned Vietnam as a dream, one that recurs, as we shall see in the discussion based around 9/11 in chapter three.[111] Conscious of the conflict as a 'high-pitched human experiment' for testing America's technology and weapons capabilities, Billy makes his decision to be an airborne gunner based on the premise that '[i]f I go down in a chopper there will be another chopper in fast, to get me and to protect the machine'.[112] On this evidence, technology and assets prioritised, the America of the last hundred years would have been wise to stop and think over the words of a voice from its past, and 'put a button on the foil'.

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[108] Ralph Waldo Emerson. *The Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson, with Annotations: 1824-32*. Boston. 1909. p. 450.
[109] Jayne Anne Phillips. *Machine Dreams*. 1984. London. 1993. pp. 240-1.
[110] Ibid. pp. 290, 324.
[111] Jean Baudrillard. 'Apocalypse Now'. *Simulacra and Simulation*. 1981. Michigan. 2006. pp. 59-60.
[112] Jean Bethke Elshtain. *Women and War*. New York. 1987. p. 212; Phillips. *Machine Dreams*. p. 282.

The Technological Embrace

In July 2011, NASA launched Atlantis on its final flight. Marking the end of a $209 billion investment in the thirty-year shuttle phase of American space exploitation, the technological spinoff products from the project have totally transformed our everyday lives, from how we are tracked to our networks of communication.[113] Despite the US now paying for Russian rockets to get into space, faced with the possibility that India or China may surpass them as far as the colonisation of space and the mining of its resources, and to the surprise of some that saw the end of the era as America downsizing, within two months NASA had announced the Space Launch System, its 'first exploration-class vehicle since the Saturn V took American astronauts to the moon'. With a provisional August 2025 date set for a manned mission to Mars, its bold and utopian intent is to 'learn more about how the solar system formed, where Earth's water and organics originated and how life might be sustained in places far from our Earth's atmosphere and expand the boundaries of human exploration'.[114] The current NASA administrator and ex-marine Charles Bolden evokes the frontier spirit when talking of the 'shuttle pioneers' that 'have made the next chapter of human space flight possible'; but the quantity of global coverage of what are potentially historic discoveries and advances intimate that while iconic to patriots and space enthusiasts, the excitement elicited in 1969 was the peak in general interest in space activity. In the decades since enthusiasm has turned to apathy: the potential in space, for the majority, has shrunk.[115]

Also evident throughout moments in its history, and especially from the 1960s onwards, the American public have become more (and more) aware of, have learnt to live with, the possibility that they are what writer and Vietnam veteran Tim O'Brien refers to as the victims 'of a very old and terrible lie'.[116] It can be argued that alternative cultures appearing at this

[113] For a brief list of subsidiary commodities see http://www.sti.nasa.gov/tto/shuttle.htm.
[114] More information can be found at http://www.nasa.gov/pdf/588413main_SLS_Web_final.pdf and http://www.nasa.gov/exploration/systems/sls/sls1.html.
[115] Cited from Alok Jha and Richard Luscombe. 'Final countdown for Atlantis marks end of Nasa's shuttle era'. *The Guardian*. 9 July 2011. p. 27.
[116] Tim O'Brien. *The Things They Carried*. 1990. London. 1991. p. 68.

time detached from the mainstream in order to bring themselves out of a state and system perceived to be rife with deceit and misinformation. Indeed, for all sides the events that would eventually lead to defeat in Vietnam made previously solid belief in dominant US political, economic and technological influence over the globe uncertain. And like the NASA astronauts sitting atop and propelled into space by what is to all intents and purposes a controlled hydrogen bomb, on a smaller scale these new alternative cultures adopted the technologies available to find ways for new frontiers to be explored by the individual. As we see in chapters two and four, this unconquered power of the imagination, and its resistance to the closure of ideology, were perceived to be at their countercultural height at the same time as Armstrong's lunar proclamation.

Nevertheless, as Marcuse also saw in 1969, the tussle between individual and the corporatised and politicised free market economy meant any belief in real revolution ended only in further exploitation 'of the ruled by the rulers', opposition commodified and existence becoming a form of 'willing captivity on the part of the ruled, where their very "biological" need-structures have been determined by the institutions controlled by the ruling class'.[117] Frankfurt school associate Max Horkheimer had warned of 'The Authoritarian State' as early as 1940, declaring in a radical attack on state capitalism that 'labor-saving discoveries' would eventually subsume humanity in 'a global mathematical formula, its specific offspring, machines', becoming 'not means of destruction in the literal sense' but through labour force obsolescence making 'not work but the workers superfluous'.[118] The parallels between what Horkheimer saw as liquidation and what we now see as virtualisation are obvious. We see its effects on the subject notably sieved through Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, where in the small town of 'Blacksmith' (itself a redundant occupation in the cybernetic era), Jack Gladney presides over a 'whole department' based around 'Hitler's life and work'.[119] The perfect place in which to incubate a deep state of Marxian false consciousness, Gladney runs a Hitler

[117] Herbert Marcuse. 'An Essay on Liberation.' 1969. *Revolution: The Theory and Practice of a European Idea*. London. 1971. p. 320.
[118] Max Horkheimer. 'The Authoritarian State'. 1940. *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*. Oxford. 1978. p. 95.
[119] Don DeLillo. *White Noise*. 1984. London. 1986. p. 4. Henceforth cited as *WN*.

Studies course initiated at the peak of the counterculture's register in 1968, and which is housed within a culture department 'known officially as American environments' (*WN* 9). Gladney, a victim of his own vanity, caught in a perpetual stasis of his own creation, and obsessed by a pursuit for meaning in the 'latest phase in his [own] dying', responds like this to an interaction with an 'automated teller machine':

> The system had blessed my life. I felt its support and approval. The system hardware, the mainframe, sitting in a locked room in some distant city. What a pleasing interaction. I sensed that something of deep personal value, but not money, not that at all, had been authenticated and confirmed. A deranged person was escorted from the bank by two armed guards. The system was invisible, which made it all the more impressive, all the more disquieting to deal with. But we were in accord, at least for now. The networks, the circuits, the streams, the harmonies (*WN* 189, 46).

The interaction is 'pleasing' as it lets Gladney participate in a 'simulation' of reality mediated by 'a network of symbols' devoid of human complications, humans employed to remove such discrepancies as the 'deranged person' (*WN* 206, 142) – so in effect other humans – from the system in order for it to run smoothly. As a space it is both comforting and over-technologised, the arc of DeLillo's narrative an exercise in showing an individual's dehumanisation, as society, body and death take on new meaning on a frontier of advanced simulation and digital corporate technology. Alongside new commodities and personas, what the virtual space simultaneously provides is the illusion of stripping away human complications, and the expunging of detected impurities.

What is surprising about DeLillo's novel is not the yielding to simulation itself, but that such a state is so firmly ensconced in mainstream American culture as early as 1984, and even somewhere as innocuous as Blacksmith. After all this is not the same genre or for the same audience as the mantic cyberspatial imaginings of William Gibson in the contemporaneous *Neuromancer* (1984). Small town life caught up with futuristic urban metropolis, both mirror the description Mike Davis gives of Los Angeles as a territory where 'mental labor is collectivized in huge apparatuses and directly consumed by big capital', where' '[a]lmost everyone is either on a corporate payroll or waiting hopefully at the studio

gate'.[120] Even the drug of choice in *White Noise*, the death suppressant Dylar, mimics the most Californian of desires that is now transmitted globally: the cult of and lust for eternal youth. And like the frontier, Los Angeles is synonymous with certain modes of exploitation, from the film industry to religious cults, from pornography to the products born from the area's technological industries and popular culture. Parallel to this, the 'new bohemia' Mildred Edie Brady saw as a 'fringe that has always seemed to cut a little deeper into West Coast communities than elsewhere', had, in fact, been present and influential in different guises throughout the twentieth century.[121] Writing in 1947, Brady's critique of William Reich's methods, and by association post-World War II sexual liberation and new perspectives on inter-human relations in a time of lethal global technology, hinges on an understanding of the new alternatives as 'a combination of anarchism and concepts related to psychoanalysis which together yield a philosophy on one hand that you must abandon the church, the state, and the family…and on the other offering sex as the source of individual salvation in a collective world that's going to hell'.[122] Brady was, unsurprisingly, an economist.

However flawed or ludicrous, the work of William Reich is one of countless examples of movements that mimic and predate the virtual in the search for a limitless window into an area that replicates the obsession fixed in American and frontier mythology for uncluttered space, what Aldous Huxley described in 1927 as a feasible outpost for starting 'life with a clean slate'.[123] Huxley and many other intellectuals of the period were forced to accept that 'the future of America' was 'the future of the world', much of the literature of the time reflecting this transnational antipathy for the inescapable movement toward totalitarian developments and technocratic systems of control.[124] Although as the 'new phase of expanded "post-industrial" consumerism with its models and vocabulary firmly based in the United States' became more entrenched, as emphasised by Raymond Williams, these

[120] Davis. *City of Quartz*. p. 18.
[121] Mildred Edie Brady. 'The New Cult of Sex and Anarchy'. *Harper's Magazine*. April 1947. p. 312.
[122] Ibid. p. 314.
[123] Aldous Huxley. 'The Outlook for American Culture'. *Harper's Magazine*. August 1927. p. 269.
[124] Ibid. p. 265.

writers also became magnetically drawn, especially in Los Angeles, towards an increasingly mediated dialectical arena that contained all the dystopian *and* utopian elements housed within that system.[125] Huxley moved to Hollywood and lived in and around southern California for the rest of his life, *Ape and Essence* (1948), a surrealistic deconstruction of post-apocalyptic Los Angeles in 2108, being his most obvious and most cited example of human and structural atomic devastation.

David Dunaway correctly recognises *Ape and Essence* as an important text in defining the anti-mythography of Los Angeles, its relentless and nihilistic assault on technology and the perversion of science an early indication of the transition from alienation of the subject to the kind of environmental disruptions and psychic fragmentation that, whether denounced or celebrated, would be most closely associated with the heights of postmodernism.[126] *Ape and Essence* is both of its time and a political, social, and technological marker for the fears that swept through the West in the latter half of the twentieth century. However, it is in *Brave New World*, written five years prior to his arrival in California, that Huxley managed to produce a prophetic allegory of a society that was, still is, and I would propose will remain instantly recognisable for some time to contemporary audiences. The same themes, relating to the spread of the US into later generations and other cultures, are also extremely pronounced in the work of French author Michel Houellebecq. Playfully recalibrating Huxley's hollow characterisations and montage techniques, in his turn-of-the-century novel *Atomised* (*Les Particules élémentaires*, 1999) Houellebecq uses the half-brothers Bruno and Michel as rhetorical vessels through which to mirror and comment on the literary styles of Aldous and Julian Huxley, the former described as a 'terrible writer'.[127] But what Huxley lacked in characterisation and narrative flair is balanced out by prescience of impending biological and psycho-social conditions. The 'World State' Huxley creates is one defined by a lack of humanity, or at least a global state whose rigid principles demand that 'the machine turns,

[125] Raymond Williams. *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*. London. 1989. p.119.
[126] David King Dunaway. *Huxley in Hollywood*. New York. 1989. pp. 222-3.
[127] Michel Houellebecq. *Atomised*. 1999. London. 2000. p. 188. Henceforth cited as *Ato*.

turns and keeps on turning'.[128] And Huxley's vision emulates what we now see in the transferral of information; the body, like data, capable of being divided and assessed in fragments, then reassembled as a way of understanding the material order and for optimum functionality. What begins to sound like SF fantasy is here in the everyday through cybernetic endeavours like those undertaken by the National Library of Medicine, their Visible Human Project launched in 1994 being the microscopic dissection and realisation of a male and female cadaver as a data set within a virtual environment, the bodies transformed digitally into both a human and posthuman spectacle.[129]

As early as the first paragraph of *Brave New World* the omniscient narrator, projecting a 'harsh thin light' into the darkness, looks 'hungrily' for 'some draped lay figure', only to find the 'bleakly shining porcelain of a laboratory' (*BNW* 1). Absenting the human figure in favour of a glimpse into the Central London Hatchery, the reader is instantly immersed in a technocratic society in which the unconscious of each state-constructed individual, through a strict caste system, is assigned an 'inescapable social destiny' and amalgamated into a networked system of programmed beliefs and values (*BNW* 13). In 1940, growing ever more disillusioned by what he believed to be a lack of political focus in Huxley's future-representation, George Orwell wrote that 'though Brave New World was a brilliant caricature of the present (the present of 1930), it probably casts no light on the future'.[130] And yet Huxley's World State projects out to a point far beyond the East/West dichotomy and state-complications of Orwell's era. By propelling his society five centuries into the future, Huxley's caricature has remained relevant during America's ascent to a position of global cultural dominance, *Brave New World* demanding, in Marcuse's terms, the redefinition of 'totalitarian' as something other than just 'a terroristic political coordination of society'.[131] Huxley could clearly see that the logical epoch of Western democracy could turn out to be a highly refined form of capitalist consumption governed by a powerful yet benign administration, its

[128] Aldous Huxley. *Brave New World*. 1932. London. 1994. pp. 1, 37. Henceforth cited as *BNW*.
[129] See Catherine Waldby. *The Visible Human Project*. London. 2000. To view and tour the bodies see http://www.nlm.nih.gov/research/visible/visible_human.html.
[130] Cited from *Aldous Huxley: The Critical Heritage*. London. 1975. p. 333.
[131] Marcuse. *One Dimensional Man*. p. 17.

inhabitants experiencing something akin to a virtual reality system: an artificially layered world perceived as a natural reality in a society in which the 'principle of mass production' when 'applied to biology' (*BNW* 5) has succeeded in producing a stable and passive global population. In a feature not wholly unfamiliar to the reader of the older utopian novel, it is the idea of the technological state in *Brave New World* that assumes the central role. Even a character as influential as the 'Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning' (*BNW* 10), as the title implies, is placed in an administrative role once reserved for the machine: there to oil the cogs of the state apparatus.

In *White Noise*, DeLillo depicts the America of the 1980s as a nation heading further towards – but not yet arriving at – the society found in *Brave New World*. If the frontier could now only be recreated through myth, metaphor, through simulation, then America's successful exportation of its popular culture and socio-political ideals, as Huxley was one of the first to predict, was having as profound an effect on its own population as it was in Europe and beyond during this period of rapid expansion. Functioning as both a contemporary dystopian nightmare and a satire of the confident post-WWII belief in a commodity-based modern utopia, *White Noise* delves thoroughly into the disillusionment an individual faces while existing within a system of illusory beliefs, in an ephemeral society where the kind of object-obsolescence Marx gestured towards in the famous dictum '[a]ll that is solid melts into air' is heightened, for the time, to its fullest extent.[132] Gladney is both prey and participant in a state that can only offer reality interwoven with the national predilection for instantly renewable counterfeit identities and the desire to calculate and acquire synthetic borders; suffering the 'myoclonic jerk', the symptom reflects the subject's existence within – at the very best – the 'muscular contraction[s]' of a 'simulation' (*WN* 18, 206) mediated by military, scientific and entertainment technologies. The sang-froid which overwhelms Gladney at the end of the novel is not so much a victory over a system that continues to gather its 'terrible data', as it is a relinquishing of the self to the state, leading to a release

[132] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels 'Bourgeois and Proletarians'. 1848. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. http://www.anu.edu.au/polsci/marx/classics/manifesto.html.

from the need to control the environment as 'I' becomes 'we' (*WN* 325) in an acceptance of living life instead of death.

If Gladney is the product of a society controlled and a decade watched over by the neo-conservatism of the New Right, Bruno and Michel are used in *Atomised* as ciphers through which Houellebecq launches a scalding attack on the incorporation of 1960s US liberalism into French society, and on its eventual corruption of French left-wing politics. Emotionally and psychologically scarred by their mother's involvement with the Californian Esalen commune and the free-love movement, the novel charts the divergent paths of the half-brothers, Bruno pursuing increasingly deviant sexual acts in order to satiate his lust, Michel totally rejecting sexual intimacy and dedicating his time to rigorous scientific research. At the end of the text the narrator is revealed to be a cloned human writing a retrospective biographical account of Michel's life from the possible near-future of 2079, Michel's work around the turn of the new millennium standardising the genetic code of all animal species being the catalyst for a final 'metaphysical mutation' (*Ato* 5) in human kind. The briefly summarised progression of cloned humanity during the twenty-first century brings an end to the egotism and cruelty inherent in our social system, the introduction and evolution of a genetically manufactured asexual species, unlike that in *Brave New World*, finally offering an alternative utopian element to the geographic frontier, one that is inverted, embodied.

The points of contact may differ, but the motto of 'COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, STABILITY" (*BNW* 1) is as relevant to the cloned society of *Brave New World* as it is the one existing at the end of *Atomised*. Both are in accord with what Krishan Kumar considers species living in 'an eternal present, with no idea of a future or a past'.[133] Taught to live in the moment only, the epiphanic vision of sex and 'universal leisure' Huxley took from a visit to California in the late 1920s concentrates on disposing of 'high art' in preference for 'agreeable sensations' (*BNW* 201) that are easily consumed.[134] It comes as no surprise that, after being hypnopaedically indoctrinated to think that 'ending is better than mending', and with the

[133] Krishan Kumar. *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*. Oxford. 1987. p. 266.
[134] Huxley. 'Outlook'. p. 267.

central administration banning 'old things…particularly when they're beautiful', the whole notion of art is sanitised in favour of the impermanence and technological blandness of entertainment that promotes 'self-indulgence up to the very limits imposed by hygiene and economics' (*BNW* 43, 199, 216). The 'feelies' (*BNW* 204), a multi-sensory interactive cinema experience providing sexual stimulation, is state run and used as a placatory device, as is the consumption of all entertainment.

While such public sexual displays still seem farfetched, the histories of the pornographic industry and technological mediums are unquestionably interlinked.[135] If by no means mainstream, this has led to unprecedented levels of direct human-machine interaction, and human-to-human interconnectivity via machine through the use of communications technology, as a means of exploring what is possible as far as sexual frontiers and haptic technology by companies like 'RealTouch' and what is quaintly termed the field of 'teledildonics'.[136] This process takes the sexual exchange away from intimacy into the world of prosthetics and the autoerotic, with sex as a technological commodity as intrinsic to Huxley's future-state as it is now. Distanced, the sexual exchange is used, as ever, as a means of acquiring capital, be it gratification through direct contact with other humans or via technological means. Gladney's wife Babette even offers sex as payment for the wonder drug Dylar, justifying the sexual exchange as 'a capitalist transaction…I did what I had to do' (*WN* 194). So the body can be an object for exchange in material reality as it is in *White Noise*, or transformed into an object upon new cyberspatial frontiers as it is currently, the subject turning from customer, to commodity, or to virtual tourist in the act of consumption. Consumers are now invited into communications technology to make contact; contracted to it, a version of frontier expansionism is sold, the skin becoming a territory, both inside and outside, that enters into a dynamic relationship with the technology it encounters.

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[135] Brian McNair. *Mediated Sex: Pornography and Postmodern Culture*. New York. 1996. pp. 1-21, 41-59; and Peter Nowak. *Sex, Bombs, and Burgers*. Toronto. 2010. pp. 197-224.

[136] For an excitable prediction of where teledildonics could go, see Howard Rheingold *Virtual Reality: Exploring the Brave New Technologies of Artificial Experience and Interactive Worlds - From Cyberspace to Teledildonics*. 1991. New York. 1992. pp. 345-91; for a realistic overview of where the technology is at now, see Patchen Barss. *The Erotic Engine: How Pornography Has Powered Mass Communication from Gutenberg to Google*. Ontario. 2010. pp. 281-92.

It is this intertessellation between exploitation and consumption that now stirs 'the sigh of the oppressed creature', is 'the heart of a heartless world'; as we shall see further in the latter sections of the thesis, it is technology that has replaced religion – and in specifically American terms also frontierism – as the 'opium of the people', its power to seduce and the subtlety of people's addiction to it making it a potent danger in the new millennium, as well as a field that still evokes dreams of progress and human emancipation.[137] Marx's overarching concern was how the privileged minority's control over material production influences the consciousness of society. In 1899 US economist and social critic Thorstein Veblen accurately described a new phase of 'vicarious consumption', in which society promotes the aspiration for all to consume 'food, clothing, dwelling and furniture' in ever-increasing volumes.[138] As I will detail later, especially in chapter four, Western civilisation has built a complex and paradoxical relationship with technology and the consumption of products in the hundred years since this observation. The human subject now desires faster forms of communication and extra convenience, while not noticing the degree of attachment to the expensive communications technology that facilitates it, addictions that are normalised and integrated into daily routines and everyday behaviours. Published the same year as the release of *Invaders from Mars*, *Junky* (1953) by William Burroughs is a piece of reportage that pinpointed these national addictions early, expressing them through the 'junk' metaphor and the theorising of the virus. In the novel, heroin becomes a variety of body technology and frontier proxy, a form of escape and entrapment, the use of it 'over a period of years' creating an impression of expansion undercut by 'the habit of directing attention inward'.[139] Technological progress and the progress of humanity cannot, it would seem, run absolutely parallel.[140] The increasing power of modern machinery has been juxtaposed by a diminishing in the practical nature of the human animal. As Heinrich Gladney remarks to his father: '[w]e think we're so great and modern…[n]ame one thing you could make' (*WN* 137).

[137] Karl Marx. *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'*. 1844. Cambridge, 1972. p. 131.
[138] Thorstein Veblen. *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. 1899. Electronic Text Center: University of Virginia. http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/VEBLEN/veblenhp.html.
[139] William S. Burroughs. *Junky: The Definitive Text of 'Junk'*. 1953. London. 2003. p. 135.
[140] The temporal effects of this disconnection of technological progress from human perception are a major theme of Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* (2003), discussed in greater detail in chapter three.

Producers of technology, in many senses, share an ahistorical cynicism for human memory and the past. In ideological terms it is the dominant culture that writes history while the disenfranchised – read Emerson, Whitman – are left to their poetry, as technocrats seek to create and sell an intangible something that exists just beyond the present. For example, as microchip technology in computers and mobile communication devices is made cheaper, the individual is given access to an ever-expanding platform for storing virtual memory. With the necessity to store information in the brain made almost obsolete, the individual – as personified by Babette Gladney in *White Noise* – begins to forget 'names, faces, phone numbers, addresses, appointments, instructions, directions': the result is a condition that is 'more or less happening to everyone', an impairment of human memory on a grand scale, the only consolation being the omnipresence of the machine, in case the individual should 'need reminding' (*WN* 52, 5) of its place or purpose. This severing of humanity from past and future has caused a corrosion in the psychological state of the species, the fascination with memory paired with a revaluation of historicity being a state Andreas Huyssen deems as 'the implosion of temporality in the expanding synchronicity of our media world'.[141] The void in our existence has been at least partially filled by marketing the by-products of technological advance, gadgets and status symbols providing reassurance in the act of consumption. Houellebecq takes the modern fixation with gadgets and the desire to escape into the technological margin to an alarming extreme, when Bruno, by this point suffering from a variety of personality disorders, is shown 'sat off to one side playing Tetris on his Gameboy' (*Ato* 312), oblivious to the scene of his mother's death – his mother a product of 1960s American sexual liberation – occurring in the same room.

Key to Houellebecq's narratives is the joylessness attached to the commodity, especially in terms of Western libidinal pleasures and a strongly US-influenced export industry of cultural products defined by virtual fantasy. On this frontier love is subsumed by fetish, desire is dulled by apathy and saturation. Houellebecq's point is that in contemporary culture the individual can find as much symbolic meaning in death or a 'Christian tract', as it can in a

[141] Andreas Huyssen. *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*. New York. 1995. p. 100.

'3 suisses' (*Ato* 143-4) mail-order catalogue or a video game, the act of worship or desire to fill space not disappearing, but transferred into the veneration of technological objects. The acceptance of life without a conception of heaven, of life without a further plausible geographic space to inhabit, and the subsequent attempts to quell these finite limitations, as well as those of the 'inner clock of the organism', have produced an intense psychological reaction in the human subject.[142] However, it would seem that humanity still cannot cope with a complete absence of faith or myth. The pervading story of the last century, and this chapter, has been the shaping of American energies in the void left by the frontier, the texts chosen showing an implicit understanding that a return to nature and a previous pastoral existence is anathema to a society in which the 'only cure' now 'for science is more science'.[143] Mirrored by the weakening of religion as a viable metaphysical concept, the impact of technology on what death means and the value of human life becomes a negotiation. In *Brave New World* dying is part of the state programming, a matter of course for a population consumed and exploited to the very last, each individual cremated so the phosphorous can be harnessed, making humanity 'socially useful' (*BNW* 65) even after death: a society where soma is administered to the living so that people can enjoy 'Christianity without tears' (*BNW* 217).

We see this already everywhere, from the motivations and actions of plastic surgery addicts, to the obsessive ingestion of dietary supplements by futurist Ray Kurzweil, all behaviours enacted to conceal or stall the terrible truth of our decaying bodies.[144] In Kurzweil's case this is probably to be expected, much of his written work used to define what he views as 'the Singularity':

> A [near-]future period during which the pace of technological change will be so rapid, its impact so deep, that human life will be irreversibly transformed. Although neither utopian nor dystopian, this epoch will transform the concepts that we rely on to give

[142] Jameson. *Postmodernism*. p. 155.
[143] Aldous Huxley cited from David Bradshaw. *The Hidden Huxley: Contempt and Compassion for the Masses 1920-1936*. London. 1994. p. 106.
[144] See Ray Kurzweil. 'Never Say Die: Live Life Forever'. http://www.wired.com. 2 December 2005. http://www.wired.com/medtech/health/news/2005/02/66585.

> meaning to our lives, from our business models to the cycle of human life, including death itself.[145]

As Steven Shaviro rightly points out, this posthuman fantasy of full immersion with the machine, where the exponential growth of processing power gazumps space, and social, economic, and political circumstances are bypassed, reads as a form of narcissism and projection 'of an infantile fantasy of omnipotence'.[146] It is a projection in which Kurzweil seems to blissfully ignore the frictionless union of material object and machine that has already been played out by entities like financial institutions, his fantasy an unwitting recreation of a point that capital has already reached. What Kurzweil ignores in his predictions is who wields power and who controls the speed at which the majority receive new technological products and innovations. Potential and application does not correlate with what is possible or made available.

Nevertheless, while many would advocate an end to the conception of human development that Kurzweil seems trapped in but dreams of the technology to escape from, the pertinent question is, in the absence of mother and father, what authority would take responsibility for the process of establishing sexual and social (human) identity if/when the ascendance of artificial intelligence is realised? And what would be the effects? As far as cloning, current opinion is divided with some believing by 'rejecting their biological destiny as mothers' cloning will lead to woman's full emancipation from the patriarchy.[147] While others – and it is certainly the case in *Brave New World* – see the process as the pinnacle of the masculine order: an end to the biological attachment to woman in favour of the machine. Any answer to this can only be speculative, and rests on whom, in the event, is given licence to organise the new social matrix. Like the French term *the little suicide* or the 'complex knots and interlacing links' that pattern the 'Book of Kells' (*Ato* 360-1), it is true to say the interrelationship of sex and death in the human mind is still inextricably linked. The detachment of this connection could be seen as another move towards what Houellebecq

[145] Ray Kurzweil. *The Singularity is Near*. 2005. London. 2006. p. 7.
[146] Steven Shaviro. 'The Singularity is Here'. *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction*. London. 2009. p. 104.
[147] Kumar. *Utopia and Anti-Utopia*. p. 265.

regards as the slow 'suicide of the West' (*Ato* 284), the further commodification of sex, and more specifically reproduction, a victory for capitalism at the expense of the family unit: be it blood-related or surrogate, the last line of defence 'separating the individual from the market' (*Ato* 136).

As mind and body integrate with technology, so too does what is left remaining of the myth of the American frontier. Western civilisation is gradually dissolving into, and yet still in control of, digital forms of global technology and communication. These new frontiers run disturbingly close to the patterns of their material predecessors. In terms of exploiting that space, innovators like Kurzweil, Bill Gates and Steve Jobs are made into heroic figures, pioneers. Covered in greater detail in the next chapter, master/slave relations are repeated and embedded in the technological apparatus and its configuration. The philanthropic work of the 'Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation' is enlightening.[148] The Microsoft brand looked at in more detail in the final chapter, the foundation itself pours some of the vast profits from the corporation into improving 'global health', disbursing a colossal $26 billion by 2010.[149] Under the auspices of global health care, ninety-five percent of the foundation's spending is invested in a portfolio preoccupied with 'returns', with an emphasis on shares in the fields of biomedicine and genetic engineering.[150] What seems like the drive towards a new frontier of universal health and prosperity is another example of vast amounts of wealth being flushed from public into private sectors, and the reinforcement of the already influential corporate fields of insurance, medicine and pharmaceuticals within the global market. The separating lines between gender and race increasingly blurred by that market, we as a species are now unashamedly the *other*, the overseer of and native that is exploited within a technological space where ethnicity and gender is secondary to the body itself. On the cybernetic frontier neutralisation of gender and race is not absolute, but possible, any*body* with access and

[148] See http://www.gatesfoundation.org.
[149] Andrew Bowman. 'The Flip Side to Bill Gates' Charity Billions'. *New Internationalist Magazine*. 1 April 2012. http://www.newint.org/features/2012/04/01/bill-gates-charitable-giving-ethics/.
[150] Robyn Dixon, Charles Piller, and Edmund Sanders. 'Dark cloud over good works of Gates Foundation'. *Los Angeles Times*. 7 January 2007. http://www.latimes.com/news/la-na-gatesx07jan07,0,2533850.story; for a breakdown of the investments see http://www.nwrage.org/content/bill-gatess-so-called-philanthropic-foundation-buys-monsanto-and-goldman-sacks-stocks.

willing to engage with the space free to sell, be sold to, and consumed: increased hybridity meets new channels of communication and sustains endemic exploitation.

Take, for example, the Human Genome Project. Tagged by the head of the project Francis Collins as a biological endeavour 'more significant than splitting the atom or going to the moon', although completed in 2003 the data still being analysed from its attempts at decoding the human genetic structure remain for the most part in and around the laboratory.[151] Currently serving as Director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the work Collins is doing with various stem cell lines has been federally backed and approved by the Obama administration, protected by a strict pledge that such research, for now at least, 'never opens the door to the use of cloning for human reproduction'.[152] But as Robert Pepperell states, there are still unknown potentialities as far as what can be achieved through the 'genetic manipulation of the human species'.[153] Balanced against the unwavering optimism displayed by Kurzweil for the potential of AI to reach the point of 'Singularity' are films like *Moon* (2009), the full-length directorial debut of Duncan Jones, in which the affordability of nanotechnology has reached a stage for 'Lunar Industries Ltd.' that it makes employing a set of clones to oversee a harvesting operation on the far side of the moon cheaper than leaving the work to non-organic machinery.

Having found a way of extracting vast quantities of helium-3 and transforming it into an energy resource serving the 'energy needs of nearly 70% of the planet', the American corporation employ a single clone of one of their original astronauts Sam Bell (Sam Rockwell) to man the lunar station in isolation on a three year contract. One of scores of Sam Bell clones secretly stored on the lower deck of the station, the apparatus of the corporation induce active clones at the beginning of every three year cycle, and convince them as they gain consciousness that they crashed and were injured upon arrival from

[151] Cited from a discussion with Collins on CNN on 6th April 2000, a transcript of which can be viewed online at http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0004/06/nsst.00.html.
[152] 'First new stem cell lines approved for funding under Obama guidelines'. *CNN*. 2 December 2009. www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/12/02/new.stem.cells/index.html#cnnSTCText; for federal support of the research see 'Federal judge allows stem-cell research to continue'. 27 July 2011. http://www.cnn.com/2011/US/07/27/stem.cell.lawsuit/index.html.
[153] Robert Pepperell. *The Posthuman Condition*. 1995. Bristol. 2003. p. 9. Papers and statistics on the HGP can be found at http://www.ornl.gov/sci/techresources/Human_Genome/home.shtml.

Earth. Fitted with 'memory implants', the 'uploaded memories of the original Sam Bell' – thoughts of a loving wife, small child – are also used to try and ensure the clone remains sane and motivated for the duration of their three year contract.

The existence of the clone conforms to the phenomenological perspective on humanity put forward by Maurice Merleau-Ponty: that '[m]an is a historical idea and not a natural species'.[154] Itself an attempt to break out from the Cartesian subject-object dualism that places 'man' at the very centre of 'things', the representation of the clone is also a contestation of humanity given primacy over all other species due to the rational mind. Such decentring of humanity's perceived superiority over other sentient beings has been a staple of science fiction from *Forbidden Planet* (1956) to *Blade Runner* (1982). Yet *Moon* is a very powerful example of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy transferred from human to non-human; that for any sentient creature, perception is constructed through the irremovable connection of subject and object, in the intertwining dialectical relationship between body and environment. Enclosed within a false environment, the premature release of a second Sam Bell clone due to the 'malfunctioning' of his predecessor causes them to meet and become aware that the corporation, the constructors of this new world, 'lied to us…[t]hey lied to us from the beginning'.[155]

Inverting the Cartesian perspective, it is the clone, the 'machine' that displays the kind of 'reason', the kind of humanity that 'causes us to act'.[156] The possessors of a new frontier and resource to commodify, it is Lunar Industries Ltd. that embodies the role of the machine, exploiting the clones by programming them with real human memories and emotions and then incinerating them rather than sending them 'home' at the end of their three year life-cycle. Not overtly sinister, the most striking aspects of Lunar Industries Ltd. are its cold-hearted sterility and insincerity in dealing with sentient beings as disposable products, and the sort of corner-cutting you would expect from a corporation fuelled by bio-industrial greed,

[154] Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *The Phenomenology of Perception*. 1962. London. 1992. p. 170.
[155] This echoes O'Brien's previous comment on 'lies' and American perception.
[156] René Descartes. *A Discourse on the Method of Correctly Conducting One's Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences*. 1637. Oxford. 2008. p. 47.

whose promotional material emphasises that ‘He-3 = Power’. The Sam Bell clones, after all, are cheaply made, shown deteriorating prior to the 3 years throughout which they are meant to function: the slaves of a company selling ‘clean fuel’ obtained through dirty methods. Escaping the limited existence provided by the corporation for its own purposes, the aware Sam Bell clone heads to Earth stowed away inside a shuttle meant for carrying supplies of He-3. The clone, hurtling towards a new frontier of his own, is placed in a position of privilege. Not only is he free, but unlike his human counterparts is now fully conscious of his own origins, on a journey that will bring him face-to-face with the creator(s) of life, what in his reality is a version of God. In *Moon*, what seems like a stable reality becomes a cluster of possibilities.

Where once there was separation, everything now, from the cell, to the body, to the frontier, bears some resemblance to the cybernetic system. In the United States and its exploitation of the frontier, humanity has always, at some level, been regarded as machine, its society a mechanical construction. As a nation America has overseen the continuing troubled transition of our culture from industrial and organic to cybernetic and cyberspatial. During this time, the frontier has stretched through modernism and postmodernism to the technological era beyond them, where the lines between human and machine, like those between material and virtual, are becoming ever more blurred. While the journey towards any final union of the cybernetic with the organic is far from over, the repercussions or point of landing far from clear, both astral and technological space have provided new versions of the ontological clean slate, mollifying simulations of the virgin land for new generations of pioneers in the seeking out of the frontier. However, the gift of technology and the opening of virtual frontiers have been paid for at the expense of depth and substance. It is the job of directors, authors, and cultural critics to reflect the reality of this transition. As the peripheral figure that traverses the margins of contemporary existence, in likening Houellebecq’s work to that of a ‘zombie back from the dead’ to tell us ‘what it is like’, friend and fellow novelist

Frédéric Beigbeder suitably defines the position of the writers and artists adrift within the technological frontier.[157]

For some, like Thomas Pynchon, the Californian edge of the frontier represented a 'little port of weirdness', offering a loose form of comfort and protection from a corporatised nation of corrupt institutions.[158] I would like to end the chapter though with a very different perspective on the US frontier and its technological progress. In Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) – its screen adaptation released the same year as *Moon* – the ashy liminal space found in the *Great Gatsby* now blows 'in loose swirls over the blacktop' and covers the entire nation.[159] From one angle *The Road* is an ode to a young son from an old father, instilled with all the fears associated with disconnection through death. But it is also a hymn to the frontier: the transposition of the collective American dream into the world of symbolic nightmare. Plump abundance is replaced with emaciation, consumption made cannibalistic, with any living food source transformed into the highest form of commodity, the 'grocery cart' just a travelling storage receptacle essential for survival in a territory where '[e]xpensive electronic equipment sat unmolested on the shelves'.[160]

Survivors of an unnamed catastrophe in a country 'looted, ransacked, ravaged…[r]ifled of every crumb', the father retains the pistol as instinctively as his understanding that 'everything depended on reaching the coast', the father and son forced to repeatedly remind themselves that they are 'still the good guys'.[161] When they arrive at the shore they find nothing. They are met with a view of the 'the ocean vast and cold and shifting heavily like a slowly heaving vat of slag', nothing beyond it but a 'gray squall line of ash'.[162] Forced to turn inland, all that remains for the father is to face the chill of death, and to cling to the hope of living on in a child's whisper. Millennia of human progress are stripped away in a relative

[157] One is reminded here of Haraway's 'cyborg'; Beigbeder cited from Louise Wardle. 'The Outsider'. *The Guardian*. 5 April 2002. http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2002/apr/05/fiction.michelhouellebecq.
[158] I am thinking here of Pynchon's trilogy of novels, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965), *Vineland* (1990), and *Inherent Vice* (2009); see Michael Ventura. 'Phantasmal America'. *L.A. Weekly*. 29 August – 4 September 1986. http://www.steveerickson.org/articles/phant.html.
[159] Cormac McCarthy. *The Road*. 2006. London. 2007. p. 2.
[160] Ibid. p. 98, 195.
[161] Ibid. pp. 136, 29, 81.
[162] Ibid. p. 230.

instant, *The Road* a stark reminder of what abides just beneath the surface of the technological embrace.

But let us go back to the future for a moment. Adopting the role of Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor, Mustapha Mond – the Resident Controller of Western Europe, another administrative figure in Huxley's *Brave New World* – sanguinely explains to the three rebels that the cloned human, even after 'decanting', lives life inside 'an invisible bottle' (*BNW* 203) placed over it by the centralised system. The size of the bottle, of the simulation, depends on the imagination, intellect, or wealth of the individual inside it. The transparency of the object makes many subjects unaware of its presence, still believing in the veneer of freedom that is part of its disguise. In 'The American Scholar', Emerson identifies the 'literature of the poor…the philosophy of the street, the meaning of household life' as the 'topics of the time', then asks if: 'it is a sign – is it not? – of new vigor when the extremities are made active'.[163]

Herein are the spatial and temporal parameters of the margin, and the American fascination with free space, 'extremities' as apparent to Emerson and the frontier themes here as they are in the chapter on the emergence of Hip Hop that follows. Held together by patterns (of action, motivation, and behaviour), the frontier or margin is now housed within and continually reshaped by the conversation between the industry of capital and technology. It is an idealised metaphor, one tendency within a web of intertwined forces corrupted in the act of simulation. And yet it has always been corrupt to a degree, the fragmentation and reoccurrence of a national consensus that trades in exploitation and invisible addictions. The body is now a frontier in itself, but it is also set adrift in a new technological wilderness. Suffice to say, that unlike the words found in the poetry of the clones that transcribe the death of 'man' at the beginning of *Atomised*, caught in the margins we can only aspire to be anywhere near their level of peace and comfort, being 'settled by the water's edge' (*Ato* 7).

[163] Emerson. 'The American Scholar'. p. 102.

2.

'Hip Hop Lives'?: Virtual Arenas, Survival Wars and the Incorporated Subculture

> Take a look at me now, I'm really your creation
> A tech-neo-logical, anti-human mutation[1]
> KRS ONE, 'French Connection' (1997)

As well as surveying its appearance and history, the function of this chapter is to assess the strength of Hip Hop as what Mitchell and Feagin categorise as a 'culture of resistance': whether it still is or ever truly was a legitimate arena for expressing opposition to oppressive ideologies and dominant practices within the United States, and so by default the global culture over which it still holds influence.[2]

The previous chapter rested on an interpretation of the conflicting narratives emanating from the exhaustion of the frontier as a topographic border. A schism that was termed the American margin, the interrelationship of body, technology and frontier opened up new transcendent spaces, while simultaneously entertaining the beginning of what Baudrillard alluded to as the possibility of a gradual desertification of Western significance. Through Los Angeles as metaphoric outpost, Baudrillard's punning of the dissipation of the West into the Pacific 'desert' remains powerful and suggestive. The play on the word imaginatively provokes an impression of Los Angeles, what Mike Davis advances as America's 'junkyard of dreams', as the location for the drying up of US expansion.[3] Yet, akin to the ghost towns left behind when a territory is abandoned, desertion also hints at human movement out of redundant spaces, new pools of capital accumulation sought as the previous frontier's main source of industry is made obsolete, its resources fully drained. Whereas Baudrillard's vision is an apparition, a glance into the future, relocations of this kind, based around capital, have occurred many times in the technological and economic cycles of recent centuries, as seen

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[1] KRS ONE. 'French Connection'. Les Disques Du Crépuscule, 1997. For tracks/tracklist see Appendix A. p. 275; the art, music, and videos cited in this chapter are available online at http://survivalwarsappendix.blogspot.co.uk.
[2] Bonnie L. Mitchell and Joe R. Feagin. 'America's Racial-Ethnic Cultures: Opposition Within a Mythical Melting Pot'. *Toward the Multicultural University*. Westport. 1995. p. 65.
[3] Davis. *City of Quartz*. p. 453.

when the 'vein of ore runs out', when the 'mine closes down', or more recently in the decimation of the high street and small-town businesses by the mall, the multinational, and the arrival of online consumption through virtual retail outlets.[4]

This chapter, like the last, also appraises the American 'energies' Turner gauged as they migrate in and back across the land, here concentrating on the effect of the nation's building of an urban and subsequently suburban infrastructure throughout the twentieth century. Paired with technology and a specific set of American social conditions, the diasporic energies described in the following sections oscillate through recent centuries before congealing in New York during the late 1960s and early 1970s. More precisely, the chapter analyses the socio-cultural forces that interlock in this period, allowing for the creation of the cultural object now referred to as Hip Hop. What is now a globally recognised cultural form, Hip Hop is also a virtual frontier, a non-physical, metaphysical set of principles: something that you cannot just eat or wear, despite corporations attaching it to their products in order to sell everything from aftershaves, to sex, to trainers.

It is easy to decode Hip Hop as a loud and abrasive branch of popular American culture. However, its development and inner workings are more subtle than indicated by this simplistic overview. A canon of interdisciplinary scholarship has built around Hip Hop culture in recent decades. Academic approaches include the historicising and mythologising of early pioneers like Kool Herc, Afrika Bambaataa, and Grandmaster Flash (Chang), the marriage of these pioneers with advances in sound and music technology (Toop), and the transformation of the culture from national phenomenon to a commercially viable range of products within the global marketplace (Charnas).[5] The focus here is on Hip Hop as a cultural form, and the survival attempts of it and its exponents as it circulates through the apparatus of power outlined in the introduction. Thus, while theoretical connections are made through the works

[4] David Harvey. *The Enigma of Capital: And the Crises of Capitalism*. London. 2010. pp. 162-6; Joyce Appleby. *The Relentless Revolution: A History of Capitalism*. New York. 2010. pp. 3-26, 331-436.
[5] Jeff Chang. *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*. London. 2005. pp. 7-211; David Toop. *Rap Attack 3: African Rap to Global Hip Hop*. 1984. London. 2000; and Dan Charnas. *The Big Payback: The History of the Business of Hip Hop*. New York. 2010. pp. 3-61.

of Theodor Adorno and Henry Louis Gates Jr., their conceptual influence is minimised and at times kept implicit as a means of emboldening the primary voices and texts.

Survival is a key term in this chapter, because many voices in Hip Hop, those of theorists and practitioners, fluctuate between reinforcing the culture's existence and claiming its extinction due to engagement with and entanglement within the unified apparatus of hegemonic power. This contradiction is played out on the last page of *Ego Trip's Book of Rap Lists* (1999), the final entry in a list of '10 Reasons Why Rap Will Never Die' wryly stating that you 'can't kill something that's already dead'.[6] Caustic or otherwise, the statement that concludes *Rap Lists* has haunted Hip Hop prior to the label 'Hip Hop' piquing the interest of even the sharpest taxonomist. Charlie Ahearn, an important artist and documentary maker deeply involved with the scene, flatly corroborated the opinion shared by many contributors from this formative stage, that Hip Hop was 'dead by 1980'.[7]

If the death knell was first sounded on the culture during a volatile developmental phase in the late 1970s, it has lingered in the decades since and become legitimate currency throughout the post-millennial period. Nas released the album *Hip Hop is Dead* late in 2006. An accretion of these sentiments, the cover art depicts the pensive dropping of a black rose into an open grave. Elaborating on the theme, Nas explained to MTV that 'when I say "Hip Hop is dead," basically America is dead…There is no political voice. Music is dead…we're [in] a vulnerable state. If we don't change, we gonna disappear like Rome'.[8] The idea of America as a vulnerable yet still powerful state in the new millennium is sustained, extending into the 9/11 narratives discussed in the following chapter. In the likening of Hip Hop to the US, Nas's polemic mourns the corruption and corrosion of cultural object *and* nation, both presumed to be pure and potent at some previous moment in their evolution.

Yet at the same time Nas's view verifies Hip Hop's impact on and conflation with American socio-political and economic power structures. The social conditions that generate

[6] The list title comes from 'Outta Here', which begins 'Back in the days I knew rap would never die'. KRS ONE. 'Outta Here'. Jive Records, 1993; Sacha Jenkins et al. *Ego Trip's Book of Rap Lists*. New York. 1999. p. 352.
[7] Chang. *Can't Stop Won't Stop*. p. 132.
[8] 'MTV News Exclusive: Nas Previews *Hip Hop is Dead*'. 10 October 2006. http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1542740/mtv-news-exclusive-nas-previews-new-lp.jhtml. The track was produced by will.i.am, of the multi-platinum Hip-Pop-Electro super group The Black Eyed Peas.

unbreakable cycles of debt, poverty, crime and squalor, along with the negative influence of senior figures in those communities – as vividly painted in the 'Broken glass, everywhere' in Melle Mel and The Furious Five's *The Message* (1982) – are submerged in this statement.[9] Gone is condemnation of governmental neglect, racial inequality, and institutional discrimination, replaced by hegemonic concerns and public introspection. What is underlined here is the very important question of status and ownership, with regard to art, culture, and identity. It says as much about the trappings of the industry and Nas at this stage in his career as it does the broader national and cultural narratives. The statement was made, after all, in the same year (2006) as the escalation of housing foreclosures devastated thousands of African American and Hispanic households in cities across the US; but it would seem Hip Hop, at this moment, had other concerns than voicing the invisibility of economic disparities and virtual forms of racial segregation played out in these markets.[10] Expanding the topic further, Tricia Rose, who has studied Hip Hop culture over twenty-five years, wrote in 2008 that:

> HIP HOP IS NOT DEAD, but it is gravely ill. The beauty and life force of hip hop have been squeezed out, wrung nearly dry by the compounding factors of commercialism, distorted racial and sexual fantasy, oppression, and alienation. It has been a sad thing to witness. I am not prone to nostalgia but will admit, with self-conscious wistfulness, that I remember when hip hop was a locally inspired explosion of exuberance and political energy tethered to the idea of rehabilitating community.[11]

The question remains: was Hip Hop ever just local, just framed by political energy, or solely tethered to rehabilitation of the community? While sympathetic towards Rose's stance on why the culture remains relevant, was Hip Hop ever the pure cultural object to which she refers? Has it just been the victim of corporate consolidation and its side effects 'in a mass-mediated world'?[12] Principles and yearnings are projected onto the object by the audience. Be they fan, critic, or consumer, the amount of distance between subject and object is

[9] Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five. 'The Message'. Sugar Hill Records, 1982.
[10] Jacob S. Rugh and Douglas S. Massey. 'Racial Segregation and the American Foreclosure Crisis'. *American Sociological Review*. October 2010. pp. 629-51; Katalina M. Bianco. 'The Subprime Lending Crisis: Causes and Effects of the Mortgage Meltdown'. 2008. www.business.cch.com. *Wolters Kluwer Law & Business*. http://www.business.cch.com/bankingfinance/focus/news/Subprime_WP_rev.pdf.
[11] Tricia Rose. *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop*. New York. 2008. p. xi.
[12] Ibid. p. 7.

always relevant when a provocative arena like Hip Hop interpenetrates not only geographic and technological boundaries, but also those that define race, sexuality, class, gender and identity. Its capacity to harness so many social mores and evoke such passion is Hip Hop's weakness and its strength. The point here is not to deride Rose's emotional investment or concerns; far from it. Rather, it is to indicate just how difficult it is to analyse a cultural object still simultaneously transmuting and fragmenting, a process that is partly but not exclusively due to its engagement with new technologies and the environments in which it is produced. Hip Hop is undoubtedly an American phenomenon, and part of a much longer lineage of teen rebellion. It has also never been static, and has proven its adaptability by thriving in the reterritorialisation of the frontier within the limitless regions of the digital milieu and the transition into the virtualised global marketplace.

These are just some of the complexities of the paradigm which this chapter and other academic work articulating Hip Hop – as musical genre, political, philosophical or technological movement – are involved in. If Hip Hop is not dead, then what state is it in? In 2012 is what remains of it for contemporary consumers and practitioners 'gravely ill'? If so, when did this illness take hold? What did Hip Hop look like before this perceived deterioration? These questions are confronted and examined in the next two sections, which centre on the strands trailing into a period of cultivation within the streets of New York, that in turn lead to the irresistible spread of a peripheral urban subculture, and how its convergence with certain political, sociocultural and technological developments have seen the culture escalate into a section of the global entertainment and lifestyle industry that now 'generates over $10 billion per year' for the American economy.[13] Counterpoint to this upward trajectory are advocates, like Rose, posing deep-rooted questions surrounding the hollowing out of Hip Hop as a cultural marker, its authenticity as a site of cultural resistance, and its system of values in terms of what (or whom) it represents.

[13] June Watson. 'The Business of Hip-Hop, Rapper's Delight: A Billion-Dollar Industry'. www.forbes.com. 18 February 2004. http://www.forbes.com/2004/02/18/cx_jw_0218hiphop.html.

This conflict of aesthetics is enunciated by Theodor Adorno in 'Culture Industry Reconsidered', an essay from 1967 which reprises the differentiation of 'mass culture' from the 'culture industry' that was first posed in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947).[14] For Adorno, the 'culture industry' must be 'distinguished in the extreme' from 'mass culture', in order to make clear that the products the 'culture industry' creates do not rise 'spontaneously from the masses themselves' – despite in many cases attempting to give this impression – but are cultural commodities 'governed by the principle of their realization as value', the 'entire practice of the culture industry' being the transferral of 'the profit motive naked onto cultural forms'.[15] Adorno advances the argument by clarifying that:

> [t]he concept of technique in the culture industry is only in name identical with technique in works of art. In the latter, technique is concerned with the internal organization of the object itself, with its inner logic. In contrast, the technique of the culture industry is, from the beginning, one of distribution and mechanical reproduction, and therefore always remains external to its object.[16]

The distinction Adorno makes between these techniques refers with antipathy to the losses incurred by both spheres in the coalescence of low and high art in the act of commodification. Often cited, Adorno's distinction remains relevant to Hip Hop as both techniques now exist simultaneously within a single sphere, the exchange between them palpable in the culture's linguistic demarcations. Hip Hop is the overarching terminology for a cultural (or countercultural) form and the elements within it: DJing, Breaking, Graffiti Art, Beatboxing, Emceeing, Street Fashion, Design and Promotion. These elements are concerned with the internal organisation of the culture and sustaining its inner logic. Many exponents of the elements listed contribute to and follow a strict set of principles that 'represent'; or, to use an older piece of American vernacular carried over from the Jazz era, adherence to the culture's tenets keep its participants 'down by law'.[17] There are others that

[14] Theodor Adorno. 'Culture Industry Reconsidered'. 1967. *New German Critique*. Autumn 1975. p. 12.
[15] Ibid. pp. 12-3.
[16] Ibid. p. 14.
[17] Nas. 'Represent'. *Illmatic*. Columbia Records, 1994; 'down by law' also means to look out/be looked out for in prison. For Hip Hop arrogations see Fab 5 Freddy. 'Down By Law'. 1982. *Wild Style Soundtrack*. Beyongolia Records, 1998; and MC Shan. 'Down By Law'. Cold Chillin' Records, 1987; for essays on the links between Jazz and Hip Hop, see James L. Conyers, Jr. (Ed.). *African American Jazz and Rap*. North Carolina. 2001.

now actively participate in the distribution and mechanical reproduction of these elements solely for the accumulation of wealth, the products they create injected into the global market with the assistance of corporate strategies using already proven and entrenched US business models. Apprehension over the outcome of what assimilation may bring is the reason why warnings against such activities have always pervaded the core of the culture. Interchangeable within the 'culture industry', terminological lines are drawn, legitimising codes invented – between Hip Hop and Rap, Emcees and Rappers – within the culture itself. Hence the oft-repeated credo 'keep it real', or, to put it another way, you don't do Hip Hop, you *are* Hip Hop, to the point where it can be interpreted as a belief system: 'Rap is something you do, Hip Hop is something you live'.[18]

Keith Negus correctly places Adorno's dialectical position inside the 'dichotomy between modernist despair at the power and influence of corporate commodity production and postmodernist celebration of the possibilities provided by cultural consumption and appropriation'.[19] The purpose here is to study how the images, signifiers, and representations from each side of the equation differ, how complex exchanges between subordinated groups and dominant hegemonic models reflect on – and back from – the constituent parts of accepted American discourse. Thus it also measures Hip Hop's capacity as a virtual arena, what Stuart Hall insightfully noted in 1981 as an 'arena of consent and resistance' perforated by the complex 'relations of cultural power and domination', the dominant culture always seeking to incorporate and transform such phenomena to maximise potential for capital production and consumption.[20] As the following lyrics from 'Hip Hop Lives' (2007) suggest, Hip Hop's remaining potential rests on the perceptual ability of who receives it, and their willingness to absorb what it communicates:

> Hip means to know
> It's a form of intelligence
> To be hip is to be up-date and relevant

[18] Taken from KRS ONE's 'Hip Hop vs. Rap'. Jive Records, 1993. Examples include Diamond D featuring Lord Finesse and Sadat X. 'You Can't Front (..it is Real). Chemistry Records, 1993; Das EFX. 'Real Hip Hop'. EastWest Records, 1995; and Mic Geronimo. 'It's Real'. Blunt Recordings, 1995.
[19] Keith Negus. *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures*. New York. 1999. p. 87.
[20] Stuart Hall. 'Notes on Deconstructing the Popular'. *People's History and Socialist Theory*. London. 1981. pp. 232-9.

Hop is a form of movement
You can't just observe a hop
You've got to hop up and do it
Hip, and Hop, is more than music
Hip is the knowledge
Hop is the movement
Hip, and Hop, is intelligent movement
Or relevant movement
We selling the music
So write this down in your black books and journals
Hip, Hop, culture is eternal
Run and tell all your friends
An ancient civilization has been born again
It's a fact

I come back
Every year I get newer
I'm the dust on the moon
I'm the trash in the sewer
Let's go
I come back
Every year I get brighter
If you think that Hip Hop is alive hold up your lighter
Let's go
I come back
Every year I'm expanding
Talking to developers
About this city we're planning, c'mon!
I come back
Through any endeavour
This is Hip Hop
We gonna last forever[21]

Can these lyrics be considered corporate entertainment, or are they a call for enlightenment through collective consciousness and revised infrastructure? Is this not a beckoning to the poetry of transcendent embodiment and renewal found in Whitman's 'Song of Myself' (1855-82), the poetics of a divided nation that expands and contracts amidst urbanisation and social upheaval in the zooming mediation between material and non-material perception?[22]

Exactly forty years elapsed between Dr. Martin Luther King's touring of 'The Other America' speech in 1967 and the release of 'Hip Hop Lives'. One America is described in King's speech as a place in which 'young people grow up in the sunlight of opportunity': the other is populated by millions 'of various backgrounds' existing in an 'arena of blasted hopes

[21] KRS ONE and Marley Marl. 'Hip Hop Lives'. Koch Records, 2007.
[22] Much of 'Song of Myself' appeared in the first *Leaves of Grass* (1855), the epic poem refined over decades until the final edition in 1882. See Whitman. 'Song of Myself'. *Leaves of Grass*. pp. 25-68.

and shattered dreams'.[23] With voices from 1967 and 2007 seeking equilibrium through the empowerment of the impoverished, it would seem little has changed through those decades. Discussed in the previous chapter, as the distance between technocratic elites and large swathes of the population widens, the message that Hip Hop vocalises – the ephemera emanating from communities historically deemed outsiders – becomes relevant to a growing and increasingly diverse audience. King's words ricochet through time and space as he observes 'millions of work-starved' Americans in a 'search for jobs that don't exist', the 'riot' as the 'language of the unheard', and the desire for a common destiny and acknowledgement of human ties in a true 'amalgam of Black and White' that does not call for integration per se, but demands a collectively-run cooperative America based on the erasure of inequality.[24] The erasure of racial inequality is an important component within a larger discussion on the rise of the oppressed and obscured voices of disenfranchised Americans. As will become clear, the points King raises – unemployment, the voices of the unheard, location of the human within a transnational context – branch out into the third and fourth chapters and are crucial signposts in understanding the virtual complexities of life in the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

While recognising the subordination of non-European groupings within the American population, and without ignoring hierarchical privileges granted within the hegemonic construction, I have capitalised 'Black' and 'White' here, throughout this chapter, and whenever referring to specific ethnic or racial groupings, despite and in recognition of the fact these terms are infused with centuries of positive and negative connotations. To borrow an evocative analogy from Will Hermes, 'racial divisions', like musical genres, are 'largely false constructs', and capitalising them is an acknowledgement of their artificiality.[25] Truth, like music, has no colour. Realities are formed from the human aptitude for reading and manipulating environments. The concept of race balances against the processing of labour,

[23] Martin Luther King. 'The Other America'. 4 April 1967. http://www.crmvet.org/docs/otheram.htm.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Will Hermes. *Love Goes to Buildings on Fire: Five Years in New York that Changed Music Forever*. New York. 2011. p. 106.

the increasing invisibility of class consciousness, and the appearance of the dispossessed. In its expression and motion, Hip Hop unflinchingly extrapolates the margins, mediating truths that America has chosen to ignore or recode through recent centuries of its history. What follows is an investigation into just a few of the narratives extracted from this larger set of virtualised realities.

Survival Wars

> From the South, to the West, to the East, to the North
> Come on Spoonie Gee and go off, go off[26]
> Spoonie Gee, 'Love Rap' (1980)

In this section I give a brief but necessary explanation of Hip Hop's transformation into a reified object, a narration of its conversion from ephemeral in-the-moment performance to purchasable commodity. Like the frontier, Hip Hop has always been painted and perceived as a minority experience lived out in the margins, the majority living it vicariously as it is filtered through either the music itself (as its most prominent product), or through news, television, radio, and other media transmissions. Also like the frontier, because of this distance and curiosity value, a great deal of attention has been placed on historicising and indeed mythologising certain people, places, and events from Hip Hop's nascent phase.[27]

It can be argued the solidifying of firm foundations, and an agreed-upon architecture, are vital to the culture's presence going forward. They add identity and impose narratives, even though the reality of any such beginning is for the most part unexplainable, or at least subjective, due to the plethora of social, economic, political, temporal, technological, and countless other factors which collide to bring about its existence. Take the word 'hip' for example, redefined in the quotation from 'Hip Hop Lives' as a form of intelligence. While citing Clarence Major's *Dictionary of African-American Slang* (1994), John Leland claims it originates from the 'Wolof verb *hepi* ("to see") or *hipi* ("to open one's eyes")', its usage 'cultivated by slaves from the West African nations of Senegal and coastal Gambia' and

[26] Spoonie Gee. 'Love Rap'. Enjoy Records, 1980.
[27] See Johan Kugelberg. *Born in the Bronx: An Original Record of the Early Days of Hip Hop*. New York. 2007.

appearing in America in 'the 1700s'.[28] As seductive as it would be to ratify the term's etymology to mean something like 'to see or be enlightened', and certain Hip Hop scholars including M.K. Asante Jr. have taken this information and presented it as fact, there is no documented evidence to confirm this.[29] Its first recorded usage is in the early years of the twentieth century, before entering popular discourse through the slang of African American populations settling in Northern cities during the latter stages of the first Great Migration.[30] Indeed, Hip Hop's appearance and progression is prefigured by that of the Harlem Renaissance: the multi-perspective expression of urban modernity cultivated in the aftermath of this first migration. A reinterpretation of the Sugar Hill aspirations and aesthetics, the more recent multicultural movement mirrors the composition of and many of the criticisms aimed at its predecessor; though Hip Hop, garnering a similarly diverse audience to Jazz, has gazumped the latter in its infiltration of popular culture.[31]

Both movements upraise the voice, which in turn reflects a history of the whip denying the enslaved hand access to the tools to create, decipher and publish written documents. Such restrictions placed on the slave helped in the embedding of false Western projections of African primitivism. This is strange, and damning, when there are reports from as early as the middle of the nineteenth century by American missionaries, like R.H. Stone, detailing 'industrious' urban activity in cities like Abeokuta located along the West African coast: progressive communities pushed to the edges of the frame of American history.[32] The fusion of cultural components – African art, language, and labour with 'American social history' – was guaranteed, however, as soon as connections were made between the African and American coastlines, and the horrors of the Middle Passage realised.[33] As Robert Farris Thompson infers when probing the rise of a Black Atlantic tradition in *Flash of the Spirit*

[28] Clarence Major. *Juba to Jive: The Dictionary of American Slang*. London. 1994; John Leland. *Hip: The History*. New York. 2004. pp. 5-7.
[29] M.K. Asante Jr. *It's Bigger than Hip Hop: The Rise of the Post-Hip Hop Generation*. New York. 2008. p. 250.
[30] For the first use of 'hip' as slang in literature, see George V. Hobart. *Jim Hickey*. London. 1904. p. 15.
[31] Gareth Millington. *'Race', Culture and the Right to the City: Centres, Peripheries, Margins*. Basingstoke. 2011. pp. 181-206; Reiland Rabaka. *Hip Hop's Inheritance: From the Harlem Renaissance to the Hip Hop Feminist Movement*. Plymouth. 2011. pp. 49-82.
[32] R.H. Stone. *In Afric's Forest and Jungle: Or Six Years Among the Yorubans*. New York. 1899. pp. 20-3.
[33] Stephanie E. Smallwood. *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora*. Cambridge, Mass. 2007. p. 3.

(1983), the dance, music and art of a continent already 'pulsing with ceaseless creativity', took on – for better or worse – 'new momentum' as it 'crossed the seas from the Old World to the New'.[34] The tendency has been repeated in microcosm, and it is no coincidence that publications stressing Hip Hop's traditions and folklores have appeared as the culture has been placed under threat by corporate miscegenation, forced into spatial, temporal, and economic territories ever-further away from its professed roots in New York in the early 1970s.

Conversely, by 1980, when the Treacherous Three introduce Spoonie Gee on 'Love Rap', they encapsulate the frenetic energy that had built up in many of the poorer pockets of New York in the call out to each point of the compass. Hip Hop was ready, hungry even, to sever the radicles and be evaluated by a consuming national audience. Released the previous year on Sugar Hill Records, with funding from Genovese-linked industry executive Morris Levy, the phenomenon that was the Sugar Hill Gang's 'Rappers Delight' marks the burrowing of Hip Hop's musical element into the national consciousness.[35] Preserved on vinyl, the single is a boisterous solicitation of the American mainstream ('and guess what America, we love you!').[36] Uncertified by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), 'Rappers Delight' sold over two million copies and infiltrated the top ten charts of the UK, Canada, Germany and Holland.[37] Still sonically vibrant, if you begin to deconstruct the fourteen minute opus a collage of improvised scat verses and raps taken from the routines of other performers within the scene is revealed; suggestive but not too risqué lyrics and brand references layered over the top of an in-house band's sparkling rendition of the bass line from Chic's Disco anthem 'Good Times'.[38] But Hip Hop to this point had been Disco's rebellious cousin, the alternative for communities not able to access the affluent narcotised

[34] Robert Farris Thompson. *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art & Philosophy.* 1993. New York. 1994. pp. xiii, 97.
[35] For information on Levy and the forming of Sugar Hill Records see Charnas. *Big Payback*. pp. 29-48; the Fatback Band, a funk group, released 'King Tim III (Personality Jock) as a B-side to 'You're My Candy Sweet' in July of 1979. King Tim's routines on this song were the first time Hip Hop rhymes were pressed onto vinyl.
[36] The Sugar Hill Gang. 'Rapper's Delight'. Sugar Hill Records, 1979.
[37] Charnas. *Big Payback*. p. 43.
[38] For a recollection of how the rhymes of Grandmaster Caz were acquired by Sugar Hill's Big Bank Hank ('I'm the C-A-S 'N the O-V-A…'), see the 1991 interview with Charlie Chase, in Juan Flores. ''It's a Street Thing!': An Interview with Charlie Chase'. *Callaloo*. Autumn 1992. pp. 999-1021.

scene unfolding in the night spots of Manhattan. Fuelled by one of Disco's greatest hits, the success of 'Rapper's Delight' was also a surprise, because, in a nation fast turning towards a new wave of corporate conservatism, its release came only months after the death of Disco had been announced at a Chicago White Sox game on the 12th July 1979.[39] Staged between a double-header at Comiskey Park, the 'Disco Demolition Derby' used the cerebral yet overtly White and masculine myth-arena of American baseball to 'destroy' Disco, physically and symbolically wounding the genre, loosening its grip on the charts, and assaulting the legitimacy of its celebration of sexual freedom and hedonistic androgyny in front of a live national audience.[40]

In the face of this resistance 'Rapper's Delight' remains a landmark release for Hip Hop, the moment in time where what had previously been a live and evanescent occurrence – at club nights, gatherings, and parties – became a packaged product. Meanwhile, more innovative and integral participants in the culture were content with building in the New York boroughs, Grandmaster Flash along with many others admitting they could not see its commercial potential; naïve to its expansive levels of appeal, they just 'didn't see it' as something to be commodified.[41] 'Rapper's Delight', however, had misrepresented or simply ignored crucial tenets within the culture: that you originate or develop rather than copy other people's beats, rhymes, and styles. Is this hypocritical when the extraction of beats and rhythm sections from other pre-recorded music provided the backbone of the scene? Perhaps, but here the distinction has to be made between bricolage, or the remoulding of existing cultural objects into something new, and the outright theft of intellectual and creative property which occurred on 'Rapper's Delight'.[42]

Like air through a flutter valve, once the commercial promise of the recorded medium had been grasped, its capacity to reach consumers from a vast range of national classes and

[39] Roger D. Hodge. *The Mendacity of Hope: Presidential Power, Corporate Money, and the Politics of Corrupt Influence*. New York. 2010. p. 153.
[40] Peter Shapiro. *Turn the Beat Around: The Secret History of Disco*. 2005. London. 2009. pp. 226-30. These events, along with the volumes of bootleg and unaccounted for sales of the single, are why 'Rapper's Delight' only reached number thirty-six on the US Billboard charts.
[41] Nelson George. 'Hip Hop's Founding Fathers Speak the Truth'. *The Source*. November 1993. p. 49.
[42] Hence the suspicion and scorn for 'rapper' and its replacement with the term MC, adopted from the Catholic Church (Master of Ceremonies-MC-emcee).

ethnicities understood, there was only one direction in which Hip Hop could and would be taken, to ensure its survival and maximise its potential as a marketable asset. Financed by Bobby Robinson (owner of 'Bobby's Happy House' record store, the first Black-owned business on Harlem's 125th Street), and released on his already established Enjoy label, a new wave of records appeared in the wake of 'Rapper's Delight'. These releases were opportunities for veterans from the parties in the Bronx and Harlem to place their honed vocal routines over interpolated and sometimes completely fresh drum accompaniments provided by prototype Hip Hop super-producer Pumpkin. In a slew of energetic landmark recordings, Robinson released the first record by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five ('Superappin'), as well as 'Rappin' and Rocking the House' by the Funky Four Plus One More, which featured Sha Rock, the first female emcee to make it onto vinyl.[43] And yet it is 'Love Rap' backed by the Treacherous Three's 'New Rap Language' that truly harnesses the ebullience of Hip Hop as it began to vie for a place in the national framework.[44] Both tracks interspersed with the command to spread the impulse to the corners of the nation, the former is an incessant bongo-driven flow of sleazy pick-up rhymes and tales of promiscuity, the latter is a call-and-response tirade of dextrous percussion-fuelled braggadocio. The cumulative effect of the record served as a clarion call to the rest of the community to make moves into the new frontier of the recording industry. As a cultural object it teeters on the precipice between Hip Hop's past and future: the new-sounding story rhyme expressing events affecting an individual character, placed back-to-back for the first time with the original quick-fire group dynamic from the live throwdown. A single product, bifurcation of the two sides discloses some of the inherent antagonisms within Hip Hop both now and then. Grassroots awareness and activism buffet against consumption and American political and economic policy in the clash of group integrity and individual aspiration.

The ethereal image of Hip Hop as panacea for a swathe of disenfranchised youth well versed in its elements and looking for a way up or out of the increasingly vast urban

[43] Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five. 'Superappin'. Enjoy Records, 1979; Funky Four Plus One More. 'Rappin' and Rocking the House'. Enjoy Records, 1979.
[44] Spoonie Gee and the Treacherous Three. 'New Rap Language'. Enjoy Records, 1980.

wastelands is tangible at this juncture at the start of the 1980s, and continued as it filtered through the ghettos of every major US city, from Philadelphia and Detroit, to Houston and Los Angeles. In the years to come, and as explained further in the final part of the chapter, control of this temperament and virtualisation of its image would escalate to a central point of contention: a nodal tussle between creator, distributor, and the monopolisation of the art-form as it is sold to and through corporate America. However, to pause at this threshold for a moment, there are many other influences that led up to the point where the crisscrossing themes of capital accumulation and survival become Hip Hop's prime incentives.

Alongside its exploitable vectors, the network of Hip Hop elements has given and is still capable of giving nourishment to the human subject by connecting eye, ear, and body. Organic and technological textures meld as pen or paint meet brick/metal/canvas; the hand-mind-eye unifies with vinyl or needle; the body is made one with the ground as it coils and reshapes; the air itself is transformed into an array of beats, tones and frequencies, drawn in and reassembled in the larynx of the emcee or beatboxer. As KRS ONE observes in the lyrics to 'Hip Hop Lives', the culture is not passive but active, its proponents conversing in a language of kinaesthetics. Like the frontiersman, natural and/or technological contact with surroundings is strived for as it preserves the American urge for reconciliation with the pastoral, contact or sense of connectivity translated into an expression of surrounding human conditions. Through its unbreakable bonds with the US, those human conditions have found Hip Hop implicated in the difficult relationship between representation and reality under capitalism. Many of its contributors can be defined as transnational, can be considered part of a global citizenry where nationality is weakened, brought into question, as bonds are made and communities structured by linked interests. Appealing to the migratory, the dislocated, the culture has travelled across continents, virally attaching itself to the socially or politically excluded in major metropolitan locations that share similar atmospherics and politico-economic systems to those found in New York, including London, Paris and

Tokyo.[45] As such, there is a case for stating that Hip Hop is a virtual communication network that speaks the language of dispersal, hence its universality.

As an instrument for amplifying the voice of oppressed people, Hip Hop is unavoidably political. The energies and motivations that drive it as a form of expression also predate recent terms and labels. For example, the majority of its practitioners have taken to the much older practice of adopting an alias or alter-ego: the finding of coded alternatives to government or given names. Now taken for granted, with many political or transcendental connotations removed, the use of a pseudonym once held power, not just as a stronger signification of mindset, personality type, or to mask criminality, but for the same reason that Malcolm changed his surname from 'Little' to the anonymous 'X' in his conversion to the Nation of Islam. In the conscious act of rejecting the 'slavemaster name' imposed on the 'paternal forebears', the legal 'X', the 'X' of erasure, is reclaimed in the shedding of American identity, making it the symbol for individuals to adopt in a new virtual nation separate from that of the dominant culture.[46]

At the Oxford Union on 3rd December 1964, almost a full century after the signing of the Thirteenth Amendment, X expanded on the decision to create his own identity while defending the motion that 'Extremism in the Defence of Liberty is No Vice; Moderation in the Pursuit of Justice is No Virtue', noting that 'if you study history you will find why no Black man in the Western hemisphere knows his real name…our names were stripped from us so we don't know who we really are'.[47] Allied with the themes in the track 'French Connection', quoted in the epigraph, X sought a reversal of the theft of identity; KRS ONE warning 'if you don't know who you are, you are clinically insane', the imposing of an artificial mind state is

[45] Too broad for the scope of this thesis, but important in terms of the transnational virtualisation of American artefacts and commodities, for reports on the early Xeroxing and subsequent spread of the culture, see Steven R. Weisman. 'Hammer Wannabes Spouting Nonsense'. *The New York Times*. 20 August 1992. p. H22; and James Bernard. 'A Newcomer Abroad, Rap Speaks Up'. *The New York Times*. 23 August 1992. pp. 20, 22; for a longer interrogation of the Hip Hop diaspora see Sujatha Fernandes. *Close to the Edge: In Search of the Global Hip Hop Generation*. London. 2011. pp. 1-24.

[46] Malcolm X and Alex Haley. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. New York. 1965. p. 296.

[47] X eloquently inverts the framing quotation from Barry Goldwater's 1964 leadership acceptance speech at the 1964 Republican National Convention, which was meant as a scathing attack on Communism, moderate Republicans, and the welfare policies of the Kennedy and Johnson presidencies (including Johnson's 'War on Poverty'). The Malcolm X section of the debate can be listened to at http://filepedia.org/audio/the-oxford-union-debate-1964; the entire debate, including introduction, minutes, and all speakers for and against the motion can be found online at http://www.brothermalcolm.net/2003/mx_oxford/index.html.

seen as a weakening of the subject through the control of individual perception: a virtual form of enslavement accompanying the physical. In the debate, X adds:

> I'm speaking as a Black man from America, which is a racist society; no matter how much you hear it talk about democracy…America preaches integration and practices segregation…they don't practice what they preach…One of the tricks of the West is to use or create images. They create images of a person who doesn't go along with their views, and they make certain this image is distasteful. And then anything that person has to say from there on in is rejected. This is a policy that has been practiced by the West…it perhaps would have been practiced by others had they been in power, but during recent centuries the West has been in power and they have created the images and have used these quite skilfully and quite successfully.[48]

The debate was aired nationally and in its entirety by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the attending students remaining enraptured as X dissected key contradictions underpinning existence in America in the 1960s. Crucial to X's message, to understanding Hip Hop, this chapter, and indeed the thesis in general, are the challenges to fixed notions of land, labour, identity, and mobility, individual and state control of accessibility to them, and who wields the power to project those images both nationally and globally. I accentuate the importance of Malcolm X here as Hip Hop came from a place more closely affiliated to the Black Power movement than Civil Rights, although both spheres have exerted influence on the culture's development.[49] Unlike Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, as a vessel for the anger of the predominantly Black urban poor, was forthright in his contempt for what was seen as American duplicity, and the struggle for survival in a state where something as apparently transparent as the 1865 outlawing of slavery could – especially but not exclusively in the response in the South – be renovated into new systems of Black bondage.[50] X also published no works during his lifetime. In alignment with early Hip Hop performance, and

[48] Ibid.
[49] On KRS ONE's 'Ah Yeah', an ever-present Black Power and revolutionary spirit is evoked, carried through various incarnations from 'Isis' to 'Malcolm X', 'KRS' to 'Kwame Ture [Stokely Carmichael]', the track notable for who is excluded as much as who is included in the lineage; see KRS ONE. 'Ah Yeah'. Front Page Entertainment, 1995.
[50] Often in collusion with local authorities, White Leagues were formed at this time, the Ku Klux Klan first organised in Pulaski, Tennessee in 1866; the effectiveness of their violence and intimidation of the apparently free is indicated, in one example, in the decrease of registered Black voters from sixty-seven to six percent between 1867 and 1882. See Jules Archer. *They Had a Dream: The Civil Rights Struggle*. London. 1993. p. 13; and Peter Kolchin. *American Slavery: 1619-1877*. London. 1995. pp. 200-35.

true to a long line of folk traditions communicated orally, our access is contingent on the technological mediums able to record and transmit them made available to each generation.

X illuminated his perspective on the US in a speech entitled 'Message to the Grass Roots' (1963), asking the Detroit audience to '[l]ook at the American Revolution in 1776. That revolution was for what? For land. Why did they want land? Independence. How was it carried out? Bloodshed'.[51] As covered in the last chapter (in *Brave New World*, *Moon*, etc.), and by Heidegger in the introduction, again vigorously questioned here is where ownership and control reside in relation to human beings/labour force as a resource/asset to be maximised. The ownership of human beings by other human beings is a complicated and long-standing global condition, but it is also reflected in and attached to America's growth as a nation and its institutions. Clear in the derogatory, dehumanising rhetoric that accompanied the relationship of contractor/owner with indentured servant/slave, the human being was treated as little more than livestock. The shift to the familiar and gruesome narrative of predominantly African slaves imported into the New World in overwhelming numbers occurs throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, yet up until this point there had been degrees of Black *and* White enforced labour in the Americas, and both White *and* Black owners of land (and human property).[52] This is highlighted merely to show that greed – individual morality offset by the desire for power and wealth – is not exclusive to any race but to agents with access to the state apparatus.

History in this sense can be both cure and disease, taught American *and* African American history equally synthetic constructions. The reality of slavery is evident; but while its history is taught and retaught it remains a burden and restricts elevation to a point beyond its shackles, including the provision of historical data on, for example, human movement and African 'settlements in the New World' prior to and 'outside of the mainstream of the post-

[51] Malcolm X. 'Message to the Grass Roots'. 1963. *Malcolm X Speaks (Malcolm X Speeches & Writings)*. 1965. New York. pp. 19-20.
[52] J. A. Rogers. *Sex and Race: Why White and Black Do Mate*. New York. 1961; Abbot Emerson Smith. *Colonists in Bondage: White Servitude and Convict Labor in America, 1607-1776*. Chapel Hill. 1947; Don Jordon and Michael Walsh *White Cargo: The Forgotten History of Britain's White Slaves in America*. Edinburgh. 2007.

Columbian slave complex'.[53] Such an evolution towards true racial equality seems impossible to attain – restrictions on human freedom impossible to leave behind – until all the still-present malignant residuals of the slave-trade mentality are removed from Western political and economic power structures. And as we shall see in the next chapter, issues of race and racial identity as far as rights and citizenship are still as precariously balanced for some individuals in twenty-first century America as they have been for previous generations.

The stripping of identity, diminishing of voice, the restriction of mobility, have, however, continued to be eroded in tiny increments, and usually in tandem with technological advance and instances of national upheaval. As Nicholas Lemann perceptively notes, the 'millions of participants' in the Black migration to US cities at various stages of the twentieth century were stimulated by 'the mechanization of the cotton fields, the end of legal segregation, World War II and the booming labor market it created in the urban North', and the decline of (Rust Belt) manufacturing in the American economy.[54] This loosening of previous restrictions brought greater freedom of movement across horizontal and vertical axes, further ontological questions raised by the (albeit still limited) access into previously inaccessible geographic and social hierarchical structures. At the same time the hopes and aspirations built into the migration were also tempered by technological advance, the confrontational but astute activist H. Rap Brown warning in his autobiography of the effects that the mid-century crossover from primary and secondary to tertiary employment could have: '[w]e were brought here to do work, there is no more work. Machines do the jobs we used to do…[eventually] the entire population of this country will be a leisure class…because of automation and cybernation…this country no longer needs Black people'.[55] Adjustment to new spaces and the accelerated pulse of city life, along with increased social interactivity

[53] Ivan Van Sertima. *They Came Before Columbus: The African presence in Ancient America*'. New York. 1976. p. 23; see also John A. Arthur. *African Diaspora Identities: Negotiating Culture in Transnational Migration*. Plymouth. 2010. pp.119-60.
[54] Nicholas Lemann. *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America.* London. 1991. p. 345. Migration was a combination of choice (to escape violence and prejudice) and economic necessity; to give one example: by 1965 '81% of Mississippi's cotton crops were harvested by mechanisation…a 54% increase over cotton harvesting in 1958'. See E. Marvin Goodwin. *Black Migration in America from 1915 to 1960: An Uneasy Exodus*. New York. 1990. p. 20.
[55] H. Rap Brown. *Die Nigger Die!*. 1969. Chicago. 2002. p. 139.

and the close proximity of urban housing, combined to give the Civil Rights generation some sense of communal power. Activist groups like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) co-founded earlier in the century by W.E.B. Du Bois, rose to prominence in the 1960s as outlets through which to voice the continuing – increasingly urbanised – struggle.[56]

Frustration at gradual change, at basic levels of education, at the social dynamics within the forming urban environments, and at devastating setbacks like the cold-blooded murder of three Civil Rights workers in Mississippi on the 21st June 1964, led to a shift towards unrest that is compressed into the SNCC's eventual omission of 'nonviolent' from the organisation's title, by 1969 renaming itself the Student National Coordinating Committee.[57] Reflecting the nation, the divergent youthful forces were increasingly militarised, vocal, and willing to fight to get inside the system. Their stance was both moral and materialistic. Sociologist Michael Walzer, witnessing the attitude at the sit-ins first-hand, documented that this generation was pointedly aware 'when one side has all the guns, then the other side is', by default, 'non-violent', the participants eager to address that imbalance.[58] With the use of force if necessary, the oppressed were no longer willing to be held at a lower stage of, or deprived access to, the full range of technological, political, and socio-economic indulgences. H. Rap Brown, responsible for the relabeling of the SNCC upon taking over from Stokely Carmichael in 1967, is emblematic of its radicalisation, the distrust in human behaviour clear in his admission that 'I've always had the utmost confidence in me and the gun. Give me the gun before you even give me somebody to work with. A gun won't fail you. People will'.[59] In this statement Brown aligns himself – becomes one – with lethal technology, and implies a willingness to use it, in doing so skewing the Second Amendment right for an individual to bear arms. Often misinterpreted, the amendment was never solely

[56] For the formation and historical context of the SNCC and NAACP, see Allen J. Matusow. 'From Civil Rights to Black Power: The Case of SNCC, 1960-1966'. *Twentieth-Century America: Recent Interpretations*. London. 1972. pp. 494-520.
[57] The lynching of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner by the Ku Klux Klan has been fictionalised many times, and helped push through the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965.
[58] Michael Walzer. 'The Politics of the New Negro'. *Dissent*. Summer 1960. pp. 235-43.
[59] Brown. *Die Nigger Die*. p. 81.

about the individual, but rather a legalising of actions by state militias to protect the government (to forcefully acquire or protect land/property, and to suppress insurrections).

In taking this position Brown is dehumanised and takes on the mantle of the anti-human, fighting from the interior a nation of which he is so clearly a product. His autobiography is a tirade of unbridled fury at an America 'that makes you want things', in a system where one section of the community's 'robbing and stealing' is re-categorised by another as 'profit'.[60] As Norman Davies writes, trade in the West through recent centuries, like slavery, '[p]iracy' or 'banditry', has been a 'relative concept', with 'operations approved by one authority…judged illegal by others'.[61] One week after the assassination of Martin Luther King, President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1968. Ostensibly an addendum to previous Civil Rights bills prohibiting discrimination in the sale or rent of housing on the grounds of race or religion, it was only passed with a clause attached, pushed through by the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee James Eastland. Aided by others in the Senate, the amendment had gathered momentum throughout 1967 as riots spread and intensified. Eastland, from Mississippi, demanded the bill as protection from 'roving fomenters of violence such as Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown'.[62]

In Chapter 102 of the final document, under 'RIOTS', it is written that anyone found guilty of travelling 'in interstate or foreign commerce' or using 'any facility of interstate or foreign commerce…with intent to incite…organise, promote, encourage, participate in, or carry on a riot', shall 'be fined not more than $10,000, or imprisoned not more than five years, or both'.[63] Severe punishments considering charges hinge on proof of intent and delivery of evidence to support such a claim. The Fair Housing Act is more a Trojan horse for an anti-riot act put in place to prosecute political radicals, restrict the movement of surveilled suspects across state territories, jeopardise the First Amendment right to free assembly, and cloud distinctions between organised political protest and acts of premeditated violence.

[60] Ibid. p. 18.
[61] Norman Davies. *Europe: A History*. London. 1997. p. 561.
[62] James Eastland and Strom Thurmond. 'US Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities'. *Final Report*. Washington. 1976. p. 15; see also Paul Scott. 'President's Proposal Turned Against Him'. *The Lewiston Daily Sun*. 24 January 1968. p. 3.
[63] Page 76 of the statute. A copy of this section is available to view in Appendix C. pp. 277-9.

Unofficially identified as the 'H. Rap Brown act', the passing of the laws on rioting exacerbated, Brown was pushed to a point where the system through his eyes can only be framed as barely disguised totalitarianism:

> [There being] no difference between the Democratic and Republican parties…Both parties have made it clear that they will not tolerate dissent from Blacks or from whites. And even if they did tolerate dissent, it wouldn't mean a damn thing, because dissent does not change policy.[64]

Brown's nihilism is aimed at the blunting of the idealised Western egalitarian notion that citizens are capable of overturning policy, vociferous demonstrations and opposition to the invasion of other nations from Vietnam to Iraq and Afghanistan in recent decades going some way to sanctioning such a viewpoint. Without going into realms of conjecture over the intricacies and motivations of each incident, Brown's assessment also speaks tangentially on the catalogue of assassinations in the US at this time. From the killing of John F. Kennedy, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and Robert F. Kennedy in the space of five years, to the fates of Kwame Ture, H. Rap Brown and Mumia Abu Jamal, it is reasonable to conclude that dissenters, or anyone nearing even the possibility of instigating political change or destabilising the functionality of the power apparatus, were susceptible to attacks (either to themselves or their image) by malevolent forces or individuals at work within the nation.

The proximity of H. Rap Brown's experience to the Hip Hop experience, the adoption of a fluid and hybridised set of expressive survival skills, manifests in Brown's description of 'playing the Dozens' as a child in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, during the 1940s and 1950s.[65] In one of the earliest and most prominent of many social and psychological studies of the Dozens, John Dollard interprets it, archaically by modern standards, as a 'collective game' involving 'a pattern of interactive insult which is used among some American Negroes', at least two participants locked in a verbal joust for superiority for the entertainment of local

[64] Brown. *Die Nigger Die*. p. 63.
[65] Ibid. p. 26.

crowds.[66] Its name is said to have evolved from the selling of old, mentally or physically weak, injured, or insubordinate slaves by the dozen. The exchanges are a form of levity, and a way of building or lowering esteem and status within a group dynamic. Where many studies centre on the exchanges as stereotypically Black, masculine, and aggressive, Brown undermines this by admitting '[s]ome of the best Dozens players were girls', the skill for loquacious verbal dexterity reaching across genders.[67] The use of the indirect insult – using the opponent's family or close relations as a target – may have also been a coded means of communicating resentment for (or information about) prominent figures within the power structure without risk of retribution, the relative as substitute referent for boss, owner, or overseer.[68]

As Henry Louis Gates highlights in his study *The Signifying Monkey* (1988), as a virtual battleground where signs from 'Afro-American culture and American culture' clash, language becomes weaponry in a 'confrontation' that is 'both metaphysical and political'.[69] Signifying, a variant on the Dozens, sees participants trading in direct insults. Using the trickster figure from Yoruba mythology, Gates turns 'Signifying' into a theoretical homonym to oppositionally and cooperatively interlink works from generations of African American writers. Yet the role of the Èṣù figure as mediator or divine messenger in a three-point system of exchange that Gates describes as a disorienting 'hall of mirrors' can be linked into Hip Hop also, as can the semantic lineage revolving around the interplay of deflection and invisibility (or silence).[70] The importance of Signifying to Hip Hop is displayed in its progression from the urban street to modulation into entertainment for whole boroughs, in battles like Kool Moe Dee vs. Busy Bee at Harlem World in 1981, and the rhyme and breakdance battles filmed for *Wild Style*

[66] John Dollard. 'The Dozens: Dialectic of Insult'. *American Imago: A Psychoanalytic Journal for the Arts and Social Sciences*. November 1939. p. 4; the study is based on Dollard's observations, their spontaneity questionable; for misreadings of the Dozens see Robin D.G. Kelley. 'Looking for the "Real" Nigga: Social Scientists Construct the Ghetto'. 1997. *That's the Joint: Hip Hop Studies Reader*. New York. 2012. pp. 143-7; and Ralph F. Berdie. 'Playing the Dozens'. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*. January 1947. pp. 120-1.
[67] Brown. *Die Nigger Die*. p. 27.
[68] See Mona Lisa Saloy. 'African American Oral Traditions in Louisiana'. *Louisiana Folklore Miscellany*. 1990. www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/creole_articles.html; see The Pharcyde. 'Ya Mama'. Delicious Vinyl, 1992.
[69] Henry Louis Gates Jr. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. Oxford. 1988. p. 45.
[70] Ibid. pp. 3-43, 44.

(1983) and *Beat Street* (1984).[71] The release of Eminem's *8 Mile* (2002) brought with it a further eruption of interest in the 'battle': part verbal combat, part male ritual, part psychological warfare, transnational rap battle leagues have appeared on every continent. Harnessing the frontier brutality of corporate, street, and digital culture in an a cappella performance, these formatted multicultural events take the language of Hip Hop and its components, repackage them, and then sell the virtual product online on sites like YouTube and through pay-per-view.[72] To elucidate its origins, an early style from Brown begins with:

> Man, you must don't know who I am.
> I'm sweet peeter jeeter, the womb beater
> The baby maker, the cradle shaker
> The deerslayer, the buckbinder, the women finder
> Known from the Gold Coast to the Rocky shores of Maine
> Rap is my name and love is my game.
> I'm the bed tucker, the cock plucker, the mother fucker
> The milkshaker, the record breaker, the population maker
> The gun-slinger, the baby bringer
> The hum-dinger, the pussy ringer
> The man with the terrible middle finger.[73]

Brown's lyrics are an assemblage of jagged non sequiturs abruptly zigzagging between nonchalant misogyny and boasts of personal or sexual prowess. Over a quarter of a century later, seemingly oblivious to Brown or his previous rhyme schemes, Brownsville residents Smoothe Da Hustler and his brother Trigger Tha Gambler create an uncanny reproduction of Brown's content and cadence on the single 'Broken Language' (1995).[74] Later in the same set of lyrics, Brown includes the line 'Yes, I'm the hemp the demp, the women's pimp, Women fight for my delight'. If this sounds familiar, it was in the lyric book of Bronx native Grandmaster Caz, from which it was taken before reappearing as the opening line of Big Bank Hank's second verse on 'Rapper's Delight'. Unlike the other rhymes stolen from Caz (self-referencing lyrical schemes linked personally to the author), but similar to several other

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[71] See http://survivalwarsappendix.blogspot.co.uk.
[72] Multiracial, empowered by the rise of interconnected global online networks of communication, independent companies offer battles to viewers that, while pre-prepared not freestyled, stick to the form's bawdy roots and appreciation of humour/wordplay. See www.kotd.com, www.dontflop.com, and www.gotbeefaustralia.com.
[73] Brown. *Die Nigger Die*. pp. 43-4.
[74] Smoothe Da Hustler. 'Broken Language'. Profile Records, 1995. When discussing the track, both emcees cite Big Daddy Kane's 'Brother, Brother' (Cold Chillin' Records, 1991) as inspiration.

lines Brown uses that have been vocalised by later artists, it would seem this phrase is from a pool of shared linguistic turns that migrated from the south to the ghettos of the north-east.[75] From Brown to now, like Èṣù or the West African griot, the emcee is an organic vessel or facility for storing and passing on community traditions, and at their best also a conduit able to improvise material from what can be absorbed from and conveyed about the immediate local environment.[76]

Uncompromising, on the edge, Brown's rhymes and actions reflect a total rejection of the American social construct, of conformity to a set of doctrines seen as virtual shackles, the turning away from negotiation in favour of an 'armed struggle' to 'destroy this system known as capitalism, for it is this system that oppresses the majority of mankind'.[77] In 1988, twenty years later, Chuck D of Public Enemy accusatorily yells 'They claimin' I'm a criminal' on 'Don't Believe the Hype', a rebuttal to the mediated misinformation broadcast about the group by a critical establishment.[78] The year after they provided the lead single from the soundtrack to Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989), the 'Fight the Power' video re-enacting a Black Power rally in which a prominent banner aligns Malcolm X with track name and group logo: a black silhouette, arms crossed, locked in a telescopic sight.[79] With the single and album soundtrack released on Motown (whose roster had included Stevie Wonder and Marvin Gaye, and which Berry Gordy sold to MCA for $61 million in June 1988, and has subsequently been absorbed into Universal Music Group- the group's permanent label being Def Jam, distributed by Columbia Records), the question has to be raised as to how the children of Brown's generation had reached a stage in two decades where the message of Black Power was now being funded and promoted globally by major distributors.[80]

[75] Unlike Pop music, which generally caters to broader themes and emotions, Hip Hop is often personalised by the artist, hence why there are still so few cover versions or remakes of previous Hip Hop records.
[76] Thomas A. Hale. *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music*. Indiana. 2007. pp. 18-58; other tracks to use Brown's lines include: The Sequence. 'Funk You Up'. Sugar Hill Records, 1979; Grand Wizard Theodore and The Fantastic Romantic Five. 'Can I Get A Soul Clapp'. Soul-o-Wax Inc., 1982; and Cody ChesnuTT. 'Serve This Royalty'. *The Headphone Masterpiece EP*. Ready Set Go! Records, 2001.
[77] Ibid. p. 129.
[78] Public Enemy. 'Don't Believe the Hype'. Def Jam Recordings, 1988.
[79] Public Enemy. 'Fight the Power'. Motown/MCA, 1989.
[80] For information on relations between Def Jam and Columbia see Charnas. *Big Payback*. pp. 191-6.

Mark Anthony Neal accurately suggests Public Enemy were 'perhaps the most accomplished at projecting black rage as a political discourse that would prove attractive to' Black *and* White 'youth audiences'.[81] And the Bomb Squad's whirring tapestries were nothing short of a sonic apocalypse. Hyperactive percussive collages laced with Chuck D's booming lyrics promoting Black nationalism produced a wall of sound like nothing Hip Hop had previously encountered. Before this, Hip Hop had appropriated technology, sound, materials and fashion. Now it added to that list the appropriation of a cluster of dormant ideologies that up to this point had always been implied in the culture rather than overt. Neal also mentions the group's 'resuscitation of 1960s-style black political rhetoric' as being 'problematic'.[82] Resuscitation here is evocative. Peers of Barack Obama, Chuck D one year older than the current President, Public Enemy were formed by the first generation to come of age in Hip Hop's decade of nurturing, the post-civil rights 1970s. Still far from equal, aided by technology, this new generation had better access to facilities providing education, information, and knowledge to poor areas than any previously. The message may have been fight the power, but the intent was not to break into the political machine for revolutionary purposes, as fictionalised in Sam Greenlee's *Spook Who Sat By the Door* (1969), but to resist victimhood by penetrating mainstream institutions and attempting to shape them for the better from the inside (as symbolised in Jesse Jackson's unsuccessful presidential campaigns in 1984 and 1988).

Nevertheless, what needs to be assessed is Public Enemy's worth, and the contradictions created by such a position within a transparent system of exchange. Replete with its own Media Assassin (Harry Allen) and militarised – black-clad, plastic Uzi toting – security unit (The Security of the First World), Public Enemy's recreation of Black Power on stage and vinyl was sensationalised, demonised by music journalists in the same way their itinerant

[81] Mark Anthony Neal. 'Postindustrial Soul: Black Music at the Crossroads'. *What the Music Said: Black Popular Music and Black Popular Culture*. New York. 1999. p. 141; see also Public Enemy. *Yo! Bum Rush The Show*, *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*, and *Fear of A Black Planet*. 1987, 1988, 1990, Def Jam Recordings. Flavor Flav's turn as a maniacal jester is rarely mentioned in critical analysis of Public Enemy, his vocal interspersions the perfect foil to Chuck D, the militant preacher paired off against the time-obsessed flamboyant addict.

[82] Ibid. p. 143.

forebears had been by the national press. And yet, however firmly held the group's own political convictions, Sister Souljah crying 'We are at War!' on behalf of every Black man and woman on 'Buck Whylin' (1990), the insurgent simulation ends, at least for most consumers, when the concert finishes or the needle reaches the inner label.[83] Sealed in a product manufactured and distributed by the industry, it never infiltrates the entrenched politico-economic structure, remaining a blunted reanimation of a lost generation. The real questions are why an ailing political body needed to be revived through music for a new generation, and why a nostalgic evocation of Black social struggles of the 1960s could be so successfully commodified.

Ravaged by a nationwide crack cocaine epidemic that had reached from the urban street corner to the suburbs, Hip Hop stood in as an abstracted substitute for real resistance while proving its capacity to adapt to, and be exploited by, the forces of commodification. Colin Harrison correctly points out that by 1990 '70 per cent' of the Hip Hop market was White, consuming 'images of blackness with a mixture of voyeurism and a genuine desire to identify with otherness'.[84] I would argue that some Black consumers also take in Hip Hop for vicarious thrills, while listeners of any background are capable of valuing 'the music for its realism and critical force'.[85] But in its role as a reflective surface, Hip Hop is also as much about narrating reality as it is fiction, its polysemy as a cultural object linking it into a much longer line of dissent *and* commodification. Incorporating future, present, and past states, Hip Hop gives voice to and prioritises survival, as it is simultaneously reformulated into profitable merchandise.

Virtual Arenas and the Incorporated Subculture

In a virtual re-enactment of the corporate transaction, the video for EPMD's 'Crossover' (1992) begins with a shot of a wall of gold and platinum plaques, the camera panning down

[83] Terminator X. 'Buck Whylin'. Columbia Records, 1990.
[84] Colin Harrison. *American Culture in the 1990s*. Edinburgh. 2010. p. 82.
[85] Ibid.

to reveal the clichéd cigar-laden White record executive sitting behind a desk in his office talking to a young Black Hip Hop artist:

> -'You want to live comfortable like me? You've got to open up to a wider audience.'
> -'But I don't want to change the way I look and sound.'
> -'Look trust me kid, when I get through with you, your name will be on a platinum record right up there on my wall.'[86]

The quintessential Faustian pact, returning to the scene at the video's conclusion, the unsigned artist refuses to become 'another tombstone' on the wall. With a shrug, the executive patches through to his secretary to 'send in the next rapper', confirming the label as a mechanised production line, manipulator of individuals willing to be made into disposable resources. The track itself, ironically EPMD's greatest selling record, is a squidgy bass-heavy odyssey that rails against the pitfalls of the industry, as the Roger Troutman sample synthetically warbles its complicity.[87] 'Crossover' asks pertinent questions regarding equity, and how images to this day are still being projected into a virtual arena that is packaged and sold by the culture industry as Hip Hop: the crossover is not just a transition from underground to commercial, a mere increase in visibility, but the crossing of a financial and moral frontier.

What exactly is lost and gained in that threshold crossing? The traversal calls for speculation on the role of the artist, and the choices (predominantly but not exclusively Black) artists make when opportunities arise 'on the tidal waves of chance', waves that W.E.B. Du Bois was already contemplating during the Jazz Age in 'Criteria of Negro Art' (1926): 'We can go on the stage; we can be just as funny as white Americans wish us to be; we can play all the sordid parts that America likes to assign to Negroes; but for any thing [sic] else there is still small place for us'.[88] The 'small place' in the entertainment industry to which Du Bois refers has expanded in certain fields, like the representations emanating from

[86] EPMD. 'Crossover'. Def Jam Recordings, 1992.
[87] Ibid; the vocoder sample ('Whatever you want, oh oh, whatever you need, I'll do it for you') is taken from Roger Troutman. 'You Should Be Mine'. *Bridging the Gap*. Reprise Records, 1991.
[88] W.E.B. Du Bois. 'Criteria of Negro Art'. *The Crisis*. October 1926. pp. 290-7.

Hollywood in recent decades.[89] Yet Du Bois worried over the repercussions of one-dimensional representations of Black Americans for future generations, over what effect they would have in decades and centuries to come.

Just over forty years later Martin Luther King was assassinated on 4th April 1968. His murder prompted days of riots in most major cities, including Washington, Detroit, Chicago, and Baltimore. It was a level of unrest that saw a hundred cities burnt and scarred, forty deaths, and over twenty thousand arrests. In Washington the uprising was so fierce that troops armed with machine guns were deployed onto 'the Capitol steps', with 'rioting' reaching to 'just ten blocks from the White House', a flush of feeling so strong that America had to take notice.[90] While Stokely Carmichael was encouraging Black America to go and 'get guns', James Brown was preparing for an April 5th gig at the Boston Garden.[91] The rioting on the 4th had remained in Roxbury, a predominantly Black borough in Boston, but with a potential 15,000-strong audience congregating at the Garden, the city's central businesses and government buildings were now also under threat.[92] Black city councillor Tom Atkins persuaded young mayor Kevin White to let the concert go ahead, offering ticket refunds and getting local station WGBH-TV to broadcast the event for free, convincing Brown that the city would compensate him for the losses.[93]

As other cities were wrecked and plundered, Brown, and then Mayor White, addressed the live and viewing audiences, White reiterating that the event was taking place to pay tribute to 'one of the greatest Americans, Dr. Martin Luther King'.[94] Put at risk in an event so publicised and so public, in an arena bathed in palpable tension, Brown, accompanied by short sets from Marva Whitney and Bobby Byrd, put on an immaculate performance that

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[89] See Sam Dennison. *Scandalize My Name: Black Imagery in American Popular Music*. New York. 1982; Tommy L. Lott. *The Invention of Race, Black Culture and the Politics of Representation*. Oxford. 1999. pp. 47-66, 139-51; Donald Bogle. *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*. New York. 2001. pp. 324-53; and Mia Mask (Ed.). *Contemporary Black American Cinema: Race, Gender and Sexuality at the Movies*. New York. 2012.

[90] Fred Siegel. *The Future Once Happened Here: New York, D.C., L.A. and the Fate of America's Big Cities*. London. 1997. p. 81.

[91] Ibid. p. 80.

[92] Destruction of property/violent behaviour remains accepted in some areas, still treated as emergency in others.

[93] See David Leaf's documentary 'The Night James Brown Saved Boston'. 2008. Available to view online at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5fBEVEQCzc.

[94] The full concert is available to view at http://survivalwarsappendix.blogspot.co.uk.

veered from eulogy to frenzied celebration. So successful in keeping disturbance to a minimum in Boston, the concert was repeated in back-to-back broadcasts throughout the night. The event is important for several reasons. Firstly, from a social perspective, the fusion of Brown's appearance with the available broadcast technology helped galvanise a city under threat, no more so than in Brown's deft handling of the stage invasion towards the end of the set, telling the swarming crowd 'we've got to show that we're young men and young ladies…we are Black!...[n]ow wait a minute…you're making me look bad…you're not being fair to yourselves or me either…or your race'.[95]

The respect for the words evident, the situation in the arena was a small scale version of the message successfully being projected to the rest of the city. With that level of social control, Brown could have turned the situation into anything, but chose to elevate it to something other than an expression of anger, hate, or disappointment, this being despite Brown's disagreement with King over the merits of peaceful protest. As Reverend Al Sharpton comments, not only was it a statement and symbol of music's ability to be political and transcend and soothe, but unlike other artists that 'were able to cross over as Blacks into mainstream, James Brown made mainstream cross over into Black' on his own terms. While not a revolutionary act, the event was revolutionary in terms of image–control and affirmation that African American influence was possible within the entertainment industry, Brown himself recognising this through an anecdote given at a press conference in Washington on April 6th: 'You know, in Augusta Georgia I used to shine shoes, on the steps of a radio station WRDW. But today, I own that radio station. You know what that is? That's Black power'.[96]

Then there is the performance itself. Brown's intermittent banshee wails between the punchy vocals are a divination: a virtualisation of the pain of the community and nation. Snatches and segments of his own numbers are segued with sections of other hits from the era, the only time the rhythm is interrupted being when an act leaves the stage. During the

[95] 'James Brown Saved Boston'.
[96] Ibid.

second half of the show Brown also comperes and conducts a series of solos from his musicians within the set; eerily reminiscent of what within several years would be termed breakbeats, Brown cuts loose, interpreting the heightened percussive interludes through dextrous dance routines that incorporate everything from a simple leg stutter, to mimed cultural references, to acrobatics. It is little wonder James Brown's records were cut apart and looped with such frequency as Hip Hop transformed and looked to build a commercial framework around the new sampling technology available in the mid-1980s. Yes, it provided a free source of funky drums, vocals, and other instruments to be isolated and recalibrated, but in doing so it also spoke and made immediate links to the essence of a previous generation and all that James Brown stood for.

With the night of April 5th 1968 as a heightened example, Brown exhibited almost all the prototypical elements Hip Hop would become known for, perhaps his greatest gift to the culture being as a pioneer in the rewiring of technology and surrounding materials: the recontextualisation of environments to empower, and as a means of creative expression. I say almost all because one crucial element was – perhaps could not have been – included in the performance, and that is graffiti. Incongruously, graffiti is the first aspect of the culture in the 1970s to garner widespread mainstream attention, and the element within Hip Hop that most overtly manipulates the public technological space – as James Brown had – as a means of making a mark on or (re)claiming the environment. And unlike live music or dance it had permanence and a set of site-specific conditions which had, along with its increasing popularity, made it a political issue in New York City by 1972.[97] Although adopted by the culture, graffiti was the label given to street art by those trying to eradicate it. It derives from a much older Italian term *graffito*, that the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as 'a drawing or writing scratched on a wall or other surface; a scribbling on an ancient wall, as those at Pompeii and Rome'. Referred to in the street as 'writers', officials took the first part of

[97] For the story behind the politicisation of graffiti throughout the 1970s, see Craig Castleman. *Getting Up: Subway Graffiti in New York*. Cambridge, Mass. 1982. pp. 134-75.

graffiti's definition and used it to highlight and stigmatise not the art itself, but the act of defacing publicly or privately owned property.

Tony Silver, the director of the pivotal graffiti documentary *Style Wars* (1984), recollected the events leading up to its production as 'war between these marvellous extraordinary kids and the rest of us, the rest of New York society…What I realised was [that] there was this incredible drama; in that New York from Brooklyn to the Bronx was a vast stage, with trains moving across it'.[98] Hip Hop was not an art-form that just developed in studios and private cliques; it was illegal to practice elements of the culture from 1973 to 1979. Hip Hop in New York in the 1970s was a fight for a technological urban territory as public performance space. The city had been transformed into a sprawling virtual arena and ideological canvas. Once again the argument reverts back to questions around the efficacy of systems that control perception and ownership, and the handling of property within designated zones of most major US cities. The Hip Hop forming in the Bronx of the early 1970s was due as much to its socio-political policy as it was to the temperament of the city's population and its architecture.

If James Brown can be positioned as an unwitting Hip Hop pioneer, then so too can Robert Moses and the process of suburbanisation and expansion of capitalist development spreading across the nation in the period after 1945. Moses was the urban planner responsible for the construction of the Cross-Bronx Expressway. As an unelected official with responsibility for the construction of all housing projects in New York in the post-World War Two era, the chairman of the Triborough Bridge Authority, Moses autocratically ran public authority revenues (such as the extensive profits on toll charges) as a private enterprise, funding more and more transportation projects in and around the city to the tune of 'two *billion* dollars'.[99] Shadowing this post-war absorption of surplus capital, the discrepancy between public and private wealth accumulation was shockingly brought to the

[98] From an interview with Tony Silver in 2007 (available to view in the online appendix).
[99] Robert A. Caro. *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*. 1974. New York. 1975. p. 843; Caro's damning biography of Moses, and his practices, was awarded the National Humanities Medal by President Obama in 2010.

fore when the city was forced to ask for 'federal assistance to spare New York from bankruptcy' in 1975.[100] On the brink, parts of the city with no funds for civic regeneration, like the Bronx, lay in ruins.

The first section of the Cross-Bronx Expressway opened on 5th November 1955, coinciding with a peak in post-war prosperity that made the new path a portal for previous generations of now upwardly mobile (German, Irish, Italian and Jewish) migrants as they relocated to the new suburban areas developed to the south, east and west of the city. What was termed 'White flight' towards an overlaid suburban frontier based on aspiration and a fresh wave of consumerism was mirrored by those who couldn't afford to leave, left to greet an influx of new migrants to the wastelands around the areas still under construction. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 abolished national-origin quotas and, along with fragmentation of previous colonial outposts (like Jamaica claiming full independence in 1962), allowed 'US capital access to the global surplus population', which meant migrant populations could be used as an alternative to the seeking out of other cheap labour-saving technologies: abyssal territories from the making of the pristine new suburbs the 'ugly mirror image of capital absorption through urban redevelopment'.[101]

To give some idea of the new demographics, as well as many arriving from the South, and outside the US from the Caribbean, the number of Puerto Ricans recorded as living in New York also rose from 554 in 1910 to 187,420 by 1950, exponentially increasing to 817,712 by 1970.[102] And as Moses hacked 'paths through jungles of tenements and apartment houses' to build the seven mile expressway, this new melting pot of different cultures were left to survive amongst what remained. With unfulfilled promises of rehousing and compensation, many tenants were left destitute or given no option but to pay high rents for remaining properties to scurrilous landlords, a situation made worse by unrelenting wage repression in

[100] See Sam Roberts. 'Infamous "Drop Dead" Was Never Said By Ford'. 28 December 2006. *The New York Times*. www.nytimes.com/2006/12/28/nyregion/28veto.html; and Sam Roberts. *Only in New York*. New York. 2009. pp. 164-7.
[101] Harvey. *Enigma of Capital*. pp. 14, 178.
[102] Carmen Teresa Whalen. 'Colonialism, Citizenship, and the Making of the Puerto Rican Diaspora: An Introduction'. *The Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives*. Philadelphia. 2005. p. 3.

the West made possible by the market's access to cheap labour.[103] The expressway and all alterations were finally completed early in 1972, but by 1969 South Bronx residents were already 'living in a state of siege'.[104] Opportunities limited by techno-industrial advance, and because businesses had moved with the affluent to new suburban locations (meaning very little work was available for unskilled labour), gangs became rife as criminality and addiction intertwined with the arrival of large quantities of heroin onto the streets. Fixers organising insurance frauds also appeared, to the point where by 1977 'more than 30,000 buildings had been set ablaze and abandoned' in the South Bronx alone, 'many of them good solid apartment houses built to last hundreds of years'.[105] The 'arson capitol of the world…the flames a signal of a national disaster', the Bronx was not only Fitzgerald's valley of ashy wasteland animated, expanded, in extremis, but also an uncontrollable inferno of urban decay and unrestricted gang violence.[106] Speaking forthrightly in 1976, Bronx Borough Commander Tony Bouza set out exactly what conditions Moses had a hand in creating:

> A dehumanised and impersonal society is brutalising and conditioning its citizens, so do we have poverty, the lack of education, the inability to articulate, alcoholism, unemployment, and inadequate housing…all of the desperate conditions of the ghetto…[W]e have a subculture in our society and it resides in the ghetto… the bureaucracy and the [federal] government are failing…and [need to] address it…one of the reasons it hasn't done so is because it's *invisible*…the fact of the matter is we are manufacturing criminals, we are manufacturing brutality, we are very efficiently creating a very volatile sub-element in our society….I am very well paid, almost to be the commander of an army of occupation in the ghetto, and that is a great tragedy.[107]

It is important to give some social and historical context to graffiti here, to comprehend its full potential and what it meant to the occupants of these 'invisible' rubble-strewn areas as a communication code.[108] From one angle graffiti was an element of the youth's reaction to the

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[103] Caro. *The Power Broker*. pp. 843, 850-84.
[104] Evelyn Gonzalez. *The Bronx*. New York. 2004. p. 121.
[105] Cited from *The Fire Next Door, CBS Reports with Bill Moyers*. *CBS*. 1977.
[106] Ibid; gangs 'spread to virtually every neighbourhood in the Bronx' by 1972. Gary Hoenig. 'Execution in the Bronx'. *The New York Times*. 17 June 1973. p. 180; for documentaries on Bronx gangs see *Flyin' Cut Sleeves*. 1993; and *80 Blocks From Tiffany's*. 1979.
[107] Tony Bouza. *The Police Tapes*. 1977. My emphasis. Bouza was removed from his post by 1977. The complicated clash of gang and law was articulated in many films of the era, examples being *Assault on Precinct 13* (1976), *The Warriors* (1979), and *Fort Apache, the Bronx* (1981).
[108] See Roger Gastman and Caleb Neelon. *The History of American Graffiti*. New York. 2011. pp. 34-85; and Norman Mailer. *The Faith of Graffiti*. New York. 1974. Bolstering then undermining the impression of the artist as noble savage, Mailer posits graffiti as 'the expression of tropical peoples': a re-projection of the oppressed voice.

spread and normalisation of the condition Bouza summarises: an attempt to use the frequencies from light and colour to visually improve the area. From another, taking one of the earliest taggers as an example, it was a way for Greek American TAKI183 to reject the pooling of ghetto residents into a single mass, by prominently placing name (Taki, a 'traditional Greek diminutive for Demetrius') and place of origin (183rd Street in the Bronx) as many times as possible across the city, as an affirmation of self-worth and self-promotion.[109] Long before online communication networks, graffiti took language and made it into a technological medium of signs and code.

From this roaming calligraphy, larger more complex hieroglyphics like Skeme's 'Back on Broadway' began appearing on the sides of trains.[110] The veins of New York transformed into a technological canvas and medium for communicating symbolic codes across the territory is not without its ironies, the defacing of the functional whitewashed city-owned transportation system an attack on and aesthetic response to the impact of modern architecture, and vivid reminder of the plight faced by unheard sections of the community who had been filtered out. It is paradoxical too, and typical of Hip Hop's built-in contradictions, that the element that required and most coveted anonymity due to the potential penalties incurred for trespass and criminal damage was also the most commercially viable, and the first to be courted globally by figures within the cultural establishment. Frederick Braithwaite (Fab 5 Freddy) and Lee Quinones were the first to exhibit graffiti late in 1979 in a show entitled 'The Fabulous Five' at Claudio Bruni's Galleria La Medusa in Rome, Braithwaite creating links between uptown and a downtown scene that congregated in and around the Mudd Club, whose patrons included Blondie, Madonna and Andy Warhol.[111] This loosely connected group also comprised Jean Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring, who, while not specifically graffiti artists were aligned with it ideologically, the

[109] "Taki' 183 Spawns Pen Pals'. *The New York Times*. 21 July 1971. p. 37; the engraving of names on surfaces is an ancient art, traced by James Prigoff in the 'Foreword' to Steve Grody. *Graffiti L.A.: Street Styles and Art*. New York. 2007.
[110] See online appendix.
[111] Fab 5 Freddy would go on to host *Yo! MTV Raps*, Hip Hop's first music video show on MTV. Examples of their work, basic by today's standards in terms of theme, letter camouflaging and colour schemes, are available to view in the online appendix.

art world embracing their fusion of subway and street with Pop Art aesthetics to fill a void in the market caused by waning interest in other movements.

Released within a year of each other, *Wild Style* and then *Style Wars* mark the severance of the graffiti scene into two distinct entities: those who tagged and bombed but did not care or were not capable of taking it further, and those who wrote and bombed *and* wanted to get paid. The awkward trade-off between the two worlds is played out in a series of scenes in *Wild Style*, starring Braithwaite and Quinones as fictionalised versions of themselves in a loosely scripted melange of breakers, party routines, turntablism, and graffiti. Acting as tour guide for Rose (Patti Astor), a White female journalist, Fade (Braithwaite) takes her to meet Ray (Quinones), the best artist in the neighbourhood; resisting her presence in the train yard at first, the trio go to an uptown club where Ray and Rose are held at gun point upon leaving. Ironed out by Fade, as they travel downtown Rose says they are on their way to 'meet some very important people…ready for new thrills'. Diametrically opposed to the energy of the club night uptown, Fade introduces Ray to a bourgeois dinner party of gallery owners and television executives as Blondie's 'Rapture' provides appropriately passive muzak.[112] Introduced to the party host, led to a bedroom adorned with abstract works, Ray asks for one hundred dollars for a commissioned piece; sitting on the bed, issued with a cheque for two hundred dollars no questions asked, the party host enquires '[w]hen do you think I can have it?' as the scene suggestively ends on a shot of the bright lights across the New York sky line.

Flirtation, seduction and purchasing power gave the art world a window of opportunity to market graffiti as a product. It gave curators the chance to promote a new technological primitivism, cultural miscegenation where, as with Warhol, the artist as celebrity or maverick is paired with homogeneity and a production-line mentality, individual aesthetics put to one side as if the Cubist works of Picasso and Braque were interchangeable. The music also susceptible to the editing out of these 'troublesome complexities', David Foster Wallace

[112] This is not to demean 'Rapture' (1982), a downtown homage to the uptown scene the video for which features Braithwaite, Quinones and Basquiat, or to dismiss Chris Stein's musical contribution to early Hip Hop (producing and playing on much of the *Wild Style* soundtrack).

warns of the process in *Signifying Rappers* (1990), individuality succumbing to the 'wide shallow definition' of '*Representative Voice of Threatening Alien Culture*' in order to make the product easier to digest.[113] The antithesis to this process, *Style Wars* is a conventional documentation of the unique lives of underground graffiti artists as a cat-and-mouse game plays out between them, Mayor Ed Koch, and New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA). Echoing what Ahearn said about the death of the scene by 1980, IZ THE WIZ, one of the featured writers in *Style Wars*, surmised that as early as '1982…was the beginning of the end for graffiti' as a cultural form that catered to and existed for a local community, the forays into film not so much a crashing introductory blast into the mainstream as a retrospective on the possibilities of what had been.[114]

Ill-feeling towards those perceived to be wantonly diluting the culture was tangible, the community increasingly combative and dangerous as the free canvasses and advertising spots offered by the train cars were locked down by a '$22.4 million' incentive introduced by Mayor Koch, a scheme based on protecting yards with dogs, fences, and razor wire.[115] The tensions and clashes in philosophical perspectives are exquisitely etched into vinyl on 'Beat Bop' (1983), the collaborative recording between Basquiat, K-Rob and RAMMELLZEE.[116] The unlikely trio were brought together by Braithwaite, with Basquiat hoping the meeting would provide material for an album to release on his new Tartown label, extending his art career by exploring another of Hip Hop's disciplines. Basquiat had never bombed a train, was eclectic, sensitive, and completely open to outside influences. By contrast RAMMELLZEE, a hardened veteran and self-professed iconoclast, was infatuated with the semiotics of graffiti and spray can as symbolic artillery. Taking the paint as virtual ammunition, the author of the 'IONIC TREATISE GOTHIC FUTURISM' prioritised the camouflaging and armouring of alphabets over any form of commercial recognition.[117] What

[113] David Foster Wallace. *Signifying Rappers*. New Jersey. 1990.
[114] Chang. *Can't Stop, Won't Stop*. p. 179.
[115] Castleman. 'Politics of Graffiti'. pp. 156-7.
[116] K-Rob and RAMMELLZEE. 'Beat Bop'. Tartown Records, 1983.
[117] RAMMELLZEE'S website is available at www.gothicfuturism.com, the 'IONIC TREATISE GOTHIC FUTURISM' can be viewed at www.gothicfuturism.com/rammellzee/01.html.

began as a meeting turned into a summit on the culture's projection, or perhaps more appropriately, as Hip Hop journalist Chairman Mao puts it, an 'interrogation'.[118]

Judging his lyrical abilities derisory, Basquiat was forced to accept a perfunctory production credit, with RAMMELLZEE and K-Rob taking over the vocal duties. Languid electric strings provided by musician Al Diaz are draped over a disjointed watery bassline, many critics accepting the back-to-back verses as a 'stream of consciousness rap' between a pimp (Ram) and a teen or child (K-Rob).[119] True to a degree, the relentless flow of rhymes is initiated by K-Rob:

> Get funky in the place
> Get funky in the place
> It's pathetic dope addicts have to be abused
> It's a shame, what a thing to be a prostitute

Flat when transferred to print, even the use of 'funky' here shatters into a congregation of separate possible meanings, from reference to the beat itself, to Hip Hop's call-and-response origins, the negative reaction to Basquiat's lyrics, or to the pungency of the atmosphere caused by tensions in the studio. What follows is a reversal, a complete overhaul of the energetic downtown disco epic: ten minutes of futuristic saloon music as Rammel and K-Rob inhabit the roles of powerful but enigmatic pimp-hustler and disenchanted innocent. An operatic virtualisation of a heroin high, the woozy surreal flows flit between free indirect discourse and barbed attacks on an absent unnamed figure. As the third and fourth lines above reveal, whether these are subliminal attacks on Basquiat or a vicious commentary on the social dynamic that had formed between the uptown and downtown scenes – was forming between street and corporation – is open to interpretation.

Whatever the exact circumstances were behind the production, visceral art came out of the conflict, the record standing as an edifice to Hip Hop's rejection of the art industry and its practices. The exchange between RAMMELLZEE and Basquiat did not end with 'Beat Bop'

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[118] For the history behind Basquiat's rise in the art world see Leonhard Emmerling. *Basquiat*. Los Angeles. 2003; the Chairman Mao quote is from liner notes to *Ego Trip's The Big Payback* compilation. Rawkus Records, 2000.
[119] Toop. *Rap Attack 3*. p. 122.

either, the pair travelling to Los Angeles shortly after the recording to promote the 'New Paintings by Jean-Michel Basquiat' exhibition at the Larry Gagosian Gallery in March 1983. While in Los Angeles, a performance by RAMMELLZEE at the Rhythm Lounge was recorded and turned into a piece of video art directed by Salomon Emquies with visuals added by Basquiat. Timeless, close-up shots of the emcee clad in hood and ski mask are intermixed with snatches of DJ Toxic looping the opening bars of Billy Squier's 'Big Beat' (1980). RAMMELLZEE's rodeo freestyle projected into a masked hand is mesmerising. The microphone is hidden from view, amplifying the performance yet transformed into a seemingly attached prosthetic. Line after line of tough talk and gun metaphors ('When I get to the spot I can take the steel, with a drop of the hammer…') are thrown out into a detached pitch-black atmosphere, the performance only given context, only brought back into the material realm, by the occasional brief glimpse of a cavernous interior filled with spaced-out bodies swaying in time to the rhythm.[120] An alien pioneer or diviner of frequencies from atmospherics, RAMMELLZEE's transformations into various criminal characters – along with Philadelphian Schoolly D's independently released 'Gangster Boogie' (1984) and 'P.S.K.-What Does it Mean?' (1985) – provide an early template for the music that would be labelled 'Gangsta Rap' by the end of the decade.[121] A drip-feed snapshot of what Tim Brennan describes as the increasingly apparent 'gangster capitalism' within the 'American state', millions of units of hyper-violent material under this moniker have been sold to bewildered global mainstream audiences in the decades since, by artists from Ice T to 50 Cent.[122] The 'illicit economy as a mirror image of American capitalism' has also spread into and become a thematic mainstay in Hollywood, beginning with films like *Colors* (1988) and *New Jack City* (1991), and seen on the small screen most recently in H.B.O.'s *The Wire* (2002-8).[123]

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[120] Available to view in the online appendix.

[121] For Schoolly D's influence see 'Gangster Boogie, a street hit'. *Hip Hop Connection*. 1994. www.globaldarkness.com/articles/schoolly_d_gangster_boogie.html; Schoolly D. 'Gangster Boogie'. Cut Masters Records, 1984; and 'P.S.K.-What Does it Mean?'. Schoolly-D Records, 1985.

[122] Tim Brennan. 'Off the Gangsta Tip: A Rap Appreciation'. *Critical Inquiry*. Summer 1994. p. 671.

[123] Robin D.G. Kelley. 'Kickin' Reality Kickin' Ballistics'. *Droppin' Science*. Philadelphia. 1996. p. 130. Gangsta Rap's ascent also collides with the rise in distribution of Class A drugs, some labels signing artists and distributing records to write off or launder profits through legitimate business channels. See Eric K. Watts. 'An Exploration of Spectacular Consumption'. *Communication Studies*. Spring 1997. pp. 42-58.

Basquiat's response to the trip is channelled into 'Hollywood Africans', a poignant canvas now part of the permanent collection at New York's Whitney Museum.[124] Across a smeared yellow approximation of American land are dotted references to legal and illegal drugs and products, the south-west corner fading into a dark abyss emblazoned with 'GANGSTERISM' in white chalk, suggesting a nightmarish transmogrification of the Hollywood Hills and all the dreams invested in it.[125] 'HOLLYWOOD AFRICANS' appears and then is crossed out in various places within the territory, the linguistic diaspora marked as dating from 1940. But most telling is the image of Basquiat. Aware of his role in the affiliation with RAMMELLZEE, adjacent to his two touring partners, Basquiat makes his own characterisation slightly more prominent in the arrangement, circumspectly holding his chin with a verbal cue alongside it stating 'SELF PORTRAIT AS A HEEL'. Clear in this and many of his other canvasses is Basquiat's obsession with American celebrity and fame, a state which is then converted into symbolic language and self-reflexively folded back into works throughout his short career. Though most early rhyme styles had a habit of being egocentric, Basquiat's treatments mirror a shift in the content of Hip Hop music, as it dispensed with community-specific commentaries and became fixated on the personality and traits of the first-person and/or consumable objects.[126]

Not only did this mid-decade wave of tracks push the focus onto emcees and their verbalising of the new urge for stardom and celebrity trappings, they were also influenced and propelled by a national upsurge in economic prosperity in the aftermath of what can be termed the first wave of modern financial crises of the post-war period in the 1970s. As Ronald Reagan's supply-side tax policies took hold, causing the thinning or dismantling of many corporations, the 'electronic landscapes' emcees 'mined in their effort to mirror a here-and-now began pulsing with the signals of a whole new yuppoid aesthetic'.[127] In terms of financial markets this was also the moment of the 'Big Bang', the interlinking of transnational

[124] See online appendix.
[125] Again echoing Baudrillard's 'desertification' of America and its frontier.
[126] See LL Cool J's debut album *Radio* (1985) which included 'I Can't Live Without My Radio', 'I Need A Beat', etc., Run DMC's 'My Adidas' (1986), and tracks from Eric B and Rakim's *Paid in Full* (1987).
[127] Foster Wallace. *Signifying Rappers*. p. 124.

stock and trading markets allowing the first movements towards the conversion of the banking system into 'one giant network of financial power'.[128]

Eric B and Rakim's highly influential *Paid in Full* album would seem a product that perfectly aligns with Foster Wallace's 'yuppoid aesthetic'. The cover alone is an aggregation of ostentatious yuppie materialism and the opening of global channels of financial exchange: Eric B and Rakim, clad in Gucci, flaunting stacks of bills and oversized gold in front of a backdrop of cascading virtual dollars. Bracketed by a spoken introduction affiliating them to relevant label and management and an extended scratched conclusion, the title track to the album consists of a single short verse ('Thinkin' of a master plan…').[129] With no date or place mentioned, Rakim's lyrics are reminiscent of an undated ghetto time capsule. The shying away from crime to legitimise your business or seek fame and fortune is as compatible with the American aspirational perspective now as it was in 1987, would have been in 1917, and will more than likely still be in 2017. A paragon of now numerous tracks about making tracks to make money, Rakim's slow, indolent delivery and lyrical minimalism harbour a certain apathy and cynicism for what is being created. Couching the production of Hip Hop as work, at best a calculated alternative to robbery or '9 to 5' existence, it can be likened to what Fredric Jameson construes in 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture' (1992) as one of the 'various forms of activity [that] lose their immanent intrinsic satisfactions and become means to an end', Rakim's last contribution to the track in the short conversation after the verse being a prompt to turn away from the track, to 'just pump the music up', and 'count our money'.[130] Consciously or not, 'Paid in Full' is a testament to the automated drudgery of manufacturing products for major labels in the music industry, a successful reflection of the emotionless efficiency of the global apparatus and its monotony.

This is a key issue in the misinterpretation of Hip Hop by consumers, creators and critics of the culture; the form taken literally, the blurring of the thin line between fact and fiction, over the years, has often had disastrous consequences. The same year as *Paid in Full*,

[128] Harvey. *Enigma of Capital*. p. 20.
[129] Eric B and Rakim. 'Paid in Full'. Island Records, 1987.
[130] Fredric Jameson. 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture'. *Signatures of the Invisible*. New York. 1992. p. 11.

Boogie Down Productions released *Criminal Minded* (1987). Consisting of KRS ONE and his DJ Scott La Rock, the cover to their innovative debut sees them posing with pistols behind a desk full of other weapons: clear-eyed, defiantly staring back out at the American consumer. The album's tone and principles are set out in the very first lines of 'Poetry':

> Well now you're forced to listen to the teacher and the lesson
> Class is in session so you can stop guessin'
> If this is a tape or a written down memo
> See I am a professional, this is not a demo
> In fact call it a lecture, a visual picture
> Sort of a poetic and rhythm-like mixture, listen[131]

The album cover was not a snapshot of reality, of destructive object-fetishism, but a metaphor for the hostile takeover of the industry and revolutionary abduction of the listener. And yet the album is best known not for the opening lines of its title track ('Criminal minded, you've been blinded'), but for gratuitous narratives of drug-related self-defence ('9mm Goes Bang') and tracks attacking the district of Queens and its representatives ('South Bronx', 'The Bridge is Over').[132] Obscured by the sensational is the formal connection of Hip Hop lyrics to poetry and the spoken arts. There is a comparison to Whitman to be made in terms of verbalisation, and how it is transmitted to and received by an audience. More generally there is a shared fascination with stretched lines and rhyme schemes, as seen in Whitman or Allen Ginsberg, that test the limits of formal poetic structure: the collision with an audible metronome in Hip Hop giving the verbal content a giddying kaleidoscopic effect as rigid machine clashes with the fluidity of the voice and its challenge to form.

In a case of life imitating art Scott La Rock, who worked as a social worker dealing with the homeless at Franklin Armory Men's Shelter in the Bronx, was shot in the neck, killed in cold blood while trying to peacefully defuse a local rivalry involving fellow BDP member D-Nice. The first in a line of Hip Hop morality tales, fables for a new urban generation, Scott La Rock's presence has 'overseen' the rest of KRS ONE's career and his transition from virtual revolutionary, teacher and poet, to lecturer and spiritual intellectual presiding over what

[131] Boogie Down Productions. 'Poetry'. B-Boy Records, 1987.
[132] The 'Bridge Wars' was a battle over Hip Hop's origins between the Bronx and Queens, stemming from the rejection of BDP by Marley Marl and Mr. Magic's Juice Crew.

remains of Hip Hop culture.[133] But to just suspend that thought on morality tales for a moment, in Costello and Foster Wallace's *Signifying Rappers*, perhaps the first truly academic interlocution of Hip Hop culture's growing relationship with dominant American power structures, Mark Costello forthrightly states that:

> Soon rap publicists will face a problem their porn counterparts encountered over a decade ago. Every single shocking act of sex or pain will have been 'done' symbolically, and, in the process, rap's audience will have acquired a taste for bloody novelty. The result: our first 'snuff' rap record…Editorial writers will be appalled, giving the new snuff rappers the kind of jackpot of free publicity N.W.A. enjoyed in the spring of '89.[134]

An innovative work, *Signifying Rappers* uses Schoolly D's 'Signifying Rapper' (1988) as an entry point into an exploration of Hip Hop's value as a sign to the America of 1990.[135] Riffing on Gates's *The Signifying Monkey*, Costello and Foster Wallace also subvert the dynamic of the original 'Signifying Monkey' story from African folklore in the book's structure and content as they 'signify' – in all senses, from the outside – both rappers and the corporate America of power and advertising that dictates that you must 'Succeed, Not Just Survive'.[136] However, there are areas of the research that are questionable. Firstly, having gained the attention of and been allowed access to a miniscule Boston label by 'nerding up', Costello is asked a question by producer Ralph Stacey that cuts to the quick: 'Why do you want to write about rap, anyway?'.[137]

Part of its charm and its major flaw – encapsulated in the laughable excitement and trepidation of two twenty-six-year-old White men venturing to a Slick Rick concert in Roxbury, their abiding memory of the gig the disappointment at how invisible they were made to feel – the thesis that follows Stacey's question is a testament to their inability to truly

[133] These fables written into its history include the death of Eazy E due to complications from AIDS (1995), Big Pun from a heart attack related to an eating disorder (2000), Guru from myeloma (2010), J Dilla from lupus (2006), Baatin's battle with mental illness, the tragic loss of Aaliyah and Lisa 'Left Eye' Lopez in crashes, and Pharcyde producer J-Swift's recently documented battle with crack-cocaine addiction (see the 2012 documentary *1 More Hit*); as well as founding the Temple of Hip Hop in 1996, KRS ONE has lectured at universities internationally, releasing over twenty-one studio albums independently and for major label RCA in his evolution from *Criminal* to *Spiritual Minded*; see Kris Parker (KRS ONE). *Ruminations*. New York. 2003.
[134] Costello. *Signifying Rappers*. p. 73.
[135] Schoolly D. 'Signifying Rapper'. Jive Records, 1988.
[136] Ibid. p. 124.
[137] Ibid. p. 19.

get under the skin of the scene. With almost all examples used taken from easily accessible major releases, the pair seem blissfully unaware of (or avoid to not impede their focus of attack) even the most prominent of local Boston/Roxbury artists and their releases.[138] Trying to ingratiate their way into the industry by playing up to a stereotypical image of non-threatening Whiteness rather than just being themselves, the ploy is seen through and fails, the text a response to this failure rather than a clinical analysis of the culture and its attachment to the state apparatus. Secondly, to return to the quotation on Hip Hop's alignment with the extreme edge of obscenity/publicity, Costello must have missed the 1988 and 1989 albums from Houston's Ghetto (soon to be Geto) Boys; far from predicting the future of Hip Hop and the insatiability of its consumers, the type of product Costello was warning against was already in circulation.

This is, perhaps, a disservice to the Geto Boys and their contribution to the culture. Nevertheless, released on the independent Rap-a-Lot Records, 'Assassins' (1988) is a grotesque yarn of ghetto dehumanisation: murder predicated on addiction, theft, and sexual disease, culminating in the dismemberment of two prostitutes; 'Mind of a Lunatic' and 'Gangsta of Love' re-tread similar themes the next year, adding graphic representations of spousal abuse, rape and serial murder to the group's catalogue of enacted social and psychological depravities.[139] Taking advantage of the national hyperbole and F.B.I. interest in N.W.A.'s activities – the 'free publicity' to which Costello refers – Rick Rubin signed the Geto Boys to his new label Def American once he had left Def Jam, hastily re-recording the more controversial offerings and releasing them on the self-titled *The Geto Boys* (1990). So keen were Geffen to disassociate from the product, they removed their logo from the initial release and insisted on a disclaimer being placed on the cover ('Def American Recordings is opposed to censorship. Our manufacturer and distributor, however, do not condone or endorse the content of this recording, which they find violent, sexist, racist and indecent').

[138] For example Gang Starr's 'The Lesson', and 'Gusto'. Wild Pitch Records, 1987/1988; and Top Choice Clique's 'Powers in the Words' and 'Peace of Mind'. Waltz/Sample Records, 1988/1989.
[139] From Ghetto Boys. *Making Trouble*. Rap-a-Lot Records, 1988; and *Grip It! On That Other Level*. Rap-a-Lot Records, 1989.

Manufacture and distribution of the album soon handed over to Warner Bros. Records, the controversy parallels the future-cycle to which Costello alludes.

The cover itself is an insolent spoof of the cover to 'Let It Be' (1970), the tetraptych of The Beatles replaced with mug shots of Bushwick Bill, Ready Red, Scarface and Willie D holding up ID placards, human beings incarcerated and made into the property of Houston's 5th Ward Precinct. This, you think, would gesture towards the album's fondness for pastiche over reportage; on 'Assassins' alone there are samples from *Scarface* (1983), and references to *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) and *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984). It is unfortunate that the Geto Boys album is cited as an early example of attempts to attach to releases what Tricia Rose describes as 'commercial ploy[s] to attract white teenagers', ploys which have become more and more prominent since 1979.[140] Easy to devalue, detached from commercial pressures, the album is for the most part an homage to the films it references and, like them, an uncompromising revelation of the psychopathologies – vindictive competitiveness, lack of empathy, wanton violation of individual rights – that lie just behind the veil of contracting and expanding free market capitalism. It uses the same ironic techniques and characterisations to bring out these disorders as Bret Easton Ellis would use a year later in *American Psycho* (1991), only here through the virtual arena of sound.

Swamped by the immediacy of the album's other simulations of psychological horror and violence, 'City Under Siege', the final track on the album, is an unguarded patchwork of bare-faced drug histories and street mathematics, peppered with more *Scarface* snippets and direct accusatory assaults on the kleptocracy of consecutive Republican administrations.[141] Introduced by an addled dealer warbling a bastardised rendition of the New Seekers' Coca-Cola-advertising jingle 'I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing (In Perfect Harmony)' (1971), 'City Under Siege' shifts from first-person narration, to crime calculations, to socio-political commentary that leaves no room for speculation as to the bodies involved in the highest tiers of cocaine distribution in the US, the network of street-level connections,

[140] Tricia Rose. *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. Middletown. 1994. p. 81.
[141] Geto Boys. 'City Under Siege'. *The Geto Boys*. Def American, 1990.

and its trickle-down effect.[142] Where the rest of the album has no time or care for ideology, this final track is a dawning of consciousness, a culmination that punctures the previous acting out of the breeding of an attitude that promotes the ghettoised 'primitive accumulation of wealth by any means necessary'.[143] In a maturation of their sound, by 1996 the Geto Boys were projecting this perspective globally on 'The World is a Ghetto', taking listeners on a 'journey to the other side' to further reveal the reach of the obscene underside/built-in cycles of poverty in the American exportation of democratised global capitalism.[144]

Foster Wallace's conclusion in 1990 was that '[t]oday even the *freshest* black music is no longer an "escape" from the very conditions and tight borders that make it possible as music, or even as expression – since rap is, in the best and worst ways, just a mirror'.[145] This acceptance of its limitations – its demotion to just reflective music instead of transcendent virtual network and soundtrack to a multifaceted culture – is refuted in the trajectory of the Geto Boys' tracks already deliberated. They are aligned more closely with what Adorno estimates to be '[c]ulture in the true sense', not simply there to 'accommodate itself to human beings' but to always simultaneously raise 'a protest' against 'petrified relations'.[146] However, in a cruel twist, Foster Wallace's opinion is more relevant now than it was in 1990, or for that matter 1968, as Hip Hop within the production of global mass culture has been re-promoted as just 'Rap', before being fully incorporated into the Pop world of one-dimensional product-placement. The argument that Hip Hop is *just* an uncritical mirror is the default setting for critics to lambast and proponents to justify the misogyny, homophobia, drugs, violence and deviant materialism that now saturates the culture. But mirrors are empty, reflecting only what is put in front of them. Hip Hop is more like America's ommatidia, the fractal fly's eye, each unit an antenna reporting back the information received to a larger system. Or to look at it another way, it is also more of a projection device, the virtual audio arena upgraded to

[142] The New Seekers. 'I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing (In Perfect Harmony)'. Philips Records, 1971.
[143] Davis. *City of Quartz*. p. 87.
[144] The Geto Boys. 'The World is a Ghetto'. Rap-a-lot/Noo Trybe, 1996.
[145] Foster Wallace. *Signifying Rappers*. p. 127.
[146] Adorno. 'Culture Industry Reconsidered'. p. 13.

cinema, the Geto Boys album being one early example showing the plausibility of Hip Hop music as a visual medium.[147]

Before reconvening with the aforementioned cycle of morality tales and what happened to Hip Hop in their aftermath, there is one other lesson to be gleaned from the release of *The Geto Boys*, one that would change the shape of the culture entirely during the 1990s: the attack on the use of the sample. The culture's backbone, the sample had been synonymous with Hip Hop's DIY alchemy and synthesis with previous generations of American movements, environments and technology. Like war targets, breaks from previous records had been scanned, isolated, excised from the rest of the consumer debris, reformed into the virtual architecture for an emerging new means of communication. With virtually limitless potential, the sampler (and the sample) became the mnemonic instrument of choice for the transient technologised human. As touched on in the previous chapter, the development of increasingly affordable and more powerful technology through the 1980s meant increased memory, the horizon of the producer expanding from short and basic single loops to tracks that could contain layers of samples from multiple copyrighted sources. Cavalier breaches of copyright previously ignored or quietly accepted, in the era when Vanilla Ice's 'Ice Ice Baby' (1990) and MC Hammer's 'U Can't Touch This' (1990) were selling multiple-million copies, each track began to contain as many potential lawsuits as there were samples, as the Geto Boys found with their use of Steve Miller's 'The Joker' (1973) on 'Gangsta of Love'. With many cases settled out of court, the defining moment came in 1992, when a Federal judge ruled that Biz Markie's use of Gilbert O'Sullivan's 'Alone Again Naturally' (1972) was a case of copyright infringement rather than fair use. With so much money involved, the sample was converted into corporate property, the domain of the legal team and major label. Anything obviously used had to be paid for or cleared, in the process crippling the expressive options available to the financially-limited independent artist.[148]

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[147] For the synergising of Hip Hop music, aesthetics, and Hollywood cinema, see Craig S. Watkins. *Representing: Hip Hop Culture and the Production of Black Cinema*. Chicago. 1999. pp. 50-76.

[148] See Chuck Phillips. 'Songwriter Wins Large Settlement in Rap Suit'. 1 January 1992. *Los Angeles Times*. pp. 1, 12; and Toop. *Rap Attack 3*. pp. 191-3. A decade later, concerning digital distribution rather than intellectual property, Dr. Dre and Eminem fought Napster, repeating the legal cycle and confirming their corporate alignment.

What EPMD termed the 'Crossover', the monopolised corporate Hip Hop era had begun, with almost ninety percent of the national music market controlled by just four companies by 2004 (Universal Music Group, Warner Music Group, EMI Group, and Sony Entertainment).[149] Plagued by a narrative of ideological decline at its ground level, the culture's simulation within the corporate arena thanks to a new breed of Black entrepreneurial industry figures modelling themselves on business magnates (from Russell Simmons to Donald Trump), meant the music was being promoted with a new level of money and sophistication.[150] The new advertising of virtual prosperity in the music video, the projection of aspirational images and lifestyles, not only mirrored the vast amounts of wealth now in the upper echelons of the music industry, but the opportunity for consumers to chase these shadowy fantasies was also opened as channels of credit in the 1990s were made 'readily available, even to those previously excluded from financial markets', debt-financing in the form of mortgages and credit cards disastrously offered even to those without regular incomes.[151]

But the mix of calculator-digit corporate business and battle ethics in an age of virtual wealth has proved combustive. One of the new breed of industry gatekeepers to emerge in this era was Sean 'Puff Daddy' Combs. Eager to claw back sales from a West Coast scene that had dominated the market share since N.W.A., his Bad Boy label entered into a feud with Death Row Records that would reach its nadir in the deaths of each camp's figurative soldiers, Biggie Smalls and Tupac Shakur. In 'Hypnotize' (1996), the last video made before his murder, Biggie and Combs are pictured being chased while driving glimmering speed boats and the finest in showroom-fresh Lexus engineering, a Hollywood production drenched in Versace, white mansions, semi-naked female dancers, and expensive

[149] For an excellent history of major label reconstruction and their attempts to survive the digital era, see Louis Barfe. *Where Have All the Good Times Gone?*. London. 2004.
[150] Since founding Def Jam with Rick Rubin in 1984, Simmons' business ventures have netted '$1.7 billion dollars' in yearly hip-hop domestic sales, and '$2 billion in annual clothing sales for hip-hop brands', building a personal net worth of '$340 million' by 2011; see Charnas. *Big Payback*. p. 616; and Tania Padgett. 'Russell Simmons: Getting Rich is so Simple'. 26 April 2011. http://www.cnn.com. http://money.cnn.com/2011/04/26/smallbusiness/russell_simmons_small_business/index.htm.
[151] Menzie D. Chinn and Jeffry A. Frieden. *Lost Decades: The Making of America's Debt Crisis and the Long Recovery*. New York. 2011. p. 15; by 2007, debt owed by consumers in the USA amounted to over '$13 trillion'. See Lyn C. Thomas. *Consumer Credit Models: Pricing, Profit and Portfolios*. Oxford. 2009. pp. 1-8.

consumables: the personification of high-end mafia-chic.[152] Extensively written about, eulogised, Biggie and Tupac were made into martyrs, urban legends; but who by and what for?[153] Actors in a gangland feud, victims in a bi-coastal frontier war, objects in a corporate expansion, their deaths galvanise and exploit the long-held stereotype of Black male lives as brief, violent, and out of control, the release of posthumous recordings and continued promotion of Biggie and Tupac's image remaining highly profitable, and pushing affiliates that fuelled the flames that would eventually engulf them further into the limelight.[154]

A stark advertisement for the capacity of technology to extend this exploitation of image was evident in the reappearance of Tupac at the Coachella Festival in April 2012. Adding digital projection and computer-generated imagery to nineteenth-century illusionary technique (the 'Pepper's Ghost'), AV Concepts used '54,000 lumens' to bring Tupac back from the dead as a 'life-size holographic illusion' for an awestruck festival audience.[155] The holographic recreation of dead celebrities also features heavily in William Gibson's *Spook Country* (2007) discussed in chapter four. The holographic projection of Tupac is not the first time the technique has been used in entertainment either, the same technology implemented in the performance by the Gorillaz and Madonna at the Grammy Awards in 2006, and to animate the shows linked to the singing synthesizer application and Japanese anime sensation Hatsune Miku.[156]

While all these events fit into what can be bracketed as the manifestation of the virtual sublime – a cartoon parody of the manufactured nature of the recording industry, a pre-recorded performance of a living person, and a karaoke simulation of a pop star respectively – what differentiates the Tupac performance is its reanimation of a deceased entity: the artificial resurrection of a previously revered public figure. Truly nothing more than a spectral

[152] Notorious BIG. 'Hypnotize'. Bad Boy Records, 1996.
[153] For example, without a commercially viable back-catalogue, the death of Big L in 1999, shot nine times in the face and chest at point blank range in a Harlem doorway, was, by comparison, barely even reported.
[154] Of the many texts written on the deaths of Biggie Smalls and Tupac Shakur, the clearest and most informative is written by the LAPD detective assigned to the case; see Greg Kading. *Murder Rap: The Untold Story of the Biggie Smalls and Tupac Shakur Murder Investigations*. USA. 2011.
[155] See http://www.strictlysocial.com/2012/av-concepts-tupac-hologram-coachella-2012/; for AV Concepts and their projection technology see http://www.avconcepts.com/holographic-projection/; for the techniques and future uses for the technology see http://www.newscientist.com/video/52428102001-3d-videoconference.html.
[156] The holographic performances are available to view in the online appendix.

reflection, the live performance is replaced by simulation of a live performance. The projection of the dead being is incapable of any true bond to or shared interaction with a conscious audience. Despite the audience being fascinated, disturbed, enthralled, the flow of human emotion in the circuitry that runs between performer and crowd is removed, the reciprocal feedback loop severed. The Tupac 'hologram' was an illusion, a conjuring trick, in reality not even three-dimensional but a two-dimensional exercise in optical trickery, one that brings with it a myriad of serious moral and ethical questions regarding what is worshipped or cheered. What principles are injected into the deliberate blurring of the lines between the spontaneous/organic and the pre-meditated/artificial? Or are these minor considerations in the flexing of technological capabilities?

If a manufactured image of Tupac can live on, who owns the rights to choose the direction of that image, and what happens to the lessons generated from the destructiveness of the lifestyle leading up to his murder? Even at the time of Tupac's and Biggie's deaths, there were counters to this rich cloud of negativity, like Jeru the Damaja's 'The Bullshit' (1996), a track that's ending is as powerful as the intelligence and wit shown in its flensing of the Bad Boy language and iconography.[157] These, however, were swept to the side by the allure, momentum, and of course money behind comparative products of the time being released for mass consumption. Sean Combs, moving into the spotlight of his dead friend Biggie Smalls, released 'I'll Be Missing You' in 1997. Sampling The Police's 'Every Breath You Take' (1983), only this new incarnation of Hip Hop, in all its perverse pop-renovated cash-fuelled glory, could convert a song about stalking – an obsession for possessing a lost lover – into a triple-platinum selling global tribute and piece of frequently requested funeral music.[158]

But Combs had shown the way forward: not as an artist, but as a brand. His celebrity persona was fitted into a portfolio next to perfume, the 'Sean John clothing brand, Bad Boy Worldwide record label' and the vodka Ciroc, corporate endeavours now amounting to a

[157] Jeru the Damaja. 'The Bullshit'. *The Wrath of the Math*. PayDay/FFRR Records, 1996.
[158] Puff Daddy featuring Faith Evans & 112. 'I'll Be Missing You'. Bad Boy Records, 1997; The Police. 'Every Breath You Take'. A&M, 1983.

personal wealth of '$475 million'.[159] In 1994 Coca-Cola marketing manager Daryl Cobbin commented that he wanted to bring 'a real authenticity in terms of Hip Hop' to the high profile and highly successful Sprite 'Voltron' campaign; he did, but as should be clear, by the mid-1990s authenticity was a quaint notion only held by artists with no money.[160] The product Hip Hop had turned into now had enough power and connections within the state apparatus – had gleaned enough from the manufacturing techniques of the culture industry – to advertise itself as it deemed fit, and on its own terms. The results from this sense of autonomy have been mixed.

Luxuriating in the Bahamas in 1999, Sean Combs told *Time* journalist David Thigpen: 'In five years…[if] I endorse a presidential candidate, we could turn an election. Hip Hop is that deep'.[161] It would take five years longer than expected, but on the 20th January 2009 Barack Obama – with Kenyan father and American mother an African American in the most literal sense – assumed his position as 44th President of the United States. But if Hip Hop is that deep, what actual changes has it made? And for that matter, what is real power? Despite Combs's quoted wealth, a review of the Forbes '400 Richest People in America' in 2011 reveals nobody directly associated with Hip Hop, and only a single Black American (Oprah Winfrey) on the entire list.[162] Depth is only relative to your position within and the shape of the entire structure. And the fact is, in terms of music, there is still not a single Black mogul, be it 50 Cent, Russell Simmons, Sean Combs, Suge Knight or Jay Z, holding a top executive position in the major record companies their subsidiaries reside within. Norman Kelley refers to this group of entrepreneurs as 'black gnats', parasites attached to the larger corporate structure that have 'never fully understood' (or never truly cared about) the 'cultural and economic significance' of what it is they are exploiting, very little of that personal wealth making a true difference in poor Black or urban communities.[163]

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[159] See http://www.forbes.com/profile/sean-diddy-combs/.
[160] Bakari Kitwana. *The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture*. New York. 2002. pp. 195-216.
[161] David E. Thigpen. 'Puffy'. *Time*. 8 February 1999. p. 62.
[162] 'The Forbes 400: The Richest People in America'. September 2011. www.forbes.com. www.forbes.com/forbes400/list/#p_1_s_arank_All%20industries_All%20states_All%20categories_.
[163] Norman Kelley. *R & B (Rhythm and Business): The Political Economy of Black Music*. New York. 2005. p. 11.

Russell Simmons, an omnipresent figure at the business end of Hip Hop's transformation over thirty years, considers that Hip Hop did not succeed 'by being correct. It succeeded by being'.[164] Two things spring to mind from this assessment. Firstly, a lyric from the Dead Prez track 'It's Bigger than Hip Hop' (1999), a rare throwback group to a generation still politically engaged: 'Ay dog, that label is that slave ship, Owners got them whips and rappers is slaves'; and secondly, the following quotation from a very graceful article on Black Science Fiction by Mark Sinker: 'Part of the story of black music (the affirmative soul-gospel aspect) has always been this – that losing everything except basic dignity and decency is potentially a survivable disaster'.[165] The point Simmons, a prominent supporter seen next to Obama in the 2008 election, and again in the recent 2012 'Runway to Win' campaign, makes, is that people should not be concerned over content or image and just be happy that Hip Hop made it over an invisible threshold into the mainstream.[166] However, to extend the Dead Prez analogy, the chains may be virtual but the limitations remain; artists that choose to be slaves by accepting advance payments – the 'grudging gifts offered by the masters as a token substitute for freedom from bondage', the imprisoning, legally-binding record contract – need to look up and confront who is lashing the whip, and look again at who owns it, before they allow for their vision to be influenced, corrupted, or compromised.[167]

The perspective Simmons encourages also makes the assumption that consumers are, or at least should be, accepting of and content with the products distributed. This is little more than an invitation to entrapment within the cycles of the culture industry distinguished by Adorno:

> If the masses have been unjustly reviled from above as masses, the culture industry is not among the least responsible for making them into masses and then despising them, while obstructing the emancipation for which human beings are as ripe as the productive forces of the epoch permit.[168]

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[164] Simmons cited from Charnas. *Big Payback*. p. 637.
[165] Dead Prez. 'It's Bigger than Hip Hop'. Loud Records, 1999; Mark Sinker. 'Loving the Alien – Black Science Fiction'. *The Wire*. February 1992. http://thewire.co.uk/articles/218/.
[166] 'Russell Simmons Designs His Support for President Obama'. 3 March 2012. www.vibe.com. http://www.vibe.com/post/russell-simmons-designs-his-support-president-obama-129058.
[167] Paul Gilroy. *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures*. London. 1993. p. 133.
[168] Adorno. 'Culture Industry Reconsidered'. p. 19.

The worrying thing about this, as Jameson notes, is that it would seem 'mass culture wants to see the same thing over and over again'.[169] Or rather this is the assumption, with the formula repeated over and over in order to maximise sales of art from a hypothesised global target audience: homogenous products sold in exactly the same way as those offered by Nike, McDonalds or Wal-Mart. Except here, like the 'visual' Jameson illustrates, consumers are opened up to products explicitly coated in 'all the libidinal investments ingeniously arrayed for us by advertising'.[170] '*[E]ssentially* pornography', it literally and metaphorically 'asks us to stare at the world as though it were a naked body'.[171] Both reflection and site of provocation for such a position, Nelly's 'Tip Drill' (2003) is little more than a seven minute repetition of the phrase 'I said it must be ya ass, cause it ain't your face, I need a tip drill I need a tip drill'. If not obvious enough, the colloquialism is fully explained in the video when the track is paused for one of Nelly's cohorts to ask a group of women in bikinis: 'You know what a butter-head is don't you? Everything look good, but her head'.[172] Accentuated by a video of men in and around a mansion throwing dollars at women's naked and semi-naked body parts, this is a degeneration to the type of minstrel roles Du Bois warned of in 1926, the masquerade differentiated only by the veiling hyper-presence of the empowering dollar.

With the implication that flesh and sex can be bought so easily, the separation of head – mind, personality – from the female body also removes all humanity, the perception that it can be tapped into directly confirmed by Nelly's swiping of a credit card along the crease of one of the women's backsides. Dehumanised, as with pornography any subtlety removed, the female body is being displayed and directly purchased, depicted as a piece of technology to receive cash and accumulate more. The machinery of capital accumulation made transparent, the video is transformed into an obscene frontier which prioritises the selling/advertising of drugs, materialism, and misogyny. Mireille Miller-Young explains it as 'a new genre form', Hip Hop and pornography partnering 'to commodify black sexuality', with

[169] Jameson. 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture'. p. 19.
[170] Ibid. pp. 1-12.
[171] Ibid.
[172] Nelly. 'Tip Drill'. Universal Records, 2003.

an emphasis on the employment of 'black women's bodies as the hard currency of exchange'.[173] Yet the Black male body is commodified too in this convergence, as proven in the promotion of 50 Cent throughout the 2000s as over-muscled survivor of a nine-bullet assault: a hypermasculine cyborg emerging in the wake of the deaths of Biggie and Tupac.[174] The human body is dissolved into the framework of capital, and as a consequence Hip Hop has become a major marketing arm contributing to the – moral, ethical, social – disempowerment of Black women and men in the US.

Though a privileged few get to play prominent roles and receive the trappings of material success, predatory capitalism is in the habit of creating distorted images of what constitutes a role model in twenty-first century Western societies. Young sons and daughters look to the mother in infancy; the daughter mirrors and wants to be the mother. These processes are vital to the development of the child. To take the women from the 'Tip Drill' video as an example: the dehumanisation through sexualisation is clear, but the consequences of the transformation of a woman into a sexual commodity attacks the very idea of the matriarchy, the power of the matriarch removed along with the sense of nurturing. This affects the next generation of men as much as women, the promotion of distorted ethical and moral value systems only optimising the market, the complexes and insecurities it produces soothed in the act of further purchasing and consumption (of personal enhancements, other bodies, technology, and virtual items). The recording industry, as part of the market, has sculpted the image of Hip Hop transmitted via major media outlets in its own image, a corrupt emblem of enriched multiculturalism behind which lies impoverishment. While money is gambled and profits made, the stereotypes will continue.

And the now-technologised stereotypes currently transmitted and sold play into the hands of those that desire to keep Hip Hop as a continuation of the lowbrow, an impression that still hangs over from the Jazz age, and which attempts to diminish the potency of the culture as an outlet for the expression of the antagonised and politicised mind-state. On another major

[173] Mireille Miller-Young. 'Black Sexualities in the new Hip-Hop Pornography'. *Meridians*. 2008. p. 262.
[174] Seen in the evolution of image/content from *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* (2003) to *Before I Self Destruct* (2009).

label release, apparently devoid of any pathos, Mann joyfully sings out on 'Buzzin' (2010): 'I feel like money, (man I feel like money), they attracted to me'.[175] Here, rejoicing in the effects of the immersion, the fetishising of trappings made available by the system distracts the subject from new role as no more than an object floating in a stream of virtual capital. Empty vessels, it seems, can be filled with all types of ideological content. This reprogramming of data and values is matched by a loss of distinct sounds, a movement accelerated by the abundant availability of cheap software able to (poorly) replicate the location-unique ambience garnered from often expensive components in a studio arrangement. On Dr. Dre's 'Let Me Ride' (1993), the airy haze-fuelled melodies are clearly reflective of the car, expansive freeway, and Californian vernacular; Nas's 'New York State of Mind' (1994) is tightly-packed headphone music, a virtual representation of claustrophobic urban pathways and northern industry (the city's skyscrapers, transport and grid systems).[176] By comparison, as shown by Mann, geographic influence has been replaced by the buzz of technology. The sound, in spatial terms, is compressed into an arena belonging to techno-capital, the global replacing the local in the process of homogenisation. Place the Nas track alongside Jay-Z's 'Empire State of Mind' (2009) to see the transition further, the former's linguistic traits and undercurrents from the New York interior replaced by a lavish production advertising the city's surface landmarks on a tour of its stereotypical imagery.[177]

It is worth remembering the industry figures that green-light these and similar releases from Hip Hop subsidiaries within larger parent companies – Jay Z, Simmons, Combs, etc. – were also involved in multicity tours of the swing states in 2008, 'drawing crowds and registering voters by the thousands', actively contributing to the successful viral Obama campaign by bringing consumers of the type of products above into the voting system.[178] Made invisible in these products, as they are in political campaigns including Obama's, are the reality of American poverty, homelessness and unemployment, and the still existing

[175] Mann. 'Buzzin'. Mercury Records, 2010.
[176] Dr. Dre. 'Let Me Ride'. Death Row/Interscope, 1993; Nas. 'New York State of Mind'. *Illmatic*. Columbia, 1994.
[177] Jay-Z featuring Alicia Keys. 'Empire State of Mind'. Roc Nation/Atlantic, 2009.
[178] Charnas. *Big Payback*. p. 637.

ghettos that bear the accumulated economic, political, and psychological weight of America's global historical influence, a burden that will be further explored in the next chapter in relation to 9/11 and its aftermath.[179]

This is not to say that the absurdity and vacuity of the whole cycle is beyond being parodied by independents still producing material in the virtual arena. Mac Miller frames all its stereotypes within a stoned fantasy projected out from a sofa in an empty room in his video for 'Donald Trump' (2011); Tyler the Creator revises the same pathologies brought out in the Geto Boys for the contemporary online era.[180] But in the transition from the settlement of migrants, to inner city, to the cultural and corporate continuation of exploitable labour – part of a global reorganisation formed around new virtual frontiers on which artificial barriers were removed to ease the smooth flow of capital across international borders – what has been drained from it is most of its potential for protest against inequalities. Provoked by the loss, academic M.K. Asante Jr. calls for a 'post-hip-hop generation', a Hip Hop 2.0 that incorporates 'the women's movement, the anti-war movement, gay rights, [and] antiglobalization'.[181] But there is no room for the 'post-' in Hip Hop; the 'voice of Black people', or rather, as KRS ONE explains, 'the *last* voice of Black people', it is the voice that has presided over the falling away of ideology and the ascension of the technological: *the* voice and music of America's digital generation.[182] Somewhat intangible, driven by electronics, always to an extent about surviving the contradictions in environments created by capital, Hip Hop as a virtual form has been the prototype for global cultural expression in the technological state.

Historically, the sheer scale of the country allowing for colonisation within its margins (rather than forced onto an exterior geographic location), Hip Hop has also powerfully uncovered this interiorised colonialism within the US. While it can no longer be considered a

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[179] For the growth of 'tent cities' in the US, see 'Panorama: Poor America'. *BBC*. 13 February 2012. http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01c2y2b; for statistics on unemployment rates in the US see http://www.tradingeconomics.com/united-states/unemployment-rate.

[180] Mac Miller. 'Donald Trump'. Rostrum Records, 2011; Tyler the Creator. 'Yonkers'. *Goblin*. Odd Future Records, 2011.

[181] Asante. *It's Bigger than Hip Hop*. p. 7.

[182] KRS ONE. 'Exhibit A'. *Edutainment*. Jive Records, 1990.

pure mode of resistance, for as long as the network remains online, what the virtual arenas within cyberspace do offer are a continuation of the Hip Hop ethos in the formulation of communities around the dissemination of alternative voices. How the music branches of the major corporations within the entertainment industry respond to this development is yet to be fully realised. Reluctant to give up on the manufacture and distribution of physical products, despite the steady decline in sales figures in recent years, their full exploitation of the virtual space is hampered by the relative freedom with which virtual music and information can be transferred/exchanged.[183] If the industry is not, artists are at least aware that music is now free, now another vehicle for advertising tours and other merchandise. There are now millions of people making, exchanging and attempting to sell themselves, their music, and image, independently. The (re)turn to live music as a form of promotion that we see in the digital era is nothing new. Hip Hop has been using this model since its inception. This is not simply many individual attempts at capital accumulation, but Hip Hop's active entrepreneurial essence spread virtually on a global scale.

On 16th May 2001, six months prior to 9/11, 'The Hip Hop Declaration of Peace' was signed and presented to the United Nations headquarters in New York by a three hundred-strong delegation, promoting a foundation based on '[h]ealth, love, awareness, wealth, peace and prosperity for ourselves, our children and their children's children, forever'.[184] Though tapered, the vision for new infrastructures and civic planning elevated on 'Hip Hop Lives' still exists. Many have claimed Hip Hop's death. If true, it is a cultural Lazarus perpetually resurrected by technology and the conditions people are placed under by the production of capital and political rule. It can be argued that if Hip Hop has died, its spirit has been immersed into a much larger virtual arena with no permanent location, while its cadaver has been animated and incorporated into a global entertainment industry fixed on the accumulation of wealth. Perhaps Hip Hop is and always has been the manifestation of a

[183] See 'End of an Era as Mercury Records Stops Producing Singles'. www.telegraph.co.uk. 25 March 2011. www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/music-news/8406373/End-of-an-era-as-Mercury-Records-stops-producing-singles.html.
[184] For a full version of 'The Hip Hop Declaration of Peace' (2001) see http://www.declaration-of-peace.com/en/.

collective mirage conjured by the external pressures placed on the subject by the state apparatus, the human reaction to extreme conditions captured on a record or wall, in a movement of the body or an MP3 file. Perhaps it is, to an extent, unquantifiable, evaporating in the very moment of its frontier traversal, escaping as it was grasped, marketed, transformed into a series of clichéd targets on a profit graph. The pertinent question is whether Hip Hop as a space for opposition was incorporated as a strategic measure, forcibly integrated into market exchange, or whether its engagement with surrounding structures and technologies led towards an unavoidable absorption into the dominant practices of capitalist reproduction. In the move from local to global it is no longer just a reflection of the United States either, but perhaps of something and some*where* else. Discussing distinctly non-virtual colonial struggle, Frantz Fanon said '[e]ach generation must discover its mission, fulfil it or betray it, in relative opacity.[185] This pertains to each actant within the cultural and socio-economic arena as much as the political, the possessor and the dispossessed. The artist must choose whether to oppose, or to reflect and enforce the status quo. From the other side of the equation, there are accusations that President Obama's appointment, like the Hip Hop magnate, for all the power and emotion invested in it, is also merely the elevation of a symbolic figurehead. The inversion of four hundred years seemingly resting on the result of a single election, murmurs abound that Obama, unable to affect the system, is another symbol of change without substance. This is not the full story. It never could be. Hip Hop, like the Obama presidency at this point, remains unfinished. We wait in suspense for the outcome, and keep faith that there is nothing false about hope. However, as we shall see in the next chapter, President Obama – the first 'Hip Hop' president – has proved adaptable in terms of the type of political and economic decision-making required to ensure the smooth functioning of the hegemonic structure.[186] In these instances, the frontiers reached and fought for are abstract, metaphorical; to quote Fanon, 'opaque'.

[185] Frantz Fanon. 'On National Culture'. 1961. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York. 2004. p. 145.
[186] For the shift in opinion on 'Hip Hop' Obama from 2008 to 2012, see Greg Kot. 'Barack Obama: The First Hip Hop President'. 7 November 2008. http://leisureblogs.chicagotribune.com/turn_it_up/2008/11/barack-obama-th.html; and Erik Nielson. 'How Hip Hop fell out of love with Obama'. 24 August 2012. *The Guardian(G2)*. p. 6.

Hip Hop is a virtual manifestation of the sensibilities of the poor: a reaction to their demonisation by forces inflicting poverty upon them. This is why the higher it reaches within the power structure the less relevant (so more anodyne) it becomes. Those who have made millions from its rise have done their predecessors a great disservice. What they convey reinforces the prejudiced conservatisms that ignore or direct blame towards the less fortunate (those not blessed with luck or opportunity). Underneath this veneer, as a virtual sound-space, Hip Hop has crossed all racial, linguistic, and territorial frontiers, developing into a global phenomenon that music executive and entrepreneur Steve Stoute refers to as a major influence on the 'tanning' of the new American economy.[187] In the digital generation, Hip Hop has served the US financially, and fed the globe narratives conveying life from America's margins. Resistant voices remain, their power to tap into deep-rooted national assumptions and structural weak points evident in the cover to Jeru the Damaja's *The Sun Rises in the East* (1994) and The Coup's *Party Music* (2001), both politically-charged premonitory warnings of the destruction of the World Trade Center and the sentiments behind the attacks.[188] Thriving in an era in which the ideological has been engulfed by the technological, Hip Hop is not dead. If anything, as a culture with influence over those who consume it, as the recently passed Jimmy Castor once put it on an old classic that breakers used to freak to: 'It's Just Begun' (1972).[189]

[187] Steve Stoute. *The Tanning of America: How Hip Hop Created a Culture That Rewrote the Rules of the New Economy*. New York. 2011. pp. 3-72.
[188] The cover art mentioned is available to view at http://survivalwarsappendix.blogspot.co.uk.
[189] Jimmy Castor. 'It's Just Begun'. RCA Records, 1972.

1.

'When Evil-doing Comes Like Falling Rain': Transnational Narratives in the Shadow of 9/11

> The gods of the void, of space: are howling. Chanting. Screaming. All at once and in unison! I hear you.[1]
> Philippe Petit. *To Reach the Clouds*, (2002)

So far the thesis has concentrated predominantly on technological progression and the development of virtual frontiers through the twentieth century, scanning perspectives appearing out of the American interior. In a discussion fixed on understanding how time and terror shape global territories in the twenty-first century, the aim of this chapter is to bring to light the narratives that lurk – converge, reflect, refract – in the shadow of 9/11. To spotlight the still-forming contours of this new architecture I have brought together readings of texts from a network of transnational authors publishing in the decade since the fall of the World Trade Center. These are primarily but not exclusively Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* (2003) and *Falling Man* (2007), Frédéric Beigbeder's *Windows on the World* (2005), Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), Colum McCann's *Let the Great World Spin* (2009), and Amy Waldman's *The Submission* (2011).

Hailing from varied Western outposts, and with an eye to its associations with economic and communications technology, the contested term 'transnational' is used in the title because the reflections on and from what I seek to define as the shadow of 9/11 are, in a theme that runs through the chapters of this thesis, diasporic. By diasporic I mean that, like the movement across the American frontier and the time since its apparent closure, any discussion of 9/11 requires an appreciation of human movement and displacement on a global scale. And here, although still firmly focused on American culture, any discussion of these themes cannot be adequately confined within US margins. 9/11, and the political and economic narratives that surround it, transcend the boundaries of a single nation, bringing together private 'non-state…non-governmental actor[s]' – be they authors, directors, performers – engaging with democratic, religious, and ideological subjects and incidents that

[1] Philippe Petit. *To Reach the Clouds*. 2002. London. 2003. p. 172.

do not necessarily relate to their own countries or borders.[2] As will become clear, this is why the Bertolt Brecht quotation in the title remains relevant to 9/11 discourse. While an outsider, Brecht is one in a line of key twentieth-century figures capable of illuminating the visible *and* invisible in the deep-rooted historical continuities still prevalent in America today.

Mediating 9/11

During the second televised presidential debate of the 2008 election campaign, then-Senator Barack Obama told the American nation that it 'had got distracted' by 'invading a country that had nothing to do with 9/11', asserting that, if elected, the 'kill[ing]' of Osama bin Laden and 'crush[ing]' of Al-Qaeda would return to being the administration's 'biggest national security priority'.[3] True to his word, on the evening of the 1st of May 2011, in a speech broadcast live and disseminated simultaneously by news channels across the globe, President Obama announced that the United States had conducted an operation in Abbottabad, Pakistan, that had killed Osama bin Laden.[4] In decorative terms the speech was delivered from the White House, the East Room providing a backdrop steeped in Americanised interpretations of Empire style, the president's demeanour, attire, and cinematic entrance only accentuating the baroque play of volume and void.[5] Reminding the US that it had 'never been at war with Islam' while evoking 'images' of 9/11 'seared' into the 'national memory', the sombre tone of the speech reinforced the eerie chiaroscuro visual contrast of light and dark apparent in each element of its presentation.[6] It was a return to what Max Paul Friedman describes as the 'theatrical phase' so prominent in presidential campaigns of the last two centuries, Obama's being no exception, where simulacra manifest in the problematic mediation of 'acts and their representation'.[7]

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[2] Peter Willetts. 'Transnational actors and international organizations in global politics'. *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*. Oxford. 2001. pp. 356-83.
[3] The 'Second Presidential Debate of the 2008 General Election Campaign' was held at Belmont University in Nashville, on October 7th 2008. See http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/washington/2008/10/post.html.
[4] See http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/05/02/osama-bin-laden-dead.
[5] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3V0ISgosTlQ.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Max Paul Friedman. 'Simulacrobama: The Mediated Election of 2008'. *Journal of American Studies*. August 2009. p. 341.

When the simulated precision and restrained ambience of the speech is compared with the jubilant scenes captured in major public spaces like Ground Zero and Times Square, the juxtaposition of light and dark is mirrored and repeated. With outpourings by the more patriotic and vociferous factions including chants of 'USA!' and renditions of 'We Are the Champions' and 'The Star Spangled Banner', the elation triggered by the news of bin Laden's demise was reminiscent of the type of pageantry usually reserved for major sporting occasions. And yet what caused such a groundswell of emotion was a highly mediated transmission that conveyed the outcome of Operation Neptune Spear without releasing many specific details, the truncated virtualisation of a single violent act in a complicated and unresolved narrative stretching across many decades, states, and borders. As commander-in-chief of the nation's Armed Forces, Obama alone made the decision to go ahead with the assassination of Osama bin Laden, giving the signal to proceed on the type of operation that defines a presidency. Was it long overdue retaliation, or final neutralising of a threat that Deputy National Security Adviser Juan Zarate admitted had been like 'chasing a ghost'?[8]

What is not mentioned in the speech is that the mission was also a covert infiltration of Pakistani borders, the unsanctioned invasion of international airspace: an act of war. The speech Obama gives also deftly places Pakistan in a double bind:

> Over the years, I've repeatedly made clear that we would take action within Pakistan if we knew where bin Laden was. That is what we've done. But it's important to note that our counterterrorism cooperation with Pakistan helped lead us to bin Laden and the compound where he was hiding…Tonight, I called President Zardari, and my team has also spoken with their Pakistani counterparts. They agree that this is a good and historic day for both of our nations.[9]

In truth, Pakistan was 'only informed after the raid' had taken place.[10] The US admission of its illegality is avoided, remains implicit here, as Pakistan is simultaneously absolved of withholding any intelligence on bin Laden's whereabouts. Indeed, Pakistan is retrospectively painted in as a player within a virtualised version of the incident. It is remade as an ally

[8] Juan Zarate held the position of Deputy National Security Adviser for Combating Terrorism from 2005-2009. Cited from *Bin Laden: Shoot to Kill*. 2011.
[9] See http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/05/02/osama-bin-laden-dead.
[10] Carlotta Gall and Eric Schmitt. 'Amid Skepticism, Pakistan Calculates its Response'. *New York Times*. 3 May 2011. p. F1.

complicit with the actions taken. Consequently any adverse response from Pakistan would only confirm collusion, or conversely the ineptitude of its military intelligence, either route proving potentially catastrophic in terms of international relations. From an American perspective the response to the news of the killing brought with it a pervasive 'sense of closure', sections of the citizenry acting out their role, like the President, in a twin-frame conclusion to a taut Hollywood blockbuster: an event movie ten years in the making.[11]

The intention in this chapter is to probe what Slavoj Žižek specifies in his treatise on *Violence* (2008) as the 'fundamental impossibility' of attempts like this to clearly narrativise and compartmentalise 9/11 without also recognising the long shadows cast either side of that date.[12] To paraphrase one facet of Salman Rushdie's essay on the on-going meaning of the frontier discussed in the dissertation's introduction, when beyond the span of a single life the final frontier we face is 'not space, but time', and in 'the harsh fluorescent light' of this frontier's 'windowless halls, we see things as they are'.[13] Time and the reading of invisible historical thresholds, then, become key factors in any analysis of 9/11 and the texts and narratives to have appeared around the subject in the last decade. As an example of how closely recent technological generations reflect each other and intermingle, the quotation that titles this chapter is taken from Brecht's poem 'When Evil-doing Comes Like Falling Rain' (1935). Part of a cluster of anti-fascist unrhymed verses written while in exile, although gesturing to the stark political climate of mid-1930s Berlin, Brecht's strong warning against impending war and genocide has maintained its relevance. It speaks out to all sites across the globe affected by unchecked and unrepentant powers that have chosen to wield technology destructively against human beings since, be it in the name of economic, ideological, or political purpose:

The first time it was reported that our friends were being

[11] 'New Yorkers React To Osama Bin Laden Death'. *The Huffington Post*. 2 May 2011. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/05/02/osama-bin-laden-dead-new-york_n_856137.html; Captain Patrice McLead. 'Osama bin Laden Killed: Celebrations Erupt across America'. *The Daily Telegraph*. 2 May 2011. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/8487658/Osama-bin-Laden-killed-celebrations-erupt-across-America.html.

[12] Slavoj Žižek. *Violence*. 2008. London. 2009. p. 184.

[13] Rushdie. 'Step Across This Line'. pp. 411-2.

butchered there was a cry of horror. Then a hundred
were butchered. But when a thousand were butchered
and there was no end to the butchery, a blanket of
silence spread.

When evil-doing comes like falling rain, no body calls out
'stop!'

When crimes begin to pile up they become invisible.[14]

There are four references to 'time' in 'Falling Rain'. From a Western perspective alone, when extracted from its original context Brecht's lines could be a hymn to anything from the 9/11 mind-state and its victims to the current culling of jobs and corruption of the financial markets across the globe. Brecht construed Hitler's fascism as the 'type of rule that will occur under monopoly capitalism, one that arises when capitalism reaches a point of crisis'.[15] And as with many other European exiles who passed through the US, Brecht could see similarities between 'the political history of Hitler and the economic history of American gangsters such as Al Capone'.[16] To the latter you could add all subsequent below-and-above ground iterations of the American gangster, all leading ruthless factions empowered by the accumulation of market monopolies through the decimation of communities and acquisition of territories through suppression and terror. Observing the postcolonial approach to terror, Elleke Boehmer suggests the 'modern and imperialist state in fact solicits the terror through which it constitutes its authority'.[17] Putting together the shattered fragments of reality through and in the wake of WWII, Brecht was already aware of this alignment of similarly craven methodologies appearing under vastly different political systems.

If the relevance of Brecht's work to this chapter and 9/11 still seems tenuous, then it is clarified further by looking at *The Life of Galileo* (1945-7), where Brecht's goal is to expose such political mechanisms: to make the invisible visible. Or rather, using the telescope as volatile two-way sign of social and technological progress, the ocular device is 'look[ed] through' (*durchsehen*) in order to make what is invisible in the social appear, while giving

[14] Bertolt Brecht. 'When Evil-doing Comes Like Falling Rain'. 1935. *Poems 1913-1956*. London. 1987. p. 247.
[15] Meg Mumford. *Bertolt Brecht*. Abingdon. 2009. p. 29.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Elleke Boehmer. 'Postcolonial Writing and Terror'. *Terror and the Postcolonial: A Concise Companion*. Oxford. 2010. p. 145.

what is made visible to the society transparency.[18] Brecht, through the corruption of Galileo's initial optimism at standing on the edge of a new frontier, exposes the distance between public expression and private intent, the former revealed as a space filled with hollow projections and empty gestures:

> Now the greater part of the population is kept permanently by their princes, landlords and priests in a nacreous haze of superstition and outmoded words which obscure the machinations of these characters. The misery of the multitude is as old as the hills, and from pulpit and desk is proclaimed as immutable as the hills.[19]

Pallesthesic concern extends from metaphoric connection – of Galileo and the telescope proving Copernican theory, with Einstein's splitting of the atom that commences the nuclear age – to the more general debasement of technological and scientific research as it is sold to, sponsored and adapted by military and state. In recent memory alone, technology has been used against humanity in a series of events from the Holocaust, to 9/11, to the scientific reality of the US drone attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan that continue unabated, where the battlefield range is narrowed to the point where 'only alleged enemies of the state [*suspected militants*], their family members, and civilians die in combat [*collateral damage*]': flesh and blood targeted from incredible distances, destroyed, transformed into statistical data for analysis.[20] Differentiated by proximity and execution, 'suicide bombings' on the other side of the conflict, as Jason Burke cogently highlights in *The 9/11 Wars* (2011), also lead to dehumanisation, resentment, and the unnecessary loss of innocent lives.[21] Hence the double-edged and timeless qualities of a Brechtian statement like the 'universe has lost its centre overnight, and woken up to find it has countless centres'.[22] The shattering of reality filtered through a character like Galileo, the decentring of subject and object can be detected to varying degrees in socio-economic and technological shifts through history, and that not

[18] Bertolt Brecht. *The Life of Galileo*. 1945-7. London. 1963. pp. 7, 11, 17, 18, 22-4, 43.
[19] Ibid. p. 117.
[20] Peter Oborne. 'It may seem painless, but drone war in Afghanistan is destroying the West's reputation'. *The Daily Telegraph*. 30 May 2012. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/9300187/It-may-seem-painless-but-drone-war-in-Afghanistan-is-destroying-the-Wests-reputation.html. For statistics on casualties from US drone attacks see http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/database/Droneattack.htm, and http://counterterrorism.newamerica.net/drones.
[21] Jason Burke. *The 9/11 Wars*. London. 2011. pp. 206-8, 324-5, 378.
[22] Brecht. *Galileo*. p. 8.

only pertain to the West. And along with that shattering, the dominant practices (of production, exchange, and communication) have profound effects on perception within each era, as devastating as they are empowering relative to who wields them, and when/where they appear within the cycles of human progress.[23]

Expounding on this state from a postmodern perspective, Martin Amis, in the introduction to *Einstein's Monsters* (1987), laments the social, temporal, and psychological impact of nuclear technology on our existence in the latter stages of the twentieth century, suggesting that 'something seems to have gone wrong with time – with modern time; the past and the future, equally threatened, equally cheapened, now huddle in the present'.[24] While the type of imminent nuclear threat discussed in the first chapter has receded, been superseded and embedded into our daily lives as the ominous figure in the distance, this fragmentation and compression of human perception – alongside an increasing sense of abstraction – has not diminished as we venture further into the twenty-first century. If anything it is reconfirmed – as in the bin Laden celebrations – in the literature and narrative structures attempting to represent a Western age still coming to terms with life after the terrorist attacks in the United States on 11th September 2001.

However, as Don DeLillo stipulates in his first piece of writing after 9/11, there is another longer and more linear 'counternarrative' throughout recent history stemming from the 'nacreous haze' that Brecht had foreseen in the aftermath of the Second World War.[25] That arcing counternarrative, with the US at its helm, redrew the lines along which international trade and relations were conceived. Noteworthy for the 'dismantling of former empires' and the 'birth of the United Nations', the US, as David Harvey indicates, sold itself at the outbreak of the Cold War as the go-to military power 'for those who chose to align themselves with the non-communist world', America acting as the protective arm for a new global economic framework 'ruled by a mix of coercion and consent'.[26] Flanking these

[23] Paul James. *Globalism, Nationalism, Tribalism: Bringing Theory Back In*. London. 2006. p. 77.
[24] Martin Amis. 'Introduction: Thinkability'. *Einstein's Monsters*. 1987. London. 1988. p. 17.
[25] Don DeLillo. 'In the Ruins of the Future'. *Harper's Magazine*. December 2001. p. 33.
[26] Harvey. *Enigma of Capital*. pp. 31-2.

machinations, during the post-1945 period America also involved itself in the Middle East, disrupting any efforts by the region to create economic and political power structures around its (then) plentiful supplies of oil. The re-carving or reconfiguration of new geopolitical frontiers was the prevalent issue.

The physical and ideological boundary with the Iron Curtain used to be clear-cut. However, developing 'over years, only now becoming inescapable', the dissolution of communism in Eastern Europe meant the West, with the US at its hegemonic centre, replaced one geographically locatable threat with a borderless enigma.[27] All the while, the 'possibility of the death of everything' has lingered: human extinction remaining technologically viable.[28] With no superpower left to define itself against, and anti-capitalist opposition seemingly vanquished, the policing of the globe had to be remodelled, refined, homogenised, and dispersed back into the mainstream vernacular as 'The Age of Terror'. International support for the 'War on Terror', though, has not been as virulent as it was for previous campaigns against mediated threats to democracy and freedom.[29] One of the central causes of this apathy has been due to the spread during this time-span of technologies that scatter power and information across many thresholds, technologies that also propagate the fragmentation and compression of time mentioned by Amis.[30]

More specifically, the rationale for this chapter is to chart the parallel narrative trajectories put forward by Amis and DeLillo, using examples from a variety of transatlantic authors who engage with 9/11 and its reverberations. As Fredric Jameson was quick to point out, cultural epochs of 9/11's magnitude 'extend into a before and an after of historical time that can only gradually unfold to disclose the full dimensions of the historicity of the event'.[31] Susan Faludi went as far as to claim that as of 'mid-2007, long after the nation had passed the five-year-anniversary mark of the attacks…[v]irtually no film, television, drama, play, or novel on 9/11

[27] DeLillo. 'Ruins of the Future'. p. 33.
[28] Earl Shorris. *The Politics of Heaven: America in Fearful Times*. New York. 2007. p. 29.
[29] Used by George W. Bush on the 16th September 2001, the term was formally introduced on the 20th: www.washingtonpost.com/wpsrv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress_092001.htm.
[30] Theory, too, is threatened by the advance of digital communication, its immediacy impinging on the time and space required for critical reflection.
[31] Fredric Jameson. 'The Dialectics of Disaster'. *South Atlantic Quarterly*. Spring 2002. p. 301.

had begun to plumb what the trauma meant for our national psyche'.[32] I would tend to agree with David Simpson, who as early as the summer of 2005 understood that texts 'that take 9/11 as their narrative occasion' are 'products of a reflection that was not instant and at sound-bite speed', and have been so since the attacks occurred.[33] Indeed, I would suggest that writers like DeLillo, like the artists from the previous chapter, were capable of divining similar or related traumas from building tensions prior to the attacks even taking place.

There are, of course, textual exceptions within the 9/11 canon that do not carry this degree of temporal depth, the most notable being *Windows on the World*, in which French author Frédéric Beigbeder weaves all manner of self-reflexive 'hyperrealist' techniques to express an inescapable transnational dread of middle-class disconnection from the safe and substantial.[34] Constructed with complete transparency, Beigbeder splits the text like a 'two-way mirror' (*WW* 241), a type of 'schizophrenic existentialism' (*WW* 24) employed to represent each minute of *'that'* morning from '8:30' to '10:29', the chapters alternating between a 'self satisfied' (*WW* 19) autobiographical reflection on 9/11 from the restaurant of the Tour Montparnasse, and an imagined American-self (Yorston) who 'wanted to live in a virtual world', but is 'dying in a real one' (*WW* 253). Beigbeder is the only writer to venture into the mind of a 9/11 victim. Taking inspiration in its style and subject matter from the film *American Beauty* (1999), a similar posthumous voiceover technique is used in the novel to highlight the anxieties of the over-sexualised, product-saturated, Franco-American middle-class, moving the reader between the before, during, and after of the event through the Beigbeder/Yorston configuration.

With Yorston 'dead already' (*WW* 40), the elastication and interruption of chronological time in the alternation of the dual narratives allows Beigbeder to enter into a discussion with his American mirror-image over the lure of 'the void', and the 'brute' certainties of jumping 'from the top of the North Tower' (*WW* 153). This remote dialogue, found at the very centre of the novel (9:16 and 9:17), provokes Beigbeder into relinquishing the comfort of Le Ciel de

[32] Susan Faludi. *The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America*. New York. 2007. p. 2.
[33] David Simpson. *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration*. Chicago. 2006. p. 12.
[34] Frédéric Beigbeder. *Windows on the World*. 2004. London. 2005. p. 8. Henceforth cited as *WW*.

Paris, choosing instead to 'time travel' (*WW* 155) across the Atlantic via Concorde. Taking up the role of the flâneur, he observes residents and other tourists in a post-9/11 New York envisaged as an apocalyptic wasteland in which 'everything was burning' (*WW* 176). Sardonically admitting that 'it is impossible to write about this subject, and yet impossible to write about anything else', Beigbeder uses the 9/11 atmosphere 'like a literary crutch' (*WW* 8, 301). *Windows on the World* differs from other aloof (DeLillo), mawkish (Foer), or poetic (McCann) interpretations because it unashamedly embraces sensationalism, the like of which is usually delivered in the instant by news and information channels. Its positioning in this way, within a wilfully hollow postmodern deconstruction, also deflates any conventional sense of narrative suspense.

The Beigbeder/Yorston incarnation of Western man is both a participant and victim in what Rosalind Morris accurately identifies as an 'Empire of Images', consuming and consumed by 'media hype' and 'subsequent media patriotism' which can 'surely qualify as obscene without too much fear of contradiction'.[35] It is a form of obscenity shaped by a nation which has always consumed but also suppressed a cultural history 'of sex and violence'.[36] The complexity of what is deemed acceptable or otherwise can be seen in the pictures aired of American soldiers killed by the Somali National Alliance (SNA) in 1993. Allegedly Al-Qaeda sponsored, the incident most commonly referred to as 'Black Hawk Down' was a landmark in the relations between the US and bin Laden. As Mark Bowden reports in his impeccably balanced account *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War* (1996), CNN ghoulishly 'kept showing the same pictures every half hour' of dead American soldiers dragged around Mogadishu, and yet a perverse engrained puritanism meant attempts to publish Canadian photographer Paul Watson's pictures of the naked body of Staff Sgt. William David Cleveland with genitals exposed caused a national controversy.[37] Perceptual dissonance of this kind is conveyed through the ruminations of Paul Joseph

[35] Rosalind C. Morris 'Images of untranslatability in the US war on terror'. *Interventions*. November 2004. p. 423; Jameson. 'Dialectics of Disaster'. p. 298.
[36] Frank Rich. 'It was the Porn That Made Them Do It'. *New York Times*. 30 May 2004. p. 16.
[37] Mark Bowden. *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War*. London. 1999. p. 445; Pulitzer Prize winner Paul Watson describes the controversy and psychological aftershocks of taking the photographs ('I felt like I'd stolen a man's soul') in *Where War Lives*. Toronto. 2007. p. 44.

Rubin in Amy Waldman's *The Submission*, the middle-aged chairman of a jury selected to choose a suitable 2003 memorial at Ground Zero for the victims of the attacks:

> You couldn't call yourself an American if you hadn't, in solidarity, watched your fellow Americans being pulverized, yet what kind of American did watching create? A traumatized victim? A charged-up avenger? A queasy voyeur? Paul, and he suspected many Americans, harbored all of these protagonists.[38]

Emotional turmoil springs from the type of 'event management' (*WW* 8) which included talks between White House advisers and senior Hollywood executives on how 9/11 should be controlled, broadcast and distributed. And yet the media narrative to accompany the spectacular rupturing of New York's surface proved incapable of containing the 'obscene underside' of the haunted culture emanating from the 'unclosed grave' at Ground Zero.[39] Within a month of the attacks, new motivations began to appear out of the shade of patriotism and hurt pride, President Bush telling the nation that:

> Now, the American people have got to go about their business. We cannot let the terrorists achieve the objective of frightening our nation to the point where we don't -- where we don't conduct business, where people don't shop. That's their intention. Their intention was not only to kill and maim and destroy. Their intention was to frighten to the point where our nation would not act.[40]

How much is revealed in a pause and a repetition. In a range of speeches and commercials people were told to buy, consume, and travel because, as David Harvey recognises, while 'temporary disruptions of the 9/11 sort can be papered over, long-term lack of motion betokens a crisis for capitalism'.[41]

Terror's Shadows

To return again to pre-9/11 America, though particularly redolent in the overarching themes of *White Noise* (1985), *Mao II* (1991), and *Underworld* (1997), it is *Cosmopolis* (2003), the

[38] Amy Waldman. *The Submission*. London. 2011. p. 13. Henceforth cited as *S*.
[39] Slavoj Žižek. 'Between Two Deaths: The Culture of Torture'. *London Review of Books*. 3 June 2004. p. 2; Daniel Henninger. 'Wonder Land: Ground Zero Bears America's Broken Politics'. *Wall Street Journal*. 8 September 2006. p. 14.
[40] George W. Bush. 'President Holds Prime Time News Conference'. 11 October 2001. Full transcript can be viewed at http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/10/20011011-7.html.
[41] Harvey. *Enigma of Capital*. p. 42.

piece of fiction DeLillo was completing the final draft of as the attacks unfolded, which provides perhaps the most prescient illustration of a New York cityscape already awash with destructive forces and 'ashy vapors' since at least the first attack on the WTC in 1993.[42] Set in April 2000, *Cosmopolis* depicts both the last day in the life of Manhattan asset manager and cyber-capitalist Eric Packer, and a more general transitional point between the 'booming and soaring' opulence afforded by the dot-com technologies and information boom of the 1990s, and an age of anxiety left to process the chilling realities of a post-9/11 world in which '[t]he logical extension of business is murder' (*C* 14, 113). Glanced by Packer on his unswerving path along 47th Street, the financial buildings around Fifth Avenue are invested with a blurry impressionism typical of DeLillo's narratives:

> [The] towers loomed just beyond the avenue. They were covert structures for all their size…They looked empty from here…They were made to be the last tall things, made empty, designed to hasten the future. They were the end of the outside world. They weren't here, exactly. They were in the future, a time beyond geography and touchable money and the people who stack and count it. (*C* 36)

Like the General Motors Building and indeed many of the other twentieth century constructions populating the New York skyline, Minoru Yamasaki's design for the North and South Tower testified to – were the pinnacle of – a style of architectural modernism that exemplified an emptiness and timelessness that were also tinged with a sense of foreboding. Influenced by and drawing on the urban visions of French architect Le Corbusier, angles and embellishing notes of former architectural styles were rejected in favour of plain facades and the dominant rectangle. The Center's windows were obscured and enmeshed in aluminium alloy, capturing the fixed yet still shimmering qualities that made the towers such fascinating objects. Their design was evocative not only of past and future, but also the material immediacy of a nation in which 'a history of myth and mediation' has been 'crucially involved' in the construction of its identity, the twinned buildings being a vertical presence emblematic of an ideology based on the idea of the frontier and the possibility of 'cultural and self-

[42] Don DeLillo. *Cosmopolis*. London. 2003. p. 6. Henceforth cited as *C*.

renewal'.[43] Writing about the Rockefeller's One Chase Manhattan Plaza from an architectural point of view, Eric Darton notes that the WTC forerunner 'proclaimed the bank's emergence at the forefront of a new, streamlined, globalised finance that leaped adroitly over the outmoded barrier of national frontiers', the World Trade Center of the 1970s being the architectural pinnacle of this national financial projection, its doubling a bold statement on the transition from the industrial age into an age of the virtual and the reproduction.[44]

Contemplating Packer's domestic equivalent, an apartment in 'the tallest residential tower in the world', DeLillo remarks that 'skyscraper and man' share 'an edge or boundary' (*C* 8). The building is populated by 'the investment banker, the land developer, the venture capitalist', the 'beaked media chief', the 'software entrepreneur' and the 'exiled head of state of some smashed landscape of famine and war' (*C* 10). That is to say the interior of the residence and surrounding environments are territories inhabited by the successful manipulators of speculative frontiers, Packer's 'chief of technology' illuminating the fact that people 'eat and sleep in the shadow of what we do' (*C* 14). Like Packer, like the hijackers too for altogether different reasons, they speculate 'into the void' (*C* 21). To accumulate wealth, power, (or in the case of the hijackers non-material status), what they pursue is the space where 'the interaction between technology and capital' (*C* 23) is at its most cutting-edge, occupation and control of the space allowing for what Packer describes as an 'assault on the borders of perception' (*C* 21).

The shared location of such figures, of the towers, of Packer's final day of self-destruction, could not be more apposite, 'New York in our time', as Rushdie symbolically frames it, being 'the beating heart of the visible world'.[45] Even so, the attacks on the World Trade Center were part of a series of coordinated assaults including the stifled attempt to crash United Airlines Flight 93 into the US Capitol building, and American Airlines Flight 77 hitting the Pentagon. The potency of their destruction, though, became the international focal-point for

[43] Kenneth Millard. *Contemporary American Fiction*. Oxford. 2000. p. 5; Jim Neilson. *Warring Fictions: Cultural Politics and the Vietnam War Narrative*. Jackson. 1998. p. 198.
[44] Eric Darton. *Divided We Stand: A Biography of the World Trade Center*. 1999. New York. 2011. p. 15.
[45] Salman Rushdie. 'October 2001: The Attacks on America'. 2001. London. 2002. pp. 391-3.

the day's events. Osama bin Laden ratified the significance the US invested in the World Trade Center collapse months later in an interview with Tayseer Alouni: 'Those awesome symbolic towers that speak of liberty, human rights, and humanity have been destroyed. They have gone up in smoke'.[46] Whether such a statement was only meant to mock and agitate, the amplification of symbolic meaning after the event is as inauthentic as the media-engineered narration of signs received in the West that it seeks to disavow. For all the fine angles of theoretical discourse, terrorism 'does not [just] destroy symbols, it hacks people of flesh and blood to pieces' (*WW* 172), as dramatically portrayed in Beigbeder's minute-by-minute fictional account of Carthew Yorston, trapped and left to die inside the top floors of the North Tower with his two young sons. Pared down to its essence, the attacks on the towers were 'hatred pure and simple', a premeditated act of technological mass murder designed to devastate buildings and kill as many citizens as possible upon impact.[47]

However, when considered alongside DeLillo's unfixed towers, as Peter Boxall stresses 'already in the process of disappearing', their actual demise is invested with a sense of fate, a finitude more akin to that of our own existence than architectural design or permanent public artefact.[48] There is affirmation of this sentiment carrying beyond the nation's borders in Beigbeder's childhood recollection that '[d]espite the immensity of the towers, there was something organic about them' (*WW* 247). This inclination is bolstered in the WTC design, made so that a 'violent draft or a sudden change of temperature will force the entire structural-steel skeleton alternately to expand and contract, a phenomenon known as harmonic oscillation'.[49] The amalgamation of natural and cultural in their arrangement creates a dichotomous haunting sensation now of presence and absence, an uncanny doubling of time and space: the targeting of modern 'America in effigy'.[50]

The new space in the city also reversed time, taking the New York skyline back to something similar to how it had looked prior to 1973, challenging the sense of modernity so

[46] Cited from Daniel Benjamin and Simon Steven. *The Age of Sacred Terror*. New York. 2002. p. 157.
[47] Žižek. *Violence*. p. 78.
[48] Peter Boxall. *Don DeLillo: The Possibility of Fiction*. New York. 2006. p. 223.
[49] Petit. *To Reach the Clouds*. p. 45.
[50] Stephen Holmes. *The Matador's Cape: America's Reckless Response to Terror*. Cambridge. 2007. p 19.

important to both city and country. New York is also a city built on – given meaning and context by – its connected layers of domestic/occupational/recreational verticality. Other targets may have satisfactorily conveyed this message, but a strike at the nation's centre of capital, covering the full breadth of that word's etymology, stood for a decapitation, a 'hit [to] the heart, or, rather, the symbolic head of the prevailing world order'.[51] Yet, as Jürgen Habermas has correctly observed, what surprised the US population, especially those living on its east coast, was not simply the 'symbolic force of the targets struck' – though as a site burgeoning with signification this factor cannot be discounted – but the effectiveness and unscripted elegance with which the terrorists 'destroyed an icon in the household imagery of the American nation'.[52] Objects of ridicule for many native New Yorkers, the topographic and psychological importance of 'the unloved Twin Towers', if only as metropolitan comforter, cultural antenna, or navigational instrument for the visiting tourist, is clarified in the admission of artist and Manhattan resident Art Spiegelman that they were 'our taken-for-granted neighbours, always picture-postcard visible a mile south of our front-stoop'.[53]

The brutality, immediacy, and unmatched scale of such an attack on US territory understandably brought forth a wave of political and economic introspection which turned the nation away – at least temporarily – from the cycle of self-motivated individualism at the root of *Cosmopolis*. The attack brought the nation back to a narrative of traditional social networks, the galvanising of familial ties, and strengthening of investment in local communities and the market, as seen in President Bush's drive to consume to restart the economy. This can be translated as a positive reinforcement of communal values, or, as Barack Obama alludes to it in *The Audacity of Hope* (2006), the regressive by-product of an American political 'tendency to view nations and conflicts through the prism of the Cold War'.[54] Social realignment is certainly an integral component in many 9/11 texts, and movingly reflected in Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, a quest narrative in

[51] Jacques Derrida. *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*. Chicago. 2003. p. 95.
[52] Habermas. *Time of Terror*. p. 28.
[53] Andreas Huyssen. 'Twin Memories: Afterimages of Nine/Eleven'. *Grey Room*. Spring 2002. p. 10; Art Spiegelman. 'Re: Covers'. *110 Stories: New York Writes After September 11*. New York. 2002. p. 284.
[54] Barack Obama. *The Audacity of Hope*. New York. 2006. p. 279.

which nine-year-old Oskar Schell, grieving for the loss of his father in the collapse, embarks on a desperate search for meaning after finding a key 'in a little envelope, in a blue vase, on the highest shelf in his [father's] closet'.[55] Layers of concealment and the need to unpeel them dominate the text, the narrative hinging on Oskar's citywide journey to collect clues. Accompanied by A.R. Black, a retired war correspondent and historical custodian, 'born on January 1, 1900' (*EL* 152) and plucked from the realms of magical realism, Oskar is protected throughout the excursion by a series of 'caring, knowing guardians'.[56] Sharing the surname 'Black', they collectively offer warmth and security to a 'panicky' child whose mindset is shared by the nation, his irrational reactions to anything from 'airplanes' and 'Arab people on the subway', to 'bags without owners', 'tall buildings', and 'turbans' (*EL* 36), capably reflecting a matrix of culturally diverse sympathisers bonded by grief, fear, and a yearning for answers.

Oskar, whose vulnerability is felt in his every thought and action, is of the first generation to be born into the post-Cold War era. Looking for patterns in the formlessness of this existence, the innocent child finds them in the post-9/11 conflation of terror, home and homeland security, his imagination inventing such devices as 'a birdseed shirt', and a 'skyscraper that moved up and down while its elevator stayed in one place' (*EL* 2-3). These are not only a means of protection against any further external attacks to either the private or public domain, but absorption of and indoctrination into the nation's new vocabulary and mindset. The albeit idealised generosity of spirit and warmth that underpins Foer's narration of the Schell family since World War II, however, is very different from the vision of a post-9/11 American family as represented in DeLillo's *Falling Man*. Following the progress of Keith Neudecker, a worker who walks out of the South Tower on the morning of the attacks, the novel illustrates how 'a time and space of falling ash and near night' lingers in a post-9/11 atmosphere where children 'talk in code', and 'privileged, detached, self-involved' parents are left to decipher a society in which 'most lives make no sense', and where

[55] Jonathan Safran Foer. *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. London. 2005. p. 37. Henceforth cited as *EL*.
[56] Ann Larabee. 'Empire of Fear: Imagined Community and the September 11 Attacks'. *Terrorism and Disaster: New Threats, New Ideas*. Oxford. 2003. p. 23.

'[e]verything now is measured by after'.[57] Although separated from his wife, Lianne, and eight-year-old child, Justin – another product of a 1990s marriage in which sex 'was everywhere at first, in words, phrases, half gestures, the simplest intimation of altered space' (*FM* 7) – Keith, a fallen everyman whose surname is only mentioned twice throughout the novel, instinctively retreats from the lethal 'tides of smoke' (*FM* 3) to the comfort of the familiar, 'the doorway' (*FM* 126) of the family home.

Unlike Foer, DeLillo undermines the implication that a social state in which everyone who 'had lost something', and 'was searching' (*EL* 300) to replace that loss, can necessarily find answers in a recalibration of the family unit. The Neudecker's reconciliation dissolves to a point in 2004 where Keith has unconsciously acknowledged the futility of the family, renouncing it in favour of a world of 'naïve expectation[s] and calculated deceit' (*FM* 97), reinventing himself as a professional poker player with a life 'of air miles and cities' (*FM* 212), where 'there was nothing outside the game but faded space' (*FM* 189). Unable to articulate the full experience from inside the tower, parenthetically mirrored in the choice to keep the reader away from the event until the novel's fraught denouement, Keith is painted throughout most of the narrative as frozen between 'the compulsion to repeat' and the necessity to exhume 'what has been forgotten and repressed'.[58] He performs the actions of a prototypical psychoanalytic subject willing to, for example, anachronistically 'crawl out of his clothes' (*FM* 93) during a series of meetings with a fellow survivor whose briefcase he had taken from the tower and subsequently returned, rather than break out of 'the process of repression' and attempt to move beyond the traumatic experience.[59] Haunted post-9/11 by the memory of her father's suicide some years earlier, a consequence of being diagnosed with Alzheimer's, it is Lianne, a matriarch 'troubled by memory lapses' and 'steeped in family history' (*FM* 187), who needs to hold onto, at the very least, an outline of their past existence:

[57] Don DeLillo. *Falling Man*. London. 2007. pp. 3, 17, 138, 215. Henceforth cited as *FM*.
[58] Sigmund Freud. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. 1920. London. 1950. p. 26.
[59] Ibid.

> [W]e need to stay together, keep the family going. Just us, three of us, long-term, under the same roof…with the idea that we're permanent. Times like these, the family is necessary. Don't you think? Be together, stay together? This is how we live through the things that scare us half to death. (*FM* 214)

But is the idea alone a strong enough base to bind a family of individuals trying – and failing – to process a collective trauma? With Lianne desperate to cling to any sense of permanence because of her own flawed memory, and Keith's unwillingness to commit to even a shadow-role in the marital pretence, the most detrimental result of this pervasive ennui is its effect on the next generation. Flawed memory and commitment issues are stock traits in Delillo's oeuvre; as is the child as peripheral cipher, Justin being the antithesis to Foer's Oskar Schell. Reflecting the parental descent into self-absorption, Justin is referred to as little more than 'the kid' (*FM* 185) throughout the second half of the narrative, seething with anger but distanced and robotic: a 'machine with hair and teeth, register set to peak velocity' (*FM* 213). If DeLillo's American adults are 'continuing to withdraw' (*FM* 212) in the post-9/11 society, then Justin is very much a product of this withdrawal, taught 'to speak in monosyllables only, for extended stretches', by school initiatives which 'sounded totalitarian' (*FM* 66), a situation endorsed outside the educational system by 'the pandering nature of media coverage' to a political administration well practised in sound-bite techniques and linguistic camouflage.[60]

The formulation of the century's first new dialectic, what Rushdie saw in 2000 as a defining struggle of the new age 'between Terrorism and Security', included the speaking of 'the current bogeyman's name – "Osama bin Laden" – to frighten us children'.[61] Except in an ironic reversal, the children in *Falling Man* overhaul the ideological baggage of bin Laden, reducing it back to the poisonous Western threat 'Bill Lawton'. Much like the nation's infrastructure, in developing 'the myth of Bill Lawton' Justin and his friends imaginatively recreate and Westernise the figure of bin Laden for their own purposes, unconsciously loading their version with economic, civic, and constitutional weight that leaves Keith merely

[60] Robert C. Boyd. *Losing America: Confronting a Reckless and Arrogant Presidency*. New York. 2004. p. 13.
[61] Salman Rushdie. 'January 2000: Terror vs. Security'. 2000. *Step Across This Line*. p. 326.

speculating as to whether 'some important meaning might be located in the soundings of the boy's small error' (*FM* 73-4). What is complex for the adult is clear in the innocent mind: the latter feels openly, the former rationalises. This is also brought out in Waldman's *The Submission*, where Claire Burwell – the only person on the memorial judging panel to have lost family in the attacks – sees pain 'so unbearable' in her son's face 'that somehow she held it against him' (*S* 34). Waldman depicts William's 'sadness' as 'too big for his tiny frame', like 'a shadow stunting a plant's growth' (*S* 34). Aided by the ability to feel instinctively, to react without the repressive social or emotional baggage of their adult counterparts, the strong imagery of the children's pain replicates the nation's post-9/11 condition, only able to grow into the devastation of such a fall (or loss) as time passes. Sharing a similar narrative structure to Irish writer Colum McCann's tangential 9/11 novel *Let the Great World Spin*, Waldman divides *The Submission* into two parts, a main section excavating actions and reactions from a specific time and event (in 2003), and a shorter concluding appendage from a future that reflects the consequences of that point historically (in this instance 2023). Launched into the near-future a dying Claire, via Waldman, ponders the 2003 US climate, determining that 'we were in the grip of some frenzy, possessed almost, at that time. I felt like little by little I was pushed…until I found myself on the other side of a line I hadn't wanted to cross' (*S* 295).

Indeed, to take Keith Neudecker as an example, the reason for his lack of comprehension and broader social dysfunction at that time is only revealed when DeLillo takes us into the tower and narrates Keith's failed attempt to save his friend and fellow poker player Rumsey, watching the man suffer a gruesome death after being hit by something so 'large and hard when the ceiling caved' in that he looked like someone 'paralyzed for life' (*FM* 241). Keith's patterns of behaviour are reminiscent of war survivors suffering from neurotic symptoms. Witness to and victim of a transnational 'readiness to wage war on civilians' which had incrementally escalated throughout the previous century, Keith is 'reduced to silence' by the horrors of his experience, yearning non-verbal communication in the compulsive desire to 'rake in chips and stack them' (*FM* 228), a virtual re-enactment – or 'intimate extract' – of his

'daytime initiatives' (*FM* 97) in the tower prior to the attack.[62] A form of purgatory, the fixed rules and measurable possibilities of the poker table, its impermeability, are a 'séance in hell' (*FM* 216) which negate any sense of psychological stasis; however banal and repetitive, the sense of order provides Keith with an escape route from a real state of anxiety. The untranslatability of witnessing such violence is a human condition as pertinent in 2001 as it was for Oskar's grandfather in *Extremely Loud*. His experience of the Dresden bombings is recalled as a 'night [that] has no beginning or end, it started before I was born', and is 'still happening' (*EL* 208) in the contemporary moment, as 'the evolution of humanity brings with it [ever] more sophisticated techniques of savagery'.[63] Thomas Schell is, in fact, a man so affected by the 'dead and dying…in the rubble of every building' (*EL* 211) that, since surviving the bombing, the rest of the century had 'felt like' he was 'looking into the dictionary definition of emptiness' (*EL* 321). Discussing the difficulty in understanding certain aspects of the Shoah, Slavoj Žižek comments that 'it is not possible to bear witness to the ultimate horror of Auschwitz – *but what if this impossibility itself is embodied in a survivor?*'.[64] To describe the indescribable indicates fraudulence, the 'witness able to offer a clear narrative' disqualifying themselves 'by virtue of that clarity'.[65] If this same principle applies to Dresden, 9/11, or any other technologically-facilitated act of human cruelty on a mass-scale, then the impossibility of translating what has been witnessed is embodied in the void defined by Thomas Schell as an emptiness, in his case repressing memories of the atrocity by permanently eradicating the voice in favour of the notepad: an instinctive desire to preserve and control emotion also present in Keith Neudecker. Whether German or American, Dresden or 9/11, the tattooing of 'YES' and 'NO' (*EL* 17) onto the mute Thomas Schell's palm in order to gesture, and the activation of 'the little binary behind the eyes' in the game of poker, are the 'choice that reminds you who you are…the choice of yes or no' (*FM* 212): a shared wish, caused by their traumas, to sever direct communication and exist in a state

[62] Michel Foucault. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. 1969. London. 1995. p. 6.
[63] Terry Eagleton. *Holy Terror*. Oxford. 2005. p. 11.
[64] Slavoj Žižek. *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!*. London. 2002. p. 140.
[65] Žižek. *Violence*. p. 4.

where language has no area of doubt, all reasoning and Lacanian signification reduced to its dual essence.

However, it is a duality which can only staunch the psychic wounds it seeks to hide. In Foer's narrative, that quite literally doubles as a multi-perspective scrapbook of the Schell's recent history, Thomas's final correspondence to his dead son ('9/11/03') explains that upon arriving back in America after 9/11, with cases full of unsent letters, the airport security ask why he has so many suitcases for 'someone with nothing to declare'. His immediate thought is 'that people with nothing to declare' are the ones that 'carry the most' (*EL* 268). After regularly sending empty envelopes to his abandoned wife, 'one' sent 'for every day' (*EL* 235) of his son's life, to finally deliver the correspondences is the relieving of a physical and emotional burden which allows, to a point, the reconciliation of memory with absence. Even so, Foer makes it clear to the reader that even this type of pilgrimage has not been enough to quench Schell's desire to express the memories and emotions of forty voiceless years. The final pages of the last notebook are a dark mass of compressed and overlaid text, the reminiscences of an old man 'running out of room [or time]', craving for 'an infinitely long blank book' (*EL* 280) to narrate and thus expel the repressed emotions flowing through three generations of the Schell family.

Linked traces of trauma and repression appear again in the 2011 commemorations for the attacks, then-US National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice remarking that for 'those of us in office on that day, it was as if time was suspended. For us and for the victims' families, every day since then has been 12 September'.[66] This may be the case for people who lost loved ones, like those portrayed in *Extremely Loud*, *Falling Man*, and *The Submission*, but for a politician to try and emulate this sense of loss is naïve and inane. If it truly is '12 September' for Rice every day, then it indicates that not only has time frozen for her politically in a moment of hatred/despair/revenge, but in the time that has elapsed and all the lives lost nothing has been learnt either. Exemplified in DeLillo's consistent association of America's national narrative with waste over purity (frugality), the denial of the spectres of

[66] Condoleezza Rice. 'Ten Years On'. *The Observer*. 11 September 2011. p. 38.

excess in the United States gives them licence to propagate, further exacerbated by the disingenuous political 'cloaking [of] its scramble for profits', and the 'extraordinary amalgam of idealism and cynicism, the angelic and the demonic' etched into the nation's constitution.[67]

The two possible Ground Zero memorials fought over in *The Submission* figuratively reconstruct this bipolarity. Ariana, an established designer of 'large-scale artworks…around Manhattan' (*S* 9), champions 'The Void', a 'black granite rectangle, some twelve stories high': dark and monolithic a 'great gash against the sky' (*S* 4). Backed by Claire, it is opposed by 'The Garden', the eventual winner, an allegorical construction that's interior walls feature the names of victims 'patterned to mimic the geometric cladding of the destroyed buildings', its 'steel trees' crafted out of 'salvaged scraps' (*S* 4) from the wreckage. Corporate abstraction, despite Ariana grasping at the future by claiming 'gardens aren't our vernacular' (*S* 5), loses to a technologised reworking of US pastoral heritage, frontier idealism, and the fantasies of the Founding Fathers to create an American Eden.[68] The dilemma that hangs on every page, that gives the novel's title depth of meaning, arises when it is revealed that the architect responsible for 'The Garden' – this potent conversion of global economic ruins into a man-made symbol of nature and rejuvenation – is 'Mohammad Khan' (*S* 24). Even though Khan is an 'American' Muslim who 'ate pork' and whose parents 'were almost puritanical in their secularism' (*S* 16, 28), the utterance of his name alone wreaks havoc as it leaks from the jury, to the press, and then out across the nation.

Indeed, the title of Waldman's text reflects Khan's entrapment in the arbitration of a quintessentially American bureaucratic conundrum. The idea of 'submission' takes on many meanings, from Khan's entry into the competition itself, to different forms of obedience, to US fear of 'submission' to a corrupt Western stereotype of 'Islamic Law' (*S* 132). There is also Khan's epiphany in Kabul, revealed in the latter stages of the novel: that to give oneself over to an inner belief is 'the truest submission' (*S* 281). What is exposed is the unavoidable egotism and prejudices of individuals given power and position within a mediated – legal,

[67] Eagleton. *Holy Terror*. p. 77.
[68] See Andrea Wulf. *The Founding Gardeners: How the Revolutionary Generation Created an American Eden*. London. 2012.

political, socio-cultural – process, Khan used as the 'prop in a propaganda war' (*S* 174) and fought over by the left and right extremes of Western liberal democracy as well as its centre. Comparable to what several of Hari Kunzru's transnational protagonists endure when they are analysed through the lens of the national media (their experiences interrogated in the chapter to follow), the architect is also the subject of an information-age witch-hunt. Put on trial, interrogated, Khan is pushed into a public initiation ceremony that offers the choice of either defying or acquiescing to the nation's systems of control, justification for the persecution being, as conveyed by the New York Governor, that 'radical Islamists could use our democratic institutions and our openness to advance their own agenda' (*S* 102). This defence is the same 'destabilizing of the sacred' that makes 'even such instrumental enterprises as a Gulf War or War on Terrorism open to being given a higher purpose', suspicion, prejudice, and personal gain cloaked and then elevated by expansionism through intervention.[69]

Hounded by an avid hack journalist for the *New York Post*, on the brink of being exposed as the Muslim that won the memorial competition, Khan, in his own country, is faced with the headline 'MYSTERY MUSLIM MEMORIAL MESS' and the picture of 'an unidentifiable man in a balaclava, scary as a terrorist' (*S* 51-2). Despite his staunch neutrality, Khan is unfairly cast as a figure of opposition to American values, because, like Brecht in a previous generation, he was reluctant to 'kowtow to rich philistines' within the system to gain leverage.[70] Taping the cover 'to his bathroom mirror that night, only to find the man in the balaclava looking back at him with cold, hard eyes', Khan cannot 'find himself in the picture', the next day superimposing his 'submission' photo 'on top of the Post picture' (*S* 52) as a means of reclaiming identity. Facing a virtual self brings a dawning in Khan's consciousness: a fathoming that in multicultural societies subjects have access to multiple veneers of identification. And for better or worse, however extreme the caricature, those identities –

[69] James. *Globalism, Nationalism, Tribalism*. p. 79.
[70] Philip Thomson. 'Brecht's poetry'. *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*. Cambridge. 2006. p. 238.

again like Kunzru's technologised characters – can either be created by the individual or be forced upon them.

Unlike the other 9/11 novels assessed in this chapter, *The Submission* directly enunciates both sides of the everyday intercultural dialogue that has resided underneath all the other layers of religious, economic, military, political and emotional investment since the attacks that shook the West to its foundations. Treating the US as a hologram, Khan a holographic object within it, Waldman uses the idea of the submission to panoramically swing between these differing national and transnational viewpoints. To stay with the hologram analogy, be it the US or Khan's doubled reflection on the cover of the *Post*, depending on the angle of perception and even if you acknowledge that both exist, 'whichever way you move on the continuum of experience and cognition something is always hidden'.[71] The text is full of these illusory fragments produced in the transitions between the visible and invisible, between the material and virtual. Iranian American lawyer Laila, for example, admits that by the age of eight, many years before the events of 2001, she already understood 'people who didn't know me hated me just for where I came from', the only way to avoid it to make herself 'invisible to them' (*S* 175): there, but also not there. Khan's garden, too, begins as a beautiful blueprint to 'unite East and West' (*S* 275); but having been sullied and withdrawn from public view, it is only ever seen by a privileged few and as a projection on a 'giant screen' on a 2023 'living room wall' (*S* 296).

The recording of it is shown to Claire by her grown son William, finding out at the same time as the reader from William's interview with Mohammad Khan that 'The Garden' was commissioned by a rich Muslim after its withdrawal and turned into a 'private pleasure garden' (*S* 296). By 2023, choosing to be a global citizen, a citizen of the future mischievously referred to as 'American only in name', Khan had become the architectural muse of 'rich patrons; undemocratic governments; Gatsby nations in a hurry to buy identities with their newfound wealth' (*S* 286). Though featuring designs paralleled by gardens 'built across the Islamic world…over a dozen or more centuries' (*S* 115), Khan's garden

[71] Malcolm Bull. *Seeing Things Hidden: Apocalypse, Vision and Totality*. London. 1999. p. 24.

incorporates transnational patterns and architectural geometrics housed within us all. Though inspired by a garden in Kabul, was it meant to be American, Islamic, or both? What was meant to be seen and what remain invisible? Little is truly revealed about the stimulus behind the design, amplifying the garden's symbolic potential and universality. The power of the garden as memorial is never questioned, acceptance of it at Ground Zero as a replacement for the cold, stark, domineering lines of the WTC a fitting eulogy embracing America past and future. Its rejection and negative transfiguration into a national bête noire correctly suggest that the post-9/11 US generation was not ready for such humility, or able to deal with a sign that so credibly displays the blurred demarcations of transnational culture and oncoming wave of external cultural, economic, and possibly political influences.

Instead, ensconced in Mumbai under private ownership, existing yet hidden in one of the fastest growing commercial capitals of finance on the globe, the garden metamorphoses into a purchasable object, illustrating how capital surplus is absorbed back through conspicuous consumption. While Mumbai expands through engineering and information technologies, the Gulf States (in which it is implied a 'star-architect' like Khan has many patrons) erect 'spectacular buildings on the back of an oil trade that depends in part on the profligate use of energy to service a predominantly suburban lifestyle in the United States'.[72] With peak oil production in decline since the 1970s, the US 'now imports close to $300-billion-worth of oil annually, which accounts for almost one third of a burgeoning trade deficit that has to be covered by borrowing from the rest of the world at well over $2 billion per day'.[73] As seen in the actions of Moses and the repercussions for New York in the previous chapter, as part of its redistribution of surplus in the post-WWII expansion, the suburbanisation of the US, and the dependencies needed to sustain it, has placed great wealth in the hands of agents within zones able to supply the required raw materials. In turn, stemming from the constructs put in place to receive this flood of transnational capital, it is these zones that are now going

[72] Harvey. *Enigma of Capital*. pp. 148-9.
[73] Ibid. p. 79.

through their own expansive phase of (sub)urbanisation, Khan and his garden caught in and profiting from this new cycle of excess and reinvestment.

Exhilarating in terms of new frictionless flows and the transferral of transnational streams of information, as Packer's chief of theory Vija Kinski claims in *Cosmopolis*, these virtual movements are shadowed by enforced 'destruction', the 'hallmark of capitalist thought' in which old industries 'have to be harshly eliminated' and new markets 'forcibly claimed' (*C* 92). Harvey labels the actions of the last three centuries marked by the rise of capitalism as 'creative destruction', a 'second nature' placed over the natural surface of the globe in an ever-evolving, ever-shifting hegemonic geography based on 'the speculative needs of further accumulation'.[74] What *Cosmopolis* and *The Submission* accurately reflect is this model in motion, and the effect human practices can have on it when they are acted out in capitalist liberal democracies like the US. A pattern emerges in this fusion of two separate spheres (geoeconomics and geopolitics), subjects (or characters) separating into those born into it, those who choose it, and those it is forced upon.

Ever more pronounced in the post-Cold War era, the progression of this strangely bifurcated moment can be charted from *White Noise* to *Cosmopolis*. DeLillo's American narrative advances technologically, economically, and geographically, from interior simulated 'practice session[s]' billed as 'instruction in disaster readiness', as foregrounded in the earlier novel, to a state where other exterior spectral elements created by the West's hegemonic centre have increased and solidified, becoming a real and 'credible threat' (*C* 19) to the nation's political *and* economic figureheads.[75] In the 'Axis of Evil' rhetoric dominant in post 9/11 Anglo-American political discourse, the credible threat has been defined along ideological lines as a primordial conflict between opposing factions, substantiated in Samuel P. Huntington's recognition that for 'fourteen hundred years…relations between Islam and Christianity, both Orthodox and Western, have often been stormy. Each has been the other's

[74] Ibid. p. 185.
[75] Christopher Donovan. *Postmodern Counternarratives: Irony and Audience in the Novels of Paul Auster, Don DeLillo, Charles Johnson, and Tim O'Brien*. New York. 2005. p. 195; DeLillo. *White Noise*. pp.143, 201.

Other'.[76] There are fragments of truth in this statement, but in condensing his argument into a highly contentious clash of civilisations, Huntington critically bypasses the recent impact of global technological, political, and economic developments and the culture created by them. The empirical skirmishes Huntington sought to define are actually a distraction from the encroachment of – the combined technology and ideologies of – capitalism and Western liberal democracy into other non-Western territories. From the shadows of American-backed overseas campaigns aimed at political and economic modernisation appeared pockets of religious revivalism. For example, counter to American military and politico-cultural movements there is also a notable rise in Islamic awareness in this period. Most noticeable in uprisings like the Iranian Revolution in the final years of the 1970s, the ties between these nations in particular stretch back even further to the US inveigling in Iranian governance from 1953 onwards.[77]

Opposition to the West's model of progress, perceived as supercilious individualism, permissiveness, and moral bankruptcy by extremists within Muslim countries, is as ideologically skewed as rejection of Islam by certain quarters in the West. In this tussle the secular freedoms and technologies associated with liberal democracies driven by capital are as galling to the Muslim world as the unshakeable religious certainty and retrograde tenets of Islam that are played on in the West. When militarism is added into an already relatively abrupt chronological advance of technological, economic and 'scientific discourse' into Islamic territories, the equally abrupt and violent 'protective screen' of fundamentalism cultivated in response to it is inevitable.[78] Žižek sheds light on this global condition and its reciprocity by distinguishing between subjective and objective violence. There is subjective violence 'performed by a clearly identifiable agent', exemplified most obviously by terrorist attacks on major Western locations; but there is also its obverse, objective violence, which 'generates such outbursts' and can be 'symbolic' and 'systemic': symbolic referring to the

[76] Huntington. *The Clash of Civilizations.*1996. p. 209.
[77] See Stephen Kinzer. *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror*. 2003. Hoboken. 2008.
[78] Žižek. *Violence*. p. 70.

'violence embodied in language and its forms', and systemic to the 'often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems'.[79] For the most part objective violence, or violence emanating from the West, remains invisible, but has to be highlighted and mediated to 'make sense of what otherwise seem to be "irrational" explosions' of subjective violence by external or alienated forces.[80] And in this dissection of late twentieth and early twenty-first century violence we find exactly what Huntington avoids, the idea of 'the war of the state against itself'.[81] In other words Huntington's distinction of civilisations, and their clashing, rests on the refusal to accept that acts of terror can also be perpetrated by 'unsettled' agents who 'have no place' (*C* 194) within their own society, such individuals being equally capable of suffering the 'horror and despair' (*C* 16) produced by the dominant culture as radicalised overseas versions of the racial or religious other.

In *Cosmopolis*, Packer's last fated day traversing New York is scattered with examples of disgruntled citizens working both individually and in units. For example, the head of Russia's largest media conglomerate is 'shot numerous times' (*C* 81) in a murder repackaged as a transnational televised event; the managing director of the International Monetary Fund is assassinated by a lone man 'live on the Money Channel' in 'Nike North Korea' (*C* 33). Later, while Packer and Kinski hypothesise 'market culture' (*C* 90) from the inside of a reinforced limousine, an anti-globalisation riot is in full swing to a refashioned Marxian chant of '*A specter is haunting the world*' (*C* 89). Branded by Kinski as 'a fantasy generated by the market' (*C* 90), a virtual state tackled at length in the next chapter, the staged protestors are men and women prepared to still invest in the prosaic notion that 'it is the violent act that makes history and changes everything that came before' (*C* 154). Written in the shadow of the protest activity in Seattle that circled around the 1999 WTO Ministerial Conference, and anticipatory of other public outbursts of dissent up to and including the actions of the Occupy Wall Street Movement in 2011, DeLillo's financial riots add credence to Žižek's claim that 'the figure of the terrorist Enemy' is not a single entity, but 'a condensation of two opposed

[79] Ibid. p.1.
[80] Ibid. p. 2.
[81] Simpson. *Culture of Commemoration*. p. 5.

figures, the reactionary "fundamentalist" and the Leftist protestor'.[82] The resulting narrative is a montage of 'cars burning in the street, metal hissing and spitting, and stunned figures in slow motion, in tides of smoke, wandering through the masses of vehicles and bodies' (*C* 91), as the representatives of the system observe from a protected space financed by the market. All the social, economic, and political forces at play in the culture are elucidated in Packer's pre-9/11 journey from East to West. What DeLillo clinically anatomises in *Cosmopolis* is the effect of technology and the market on time, and the effect of that time on human perception. Time, indeed, is 'a corporate asset now', it 'belongs to the market system' (*C* 79). This is why Kinski can see a live immolation instantly re-broadcast as 'not original' (*C* 100), the themes of the violent riots against the system mis-sold; what at their exterior are attacks against corporate globalisation and greed, are in fact 'a protest against the future', against its inevitable technological and economic futurity, an attempt 'to normalize it' to 'keep it from overwhelming the present' (*C* 91).

Packer's self-induced ruination, in fact all his actions on the day – from the shedding of all assets to the needless journey to get a haircut against traffic – amount to a personal experiment to see whether the market is totalising as Kinski proposes, or whether it is possible to find a space and exist as an entity 'outside its reach' (*C* 100). The killing of his bodyguard, Torval, is the final unchaining of Packer from the market and its protective bubble. It is the point when the narrative turns increasingly surreal, the juncture at which his world transforms into a dangerous environment. Packer is finally made susceptible to the instability of time and existence outside the system. This chaotic backdrop is filtered into Packer's final encounter with his self-appointed executioner Benno Levin. When Levin remarks that '[e]verything in our lives, yours and mine, has brought us to this moment' (*C* 189), it is in recognition of the symbiotic relationship between opposing Manichaean forces. As Obama self-consciously suggested when musing on the shifting opinions over time of those who wield power within the Senate, the confrontation is an archetypal American last

[82] Žižek. *Desert of the Real!*. p. 111.

dance in 'the struggle of warring impulses, a twining of darkness and light' that can only be resolved through violent retribution.[83]

Outside his sphere of manipulation, the prognosis that his 'prostate was asymmetrical' (*C* 8) gnaws away at Packer throughout *Cosmopolis*. When Packer announces the condition to Levin in his final moments, Levin replies '[s]o is mine' (*C* 199), intensifying the notion of the novella as a suicide note for the ages, everything inside it a projection from the mind of a financial trader experiencing a deep existential crisis. A symbolic redeployment of the power dynamic between Packer and Levin, the lack of symmetry in the prostate, one large powerful side conjoined with an enfeebled disproportionate other half, also replicates the shape of existence in the West under the forces of capital: the outline of global capitalism and its shadow. Engrossed in the 'beautiful balance' of data flows in a world of simulation, Packer, though stalked by it, ignores 'the importance of the lopsided' in nature, what is generated in the form of 'tics and quirks' (*C* 200). Projected or otherwise, Levin by comparison is the disgruntled labour force displaced by technology, whose 'syndromes' (*C* 202) have been swollen to the point of murderous madness by the inequalities and sense of human obsolescence caused by the 'permanent dissolution of all life-forms which capitalist reproduction' dictates when taken to its logical conclusion.[84]

The only text in this discussion written prior to 9/11, *Cosmopolis* is also the only work to feature murder at close proximity, those written post-9/11 choosing to deal with violence in retrospect or at a distance, either as part of the attack itself or analogised through other bloody transnational episodes from the previous century. Surprisingly excised from the 2012 film adaptation, considering David Cronenberg's previous directorial interrogations of near-future technology, DeLillo's narrative is punctuated by two hyperbatic written confessions from Levin regarding the murder ('Night' and 'Morning'). These jumble the otherwise chronological omniscient narration of the day, but accentuate and reflect back onto the reader Packer's 'hypermaniacal' intimacy with technology and the markets, that includes the

[83] Obama. *Audacity of Hope*. p. 75.
[84] Žižek. *Violence*. p. 177.

disturbing ability to conjure images from future moments that occur just 'beyond the general perception' (*C* 95). If it is 'cyber-capital that creates the future' (*C* 79), Packer, one of its most successful pioneers, unblinkingly glimpses it 'reappropriating time and hybridizing new machinic systems' on the very edge of its frontier.[85] However, while that virtual space, and technology 'that was almost pure information…pure metaphysics' (*C* 204), may be advantageous for accumulating capital or accessing fragments of the near-future, it does not necessarily lead to Packer's vain fantasy of a life 'outside the given limits, in a chip, on a disk…the practical mapping of the nervous system onto digital memory' (*C* 206). Rather, access to such free-flowing technological streams only leads Packer to a vision of himself 'dead inside the crystal of his watch', the machine, free from conscious existence, coldly reflecting his tagged body in the future next to the rest of 'the bodies of unidentified men in [a] hospital morgue' (*C* 206-7).

Packer is Icarus reborn in the age of information capital. Privileged with the most advanced technology, despite numerous warnings, he is compelled to test it to its limits. The human being, destroyed, melts anonymously back into the system it sought to challenge. Tellingly, working under the pseudonym Benno Levin, Packer deems the threat from the ex-employee and conspiratorial assassin Richard Sheets to be a 'stale fantasy' (*C* 193), failing to notice Levin's costume and demeanour transforming in the novel's final confrontation. Levin's evolution from deluded outcast to a killer with a 'towel over his head and shoulders, draped in the manner of a prayer shawl' (*C* 187) is an eerie intimation toward the uniform and physiognomy of a new and efficient assassin for the next phase in the geopolitical cycle: the twenty-first century Islamic fundamentalist. This is not to say that acts of transnational terrorism are phenomena particular to the new century, as indicated by the Irish Republican Army's campaign against the British, or previous incidents in the likes of Nairobi and Tanzania.[86] What differentiates this new wave of terrorism from its predecessors is the ingenuity with which it harnesses the 'very interconnectivity that increasingly binds the world

[85] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. 2000. Harvard. 2001. p. 407.
[86] Ian Tyrrell. *Transnational Nation: United States History in Global Perspective*. Basingstoke. 2007. p. 224.

together'.[87] The choice to subvert a benign globe-shrinking technological icon like the aeroplane into a malevolent force instead of using manufactured arms, and manipulation of a salacious media through a staggered double-assault, infused the attacks with a 'demented sophistication'.[88] Even the maximisation of the fuel on-board, using a resource the nation purchases and desires more than most others as further ammunition, laced the attacks with a devastating edge that made them 'instantly the most murderous in Western history: the greatest number of civilians massacred in one fell swoop since the founding of the United States' (*WW* 297).

Taught the necessary skills to convert commercial 'passenger jets' into 'manned missiles' by the very nation they planned to attack, Al-Qaeda's successful infiltration of the American system – the fear of its recurrence underlined throughout *The Submission* – also mirrors the manoeuvring of 'transnational corporations' with no allegiance to specific nations in their 'global franchising of brands'.[89] The axiomatic rhetoric of George Bush soon after 9/11 eloquently reiterates the connection:

> I see things this way: The people who did this act on America, and who may be planning further acts, are evil people. They don't represent an ideology, they don't represent a legitimate group of people. They're flat evil. That's all they can think about, is evil. And as a nation of good folks, we're going to hunt them down.[90]

What Bush unintentionally confirms, amongst the obtuse binaries and allusions to some of the least attractive precedents set along America's historical path, is that with no ideology or geographic legitimacy terrorists may tell different narratives than corporations, but 'they are united by a common deterritorialized global structure'.[91] As a worldwide network with 'cells in over sixty countries, including the United States', promoting a transnational brand of terror that remains 'diffuse, ubiquitous, and [yet] largely invisible', Al-Qaeda would seem to have been very much the 'quintessentially postmodern' corporate entity.[92] A glaring omission from

[87] Obama. *Audacity of Hope*. p. 305.
[88] Martin Amis. 'The Second Plane'. 2001. *The Second Plane*. London. 2008. p. 6.
[89] DeLillo. 'Ruins of the Future'. p. 39; Tyrrell. *Transnational Nation*. p. 224.
[90] Cited from Boyd. *Losing America*. p. 91.
[91] Susan Willis. *Portents of the Real: A Primer for Post-9/11 America*. London. 2005. p. 90.
[92] Eagleton. *Holy Terror*. p. 82-3; Boyd. *Losing America*. p. 83.

Huntington's civilisations theory, capitalism's existence as a borderless economic structure goes unrecognised; what Žižek dubs a 'truly neutral economic-symbolic machine', the transnational groupings to rise up out of it split along ideological lines but share its statelessness and draw on its adaptability.[93] This is also the critical misunderstanding present in Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992). Caught in a critical wave of free market triumphalism, Fukuyama, describing this perceived historical flatline, went so far as to say 'no ideology with pretensions to universality' was 'in a position to challenge liberal-democracy', localised pockets of resistance to it, principally in the form of Islam, maintaining 'virtually no appeal outside those areas that were culturally Islamic to begin with'.[94] Buoyed by the post-Cold War zeitgeist, ten years on a statement like the 'days of Islam's cultural conquests, it would seem, are over', was totally deflated in the instant the first plane impacts with the North Tower on that bright 2001 September morning.[95]

The *End of History*, then, is a product of the rampant attitudes and markets pervading the US throughout the 1990s. Exhibiting complete incomprehension for the actions of characters like Mohammad Khan or Eric Packer who actively want to reject or seek alternatives to it, the 'liberal *idea*' elevated in *End of History* combines liberal democracy and market capitalism within the same structure, rather than comprehending them as linked and parallel but crucially separate, and capable of functioning or being adopted in different spaces and at different speeds.[96] It also, imitating its time, repudiates the possibility that liberal democracy needs shadowy opposition against which to define itself, the arrival of the religious fundamentalist onto the global stage as a mythic enemy essential to its progression, the imposition of terror the stymieing of a stagnation building in the West from the early 1990s onwards. Fukuyama's recent writing avoids extensive references to the dynamic sweep of capital accumulation that runs alongside 'social modernisation', preferring to concentrate on the 'spread of democratic ideas' to the remaining international spaces that do not resemble

[93] Žižek. *Violence*. p. 133.
[94] Francis Fukuyama. *The End of History and the Last Man*. London. 1992. pp. 45-6.
[95] Ibid. p. 46.
[96] Ibid. p. 45.

'modern technological societies'.[97] Could this perhaps be because capitalism has proved its 'universality' as it has spread globally, moving on from the American mode of the last fifty or so years? The successful reach into nations like China, as well as the recent weakening of elected governments and strengthening of financial technocrats in some European countries, does imply that capitalism is at a stage once again where it no longer necessarily needs to have democracy attached to it as a political ideal. In which case, the promotion and mediation – the forceful selling – of democracy understandably becomes a high priority. If so, does this not suggest the true threat is not to the further spread of capitalism, but instead to the notion of democracy as the only viable global political system to chaperone its propagation across further non-Western territories? What cannot be accounted for and what needs to remain the highest priority is the maintaining of an acute awareness for humanity's location within the contingencies and unpredictable socio-political shifts in store as international tensions appear and new geographic frontiers are drawn in the forthcoming decades.

Clouded Edges

Back, for now, to the 9/11 timeframe: defined by Hardt and Negri as destruction, judgment, and fear, Al-Qaeda's literal and figurative hijacking of the three 'royal deployments of Empire' has proved to be difficult subject-matter to extract from a collection of 9/11 narratives written predominantly from a Western perspective.[98] Putting to one side the contributions of Waldman and Rushdie, whether Amis, DeLillo, Foer, Beigbeder, McCann, or William Gibson, whose novel *Pattern Recognition* (2003) was the first fiction to broach the fallout of 9/11 and is examined in detail in the next chapter, the majority of material published for mainstream audiences that interacts with the subject is written from the standpoint of the White Western male. Yet Robert Eaglestone's claim that there is 'a simplistic refusal to engage with the

[97] Francis Fukuyama. 'The legacy of that terrible time will be less significant than we feared'. *The Observer*. 11 September 2011. p. 32.
[98] Hardt and Negri. *Empire*. p. 356.

otherness of the terrorists and their ideas' in many of these narratives underestimates a shared inclination to balance hegemonic indignation for exploitative and cavalier acts of mass murder, with a portrayal of the 'real and imagined threats, bellicose statesmanship, precious affluence, brutal poverty, and civil wars' that indiscriminately affect networks of citizens from across the culturally and socio-politically interlaced transnational canvas.[99] This is not to say that all the narratives contain characterisations of Muslim fundamentalists, or that the representations of those deemed by some to be the 'terrorist other' are not in some ways generic or flawed. Reversing Eaglestone's impression that many of the 9/11 fictions 'mark the limits of the current understanding of terror from the Western point of view', these narrative structures reveal the shape and interconnectivity between West and non-West: what they show is precisely that the term *other* is now problematic, even questionable, for an amorphous and contradictory terrorist organisation based in territories with so many cultural links to the way of life it seeks to destroy.[100] It is a situation visualised in Huntington's crude yet prophetic prediction from the early 1990s that '[s]omewhere in the Middle East a half-dozen young men could well be dressed in jeans drinking Coke, listening to rap, and, between their bows to Mecca, putting together a bomb to blow up an American airliner'.[101]

In *Falling Man*, for example, the tumbling scraps of memory that comprise the Western narrative are mirrored and interspersed with a linear fictionalised account of Hammad's voyage from studying 'architecture and engineering' (*FM* 79) in Hamburg, to the final moments aboard United Airlines Flight 175 prior to its impact with the South Tower. Functioning as coda to the central narrative, the piety and clarity of the mission's preparation is destabilised by DeLillo in Hammad's fight against the lure of Western culture, whether in the casual sexual relationship with a 'German, Syrian' woman (*FM* 81) in Hamburg, or in the mundane yet comforting interactions with customers and staff in a Florida supermarket. Products of the same global system, Žižek correctly evaluates this as a state not born out of

[99] Robert Eaglestone. 'The Age of Reason was over…an Age of Fury was Dawning'. *Terror and the Postcolonial: A Concise Companion*. Oxford. 2010. p. 367. Eaglestone is referring here to the 9/11 narratives of Amis and Foer; Russell Jacoby. *Picture Imperfect: Utopian Thought for an Anti-Utopian Age*. New York. 2005. p. 148.
[100] Eaglestone. 'The Age of Reason'. p. 368.
[101] Huntington. *Clash of Civilizations*. pp. 58-9.

cultural difference but the very opposite, that 'the fundamentalists are already like us, that, secretly, they have already internalised our standards and measure themselves by them'.[102] Indeed, DeLillo gleefully renders Hammad as a victim of propaganda, a blank surface as easily seduced by the religious zeal that leaves the pilot of the plane to hit the North Tower, Muhammad Atta, 'dripping fire from the eyes', as he is by the ease of a secular Western existence of 'ordered takeout' and watching sport on 'TV in a bar near the flight school' (*FM* 172-3). DeLillo obliquely contextualises what Beigbeder refers to directly as 'bigoted anti-Americanism', resentment born from 'jealousy and unrequited love' for an 'American culture [which] dominates the planet' (*WW* 16-8), any exclusion from its privileges proving as equal an incentive for retribution as the nation's heavy-handed interventions in global affairs, both of which can be perceived as 'the horrible outcome' of a 'misguided antagonism to the logic of late capitalism'.[103]

Feeding into the final chapter's valuation of consumption and the meaning of revolution as it relates to the US from the outside-in, this seesawing cross-cultural and cross-continent dialectic sparked at the conclusion of *Cosmopolis* also reappears in the interpretations of Giorgio Morandi's '*natura morta*' (*FM* 12) in *Falling Man*. Representing the opposing ends of the political chasm in the West, Lianne's mother Nina, and her lover Ernst Hechinger, as the ambassadors of American and European values, use the painting as an aesthetic arena in which to claim and contest whether 'these jihadists…have something in common with the radicals of the sixties and seventies', their actions 'part of the same classical pattern' (*FM* 147).[104] Formerly an active member of 'Kommune One' (*FM* 146), a part of the 'New Left student protest movement in Germany' in the 1960s and 1970s, Hechinger can see the behaviour of those disenfranchised by Europe's twentieth-century socio-political conflicts mirrored in the reaction of Islamic militants.[105] Resenting 'the huge challenges that globalisation had brought to their religion, societies, and traditional worldviews', the

[102] Žižek. *Violence*. p. 73.
[103] Jameson. 'Dialectics of Disaster'. p. 303.
[104] One of a series, the 1956 Morandi 'Still Life' referred to in *Falling Man* can be viewed online at http://english.mart.trento.it/UploadImgs/303_Giorgio_Morandi___Natura_morta___1956.jpg
[105] Žižek. *Desert of the Real*. p. 9.

domination of the 'two dark objects' in the Morandi still life reflect the towers' symbolic value as an extension or projection of state power, capable of facilitating 'ethnic hatreds and religious divisions…economic volatility, the spread of pandemics, and terrorism'.[106] The ideological cloud emerging from 9/11 is, in fact, a catalyst for the severance of their relationship, Hechinger only returning to America for Nina's funeral where, empowered by her absence, he concludes that 'we' are 'all beginning to have this thought, of American irrelevance…it is losing the center. It becomes the center of its own shit. This is the only center it occupies' (*FM* 191). Embodying a certain strain of old European values, and also bearing 'signs of bloat and sag' (*FM* 191), Hechinger's deterioration is detected, and anti-American bias countered, in the library director's controlled rebuke:

> If we occupy the center, it's because you put us there. This is your true dilemma…[y]ou go to our movies, read our books, listen to our music, speak our language. How can you stop thinking about us? You see and hear us all the time. Ask yourself. What comes after America? (*FM* 192)

There is certainly merit in Hardt and Negri's concept of imperial power having 'no actual and localizable terrain or centre', an impermanent and ever-shifting 'smoke screen' with the United States – having superseded Europe – currently acting as its epicentre.[107] However, any serious contemplation of 'What comes after America?' while global culture and financial markets still remain under the spell of its influence is unavoidably speculative and Janus-faced. As we shall see towards the end of the thesis, this is not to say that cultural and financial hegemony is as firmly rooted in the US as it had been after 1945, just that its final destination and the American response is still difficult to chart as capital continues to flow into new spaces and seek passage across new borders. What the US cannot afford to do in this instance, as in the last decade, is fall into the same post-9/11 trap of playing out the role of the belligerent stereotype that helped fuel the flames of anti-Americanism across the globe.

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[106] Tyrell. *Transnational Nation*. p. 223; Obama. *Audacity of Hope*. pp. 279-80.
[107] Hardt and Negri. *Empire*. pp. 384-9.

Ontologically bound between reactionary traditionalism and a (post)modern over-attention to surface, the intricate and contradictory nature of America's local/global persona in 'the age of ideology' is mimetically doubled, sometimes unconsciously so, in Amis's many years of writing on the subject of 9/11.[108] Advocating an 'ideology of *no* ideology', Amis's career has erratically traced the American moment.[109] Due to subject matter and for satirical effect, the US is, for example, considered a nation too complex to represent as anything but an empty page in *London Fields* (1989). However, in his 9/11 writing Amis oscillates between continued criticism 'of what he sees as the imperial aspects of US foreign policy' (its 'blindness to overseas affairs'), and a championing of its contribution to Western society in the fight against militant fundamentalism, the latter marked as being 'in a late-medieval stage of its evolution' despite 'techniques and pathologies…on the crest of the contemporary'.[110] Returning to Eaglestone's accusation of not engaging with the terrorist other, it would seem that whether in fiction, fiery polemic, or calculated reportage, Amis's multi-pronged approach to 9/11 in no way showed 'an inability to address the terror'.[111]

As a British author and journalist with strong ties to the United States, it is, if anything, an over-engagement with the subject that obscures his output, leaving Amis perilously close to the title of 'unreliable narrator' that he deflects onto Sayyid Qutb in 'Terror and Boredom', the author (or as suggested both authors) becoming 'blind to the complex, shifting relationship between ideology and aesthetics that permeates his[/their] own narratives'.[112] At times the 'politically correct' insistence that 'the terrorist attacks have nothing to do with the real Islam' seems tentative and thin, Amis's lacklustre accreditation of it as 'the donor of countless benefits to mankind' lacking the force of conviction in the descriptions of 'Islamists' as 'misogynists' and 'haters of reason'.[113] This light-footed Brechtian navigation of the social and cultural climate is at its sharpest and most scathing in the fictional account of the 'last

[108] Martin Amis. 'The Voice of the Lonely Crowd'. 2002. *The Second Plane*. London. 2008. p. 13.
[109] Ibid. p. 19.
[110] Paul Giles. *Atlantic Republic: The American Tradition in English Literature*. Oxford. 2006. p. 316; Amis. 'Second Plane'. p. 9; Martin Amis. 'September 11'. 2007. *The Second Plane*. London. 2008. p. 206.
[111] Eaglestone. 'The Age of Reason'. p. 367.
[112] Martin Amis. 'Terror and Boredom: The Dependent Mind'. 2006. *The Second Plane*. London. 2008. p. 66; Giles. *Atlantic Republic*. p. 325.
[113] Žižek. *Desert of the Real*. p. 133; Amis. 'Terror and Boredom'. p. 50; Amis. 'Lonely Crowd'. p. 19.

day' of Muhammad Atta, an itinerant figure 'growing more gangrenous by the day' in the build-up to his role in the events of 9/11.[114]

Suffering from, and driven by, a 'mind-body problem – in his case fanatically acute' (*LD* 101), Atta's is a total corruption, the revulsion toward human existence appearing as 'disease, frustration and mutilation' of his own form, the apparently 'endless supply of blood' from a cut during his final shave pre-empting the 'paper trail' of 'staunched gouts' (*LD* 99) that would later overwhelm the Manhattan skyline.[115] The unswerving dedication to fantasised 'war, the wars, the war-cycles that would flow from' the events of 'this day' (*LD* 122) is weakened to the level of the absurd by Amis's darkly satirical portrait of Atta showering, struggling to – physically and metaphysically – shape a future that lies beyond his control or perception:

> [Atta] spent an unbelievably long time trying to remove a hair from the bar of soap; the alien strand kept changing its shape – question mark, infinity symbol – but stayed in place; and the bar of soap, no bigger than a book-match when he began, barely existed when he finished. (*LD* 96)

The desire to purge the foreign body from the system ricochets through Atta's consciousness and is reflected back in his actions, 'doing what he was doing' to the United States 'for the core reason and the core reason only' (*LD* 101). If 'there is little sense in the story for what the core reason actually is', as Eaglestone proposes, it can only be as a means of sidestepping Amis's assertion that the 'core reason was of course all the killing – all the putting to death' (*LD* 101).[116] The text clearly represents the core reason as 'not religious…not even especially political', Atta only using jihad, the 'most charismatic idea of his generation', as a convenient vehicle for satisfying the lust to commit mass-murder: to reach oblivion, and 'cleanse' (*LD* 101) himself of the body and its function in the process. Amis is alluding here to the social conditions and access to technology which provide killers of Atta's temperament – ones, for example, 'not expect[ing] to relish' (*LD* 100) the intimate

[114] Martin Amis. 'The Last Days of Muhammad Atta'. 2006. *The Second Plane*. London. 2008. pp. 95, 98. Henceforth cited as *LD*.
[115] Hardt and Negri. *Empire*. p. 392.
[116] Eaglestone. 'The Age of Reason'. p. 367.

slaughter by blade of passengers or cabin crew – with an alternative to the abhorred physical proximity of murder, the marriage of assailant with suitable weapon giving an outlet to such violence, and the opportunity of executing such acts on a grand scale. The action of the suicide bomber is, after all, a technological act, the terrorist becoming one with the technology to form a technological weapon, dehumanising themselves to devastate other human beings and a specified target.

But Amis does not allow Atta the desired division of mind and body in the act of dying 'suddenly and violently', ending the 'Last Days of Muhammad Atta' by questioning whether death of this kind 'took much longer than an instant', the plane strike at '8.46.40' causing the body to be 'beyond all healing by 8.46.41', while, by contrast, the mind 'needed [more] time to shut itself down' (*LD* 123). The psychic ripples and electronic language emanating from the impact are reflected in the narrative's conclusion, the repeating of the opening lines sealing an infinite infernal loop of apocalyptic terror-data stemming from Atta's actions during his last day(s). Who is considered embedded in this infernal loop remains ambiguous, and differs depending on perspective. Is it Atta mockingly refused the anticipated 'eternal bliss' in the promised 'gardens of paradise', or is it Western survivors like Florence and Keith Neudecker living in an indeterminate state where, even if they 'live to be a hundred', a part of them will 'still be on the stairs' (*FM* 57) inside the towers?[117] By terrorists 'turning their own deaths into an absolute weapon', it is, by default, left to Western witnesses to authenticate the inescapability of life beyond such a tragedy.[118]

Here one is reminded of Condoleezza Rice's statement on every day *after* being '12 September'. The reliability and motives of such authentications should always be questioned when, as Waldman notes, as '[h]orrible as the attack was, everyone wanted a little ash on their hands' (*S* 150). Contrary to this position you also have the recollections of someone like French filmmaker Jules Naudet, who recorded the horror of the disaster while shooting a documentary on trainees from the New York Fire Department. After capturing footage of the

[117] Cited from the last will and testament of Muhammad Atta. Translated from Arabic as 'Last Words of a Terrorist'. *Observer*. 30 September 2001. www.guardian.co.uk/world/2001/sep/30/terrorism.september113.
[118] Baudrillard. *Spirit of Terrorism*. London. 2003. p. 16.

activities inside the smouldering North Tower, he reflected on this experience by asking: 'How do you deal with something like this? It's the 11th every day for me when I wake up'.[119] However, if the 'phantasm of international terror' is 'the reflection of global capitalism', then the answer to the question of which side is trapped inside the infernal loop posed in 'Last Days' is surely either, or both, in a contemporary environment where every imagining of the mirrored 'other' is 'an encounter with the self: *they* are *us*'.[120]

The evocation of a force and mirrored counter-force reverberating within the same system is enhanced by the textual form of *Cosmopolis* and *Falling Man*, both possessing twinned narratives which merge in scenes of confrontation in each novel's final stages. The atomisation of linear time by the parallel narratives is particularly acute in *Falling Man*, with Keith, like Amis's Atta, depicted as an individual fixed inside a cyclical arrangement. In this case regular before-and-after chronology is fragmented and reversed. The shards of memory from the 9/11 experience are placed between the time outside the tower and the final minutes before its collapse; when the 'heat, then fuel, then fire' from the plane's collision transfer into Keith from Hammad, their narratives are finally conjoined by 'a blast wave' which 'passed through' the entire 'structure' (*FM* 239). It is a physical and symbolic immersion into both the tower's 'structure', and the corporate transnational culture it stood for, an instant when 'parts of our world' also 'crumbled into theirs'.[121] Testament to the 'incoherence of the message' advocated by the Islamic fundamentalist, the mission to punish and diminish hegemonic procedure involves the destruction of human bodies, hastening the trajectory leading to the disembodied flow of friction-free capital.[122] DeLillo picks up on and challenges this contradiction when Atta and the other hijackers are reduced to 'organic shrapnel' in the blast, mere 'pellets of flesh' producing 'bumps' on the bodies of survivors, 'tiny fragments of the suicide bomber's body' (*FM* 16) simply assimilated back into the West, its people, and its systems.

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[119] Cited from *9/11*. The Naudet brothers' documentary provided unique footage of the day from the 'inside-out'. First broadcast by CBS in September 2002.
[120] Simpson. *Culture of Commemoration*. p. 136.
[121] DeLillo. 'Ruins of the Future'. p. 33.
[122] Holmes. *Matador's Cape*. p. 58.

Finding its metaphoric inverse in the startling photographic image of 'The Falling Man', the expulsion of the iconic Western figure from the safety of the system can be approached from many angles within the 9/11 narrative, magnifying the 'way[s] in which 9/11 has become for the United States the most visible and haunting symbol of the new permeability of its borders, its vulnerability to outside elements'.[123] The frontier now more of a two-way channel, the anxieties of the American subject in the period since 9/11 include the need to accept a position as agents in a much larger global apparatus, adjustment to what Karen Barad posits as a new 'dynamic and shifting entanglement of relations' in a competitive and ever-expanding international marketplace.[124] This is to say that while 9/11 brought awareness to a Western state which is 'outraged at the spectacle' of the attack (*FM* 33), it was also horrified at the possibility that 'dropping into free space' (*FM* 4) may also be the result of an unavoidable and not necessarily connected descent into financial and cultural degeneration, with terrorism the face – the bogeyman – on which anxieties over the new porous nature of its frontiers could be hung.[125] Acting as a social conduit, these contemporary American apprehensions are encapsulated in the stunt performances of DeLillo's David Janiak, the falling man. Seen throughout the metropolis impersonating the 'body posture of a particular man who was photographed falling from the north tower', Janiak simulates a figure in 'a business suit' (*FM* 221) falling, yet frozen in time and space. It is an act which, like America, holds 'the gaze of the world', before Janiak's death is fatefully revealed in the latter stages of the narrative to have been from 'natural causes' (*FM* 33, 220).

Janiak, being not only the seizure of post-9/11 America in symbolic form, is also the merging of Junod's 2001 'Falling Man' with the distinctly pre-9/11 actions of Philippe Petit, the French tightrope walker who nonchalantly negotiated the space between the two towers on the morning of August 7th 1974. But unlike either of his 9/11-inflected counterparts Petit

[123] Tom Junod's article 'The Falling Man' seeks to identify the man in Richard Drew's iconic photograph. See http://www.esquire.com/features/ESQ0903-SEP_FALLINGMAN; Giles. 'Deterritorialization of American Literature'. p. 51.

[124] Karen Barad. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. London. 2007. p. 35.

[125] Addressed and recoded in many texts on and outside US soil. See *History of Violence* (2005), *War of the Worlds* (2005), *Cloverfield* (2008), *Vantage Point* (2008), *The Hurt Locker* (2008), and *Body of Lies* (2008).

remains alive. Balanced with no harness approximately 1400 feet in the air on '250 feet of galvanised steel wire-rope, 7/8 inch in diameter', he braved the void in order to uncover what he describes in his memoir as '*the secrets of weightlessness*'.[126] The day of Petit's breathtaking performance also acts as the pivot in McCann's *Let the Great World Spin*, the alternating first and third person narration of its ethnically varied characters weaving in and out of and encircling the event taking place in the sky over Lower Manhattan. As hinted at previously, McCann's novel is also the most poetic and lateral of 9/11 interpretations. Skirting around the attack by slicing the narrative into two distinct historical sections (1974 and 2006), *Let the Great World Spin* only alludes to the events of 2001 while enclosing them within a virtual space of the author's creation. It is conceded to only once, in the concluding section from 2006, and then indirectly, as Jaslyn meditates on a coveted photograph of Petit's walk she had found 'yellowing and torn, in a garage sale in San Francisco'.[127] The 9/11 attacks are removed almost entirely from the text's framework, extricated but still recognised as 'what would come later', the 'intrusion of time and history': the 'collision point of stories' (*GS* 325).

For Jaslyn, daughter and granddaughter to successive generations of Bronx prostitutes (the former killed on the day of Petit's walk in a violent swirling car crash that has profound repercussions for several of McCann's protagonists, the latter incarcerated on the same day and lost through a prison suicide), the psychological weight of and association with the Twin Towers is not financial, political or cultural, but personal. Using the French funambulist's endeavours as a binding agent, McCann's entwined vignettes build into a compendium of characters who have incurred human loss: the loss of loved ones due to interaction with technology and/or state. To add to Jaslyn's experience, Ciaran loses Corrigan in the aforementioned car crash, the elder brother he was staying with after fleeing injured to the Bronx in the wake of an Irish terrorist blast on 'Kildare Street' in the 'spring of '74' (*GS* 22). Claire and Gloria both lose their sons to Vietnam. By adroitly circumventing 9/11 McCann

[126] Petit. *To Reach the Clouds*. pp. 77, 172.
[127] Colum McCann. *Let the Great World Spin*. London. 2009. p. 325. Henceforth cited as *GS*.

drains power from it, and reinvests that power in New York and its citizens. In the recontextualisation of recent American history 9/11 is made into a footnote in the lives of its characters. Prioritising people over nation, *Let the Great World Spin* accurately mirrors the incomprehensibility of and distance from the Al-Qaeda attacks as they were felt by the majority of the world's population. But this makes it a 9/11 novel through and through, the remoteness of the masses to the mediated narrative from it reflected in the 'slick hysteria of war' being a side issue to people's day-to-day lives, the type of distant events scanned 'in a newspaper on the ground' (*GS* 347).

Nevertheless, one of the strongest features of *Let the Great World Spin* is the way the exposition of the contemporary gives way to times and occurrences that echo and resonate through the generations, becoming part of longer historical processes, the vividness of the 9/11 images leaking into the past via an allegorical phrase or micro-event. Cascading along natural and historical tributaries through language, Ciaran's mother passes 'on a September day when everything seemed split open with sunlight'; Claire worries over 'whole colonies of birds that fly into the World Trade Center buildings, their glass reflection': the 'bash and fall' (*GS* 18, 105). This intuiting of multi-generational temporal flow and ingrained undercurrent is also apparent in McCann's treatment of the frontier, and how the concept of it lingers. Claire's son Joshua, one of the early military code writers 'developing the dream of the ARPANET', is likened to a 'test pilot of a new frontier' (*GS* 83, 100); and after his death, so attached to his nascent technological ideas, she uses any electronic thing – from television to fridge – to 'travel through the electricity to see him' (*GS* 86). Ciaran flings his brother's ashes and lets them 'settle where they wanted' out of respect for Corrigan's belief, as a man of faith, 'that the space for God was one of the last great frontiers' (*GS* 154). The unnamed 'Kid' in a team of hackers working out of an institute in Palo Alto (more than likely PARC) uses a 'blue-box program' to patch through to New York payphones for live commentary on the tightrope walk; in awe of the link and its potential he proclaims: 'This is America. You hit the frontier' (*GS* 197). Commercial and information technology, unbreakable religious belief, the rigorous mapping of the markets (not mentioned in the novel), are all immersions in

frontiers as the twenty-first century world 'grows small and still': like the high wire act, in the reach for the frontier there should be no 'backward glances', you 'gather pace', you 'keep going' (*GS* 188).

At the very centre of the novel, fourteen-year-old graffiti-obsessed Fernando Yunqué Marcano also cites the virtual underground spaces and canvases sourced in the same 1974 Bronx environment that birthed Hip Hop as being like 'the only territory left', the network 'underneath the city' like 'hitting a new frontier' (*GS* 168). McCann fictionally accredits Marcano with taking the photograph of Petit as 'haunted silhouette' (*GS* 325), the image Jaslyn finds and treasures. In reality taken by Vic DeLuca, the same image features on the front cover of this thesis. Used by McCann as a comparative device, in the photograph planes of perception and planes of time are overlaid like transparencies. The progress of a nation – past, present and future – converge in a single image. In 'overlapping realities' (*GS* 241) a man crosses a virtual frontier created from his own imagination in the material realm; while precariously close to impacting the tower, a passenger craft, technology in motion, holds human beings that are frozen in time but perpetually in flight.

In Petit's narration of the transition into the new frontier, in the moment before the first step he 'still belong[s] to the material world'.[128] The moment after stepping onto the wire the virtualisation of the body occurs as it reaches 'the unknown, the infinite, the joyous reaper' stretching 'out its arms' and 'hiding its face' as 'Wall Street stops counting and looks up'.[129] It is little wonder that, while hosting a coffee morning for bereaved Vietnam mothers, Claire shows resentment for Petit's use of 'the city as art'; making the city 'a different space', what irks her, what the 'nagging discontent' (*GS* 102) stems from, is that death is not on Petit's mind even though it surrounds him. He majestically flirts with death and spurns it as horizontal and vertical arrangements intertwine, effortlessly gliding across a representative frontier of misery, fear and terror, and the systems which deal in it. Petit was acutely aware of the significance of this space: '*My destiny no longer has me conquering the highest*

[128] Petit. *To Reach the Clouds*. p. 163.
[129] Ibid. pp. 166, 182.

towers in the world, but rather the void they protect'.[130] Herein rests its symbolic beauty. Like the endeavours of Khan and Packer also, but for different reasons, the journey into the new frontier is a line crossed, a transformation. An emblem of humanity perilously balanced between the pillars of the market, the walk is simultaneously a conquering *and* complete withdrawal from the imposed rules of capitalist liberal democracy. This abstention is even seen in the existential drama occurring in microcosm during – as an aside to – the walk. When authorities appear at the line's edges Petit joyfully retreats to its centre, remains out of their reach and contemptuously oblivious to them or their power of arrest. To even recognise their presence would have been a lethal distraction, it would have meant 'death was now looking through the golden frame of this dream'.[131]

For the family in *Windows on the World*, and for those that were trapped in the towers (so both metaphorically and in very real terms), access to the roof of the World Trade Center is locked, escape from the financial structure is unavailable. Yet Petit reached those heights and mastered the West's 'soaring secular cathedrals'.[132] Part of the post-9/11 political vocabulary used to justify the setting of new boundaries both home and abroad, the level of abstraction in the concept of 'Enduring Freedom' is already there in McCann's US of the 1970s. Artist Lara, a passenger in the car that struck Corrigan, considers 'freedom' a 'word that everyone mentioned but none of us knew' (*GS* 131). Petit, however, was 'thirsty for freedom' and its definition through performance.[133] Nearly forty years on, despite and in light of the felling of the Twin Towers, it is nigh impossible to consider the achievement of another act so forward-looking, in which humanity, breaking from the invisible parameters put on Western freedom, defies the dangers of a created vector to show the world is 'still capable of myth in the face of all other evidence' (*GS* 325-6). The mission to get Petit to the peak was, like all monumental heists, a mixture of calculated precision and pure chance, preparation and circumstance aligning to allow for 'the artistic crime of the century'.[134] The shadow from

[130] Ibid. p. 179.
[131] Philippe Petit. *Man on Wire*. 2008.
[132] Rushdie. 'Step Across This Line'. p. 436.
[133] Petit. To Reach the Clouds. p. 40.
[134] Ibid. p. 175.

our new century to the methodology and narrative behind the heist is, of course, the Al-Qaeda attacks. One open and sacrificial, the other sacrificial but secretive and malicious, the twinned creative and destructive applications of technology and art to a single target this time, in twenty-first century time, had monstrous effects as the movements along vertical and horizontal frontiers collided.

Such acts, now made real, have stalked the darkest corridors of the human imagination and the art produced from it through the ages. Rushdie surmised the 'planners of that day's events' to be 'perverted, but in another way brilliantly transgressive, performance artists'.[135] Not bothering to add a caveat, Karlheinz Stockhausen was vilified for even contemplating that 9/11 may be 'the biggest work of art there has ever been'.[136] If considered art it lacked subtlety and relied on sensationalism and spectacle for resonance, repackaged as art by Western and non-Western parties set to gain from doing so after the event. Not living long enough to see it play out fully, Stockhausen, like salt to a fresh wound, was alluding to a state Walter Benjamin had foreseen decades earlier: America as a nation whose 'self-alienation' had 'reached such a degree' (in its repression of previous actions, media repetitions, and artistic re-enactments of the event), that it could experience 'its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order'.[137] This is a theoretical premonition that repeats the trajectory of Packer's last day in its entirety, and reconfirms the significance of the shaping of the asymmetrical prostate.

The significance of the asymmetrical structure is even apparent in the similar textual form applied to *The Submission* and *Let the Great World Spin*. The past as represented in the main body of the texts is full and clearly formed. By comparison the spliced concluding addendums that hover in the present – or in Waldman's case the near-future – are winsome, short and tentative. The provocative conclusion to Foer's family collage actively attempts to stall the future by reversing into the past. The 'flipped' picture-book of a figure 'floating up

[135] Rushdie. 'Step Across This Line'. p. 436.
[136] Karlheinz Stockhausen. 'Huuuh! Das Pressegespräch am 16. September 2001 im Senatszimmer des Hotel Atlantic in Hamburg'. *MusikTexte*. 91. 2002. pp. 69-77.
[137] Walter Benjamin. 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'. 1936. *Illuminations*. New York. 1968. p. 242.

through the sky' (*EL* 325) re-entering the top of the World Trade Center shares in the nationwide nostalgia for a return to unwavering twentieth-century ideological certainties through a reverse-world in which 'the clocks went tock-tick' (*EL* 311). It also sentimentally suggests Oskar, on an individual level, can finally 'stop inventing' (*EL* 257) how his father died, and move away from the definitives of the book's title to a life outside the perpetual inhabitation of the 9/11 moment. Feeling 'incredibly angry' that 'people all over the world can know things' that he 'can't' (*EL* 256), Oskar's sourcing of footage and statistics from global networks confirms that, for the most part, factual information about 9/11 'has been told' to Americans by 'outsiders looking in' as much as it has by internal sources.[138] The inflexible element in the nature of America's own narration is evident in attempts to deem the 'hundreds' to fall from the towers as 'jumpers', suggestion of an act of mass-suicide stoically rejected along with the psychological burden of such a label, preferring to load its national rhetoric with an 'immense compassion for itself' in the proliferation of 'star-spangled banners, commemorative messages, the cult of victims', and the re-branding of 'firefighters and police' as 'postmodern heroes'.[139]

If the 'spectacular' series of human 'set-pieces' are considered too vivid an allegory for the power cascading out of the *Pax Americana* model, they can only be tempered in the 9/11 narrative by the gruesome reality of the 'pink mist' and 'thunderous noise' (*WW* 265) that would have accompanied the 'explosion of the falling bodies'.[140] Mass-suicide, murder, and genocide have been with us for as long as technology has made acts of this kind possible. The live global televising of such an act though is unprecedented. The symbolically loaded images of loss and personal sacrifice create a justifiable sense of unease in a population now living through an 'undefined age', one which has still 'not yet produced ideologies, found political leaders, or devised political institutions to respond to that historic reality'.[141] The 'historic reality' put forward is a future of negotiations conducted with grace and diplomacy,

[138] Willis. *Portents of the Real*. p. 8.
[139] Junod. 'The Falling Man'; Baudrillard. *Spirit of Terrorism*. p. 60.
[140] Ibid. p. 12; Amis. 'Lonely Crowd'. p. 12.
[141] Gary Hart. 'The New Security: A Post-Cold War Understanding of Security in the 21st Century'. *The Twelfth Annual Douglas W. Bryant Lecture*. London. 2007. p. 11.

in a new phase of socio-economic transnational inter-relations requiring vision beyond that of an impervious state in which '[n]obody doubts' (*C* 31), and one that is also sensitive to an 'America [which] has [only] just discovered doubt' (*WW* 272) in actions and feelings 9/11 has unearthed from 'deep' inside its own 'cultural memory'.[142] The 9/11 attack was certainly an 'assault on meaning as well as on materiality', the images of falling bodies and scenes of Babel-like destruction only accelerating a latent sense of doubt in the nation's forward-thinking predisposition, and amplifying the discontented global murmurs that 'America has become its own worst enemy' (*WW* 120).[143]

According to Beigbeder's account the scarred city was simultaneously reminiscent of a 'makeshift church' and 'huge brothel' (*WW* 127, 187). Foer's text gently portrays the former, Oskar Schell's family exemplifying the frontline of the scarred city in the 'days after the worst day', Oskar's grandmother carrying 'a huge rock across Broadway' in commemoration of her lost 'baby' (*EL* 104), his mother adding to the 'posters everywhere' (*EL* 299) that were attempting to communicate with dead or missing loved-ones. Alongside this 'memorialization' Beigbeder's text suggests a further reality, 'blue-collar workers' taking their minds off the horrors of the 'smouldering' site by 'snapping up' (*WW* 176) any dancers and sex-trade workers available in the vicinity of the Manhattan strip-clubs.[144] Surveying the 'dead everywhere' (*FM* 25) but with no bodies to bury, the profound virtualisation of the dead affected workers and mourners alike, making depictions of 9/11 New York a 'dark parody of carnival': the twofold 'merging and exchange of bodies…comically interchangeable in an orgy, but tragically so in a terrorist bombing'.[145] Promiscuity and violence: the suggestive hallmarks of an empire in decline. Working all sides, vital to its propagation, the exploitation and transmission of conflated images from the 'private' and 'public', national and international, has also clarified the mainstream media as a 'new' variant of the post-9/11 'pornographer'.[146] Exposure of and profiteering from the nation's perverse underbelly

[142] Faludi. *Terror Dream*. p. 13.
[143] Žižek. *Desert of the Real*. p. 91.
[144] Simpson. *Culture of Commemoration*. p. 2.
[145] Eagleton. *Holy Terror*. pp. 4, 21.
[146] George Steiner. 'Night Words'. 1965. *The Case Against Pornography*. London. 1972. p. 234.

reached its lowest point with the release of the grotesque images of sexual torture and prisoner abuse from Iraq's Abu Ghraib, acts committed by military personnel filtered and then reflected back at an American public that, by 2004, were now aware of 'new war' as an apparatus in which 'Good' and 'Evil' are, at best, difficult to tell apart.[147] Yet the revelation of such degradation is also Western liberal democracy's redeeming feature, Žižek sharply noting that under a true totalitarian regime a case like this, or the fact we know 'US forces did not find weapons of mass destruction' in Iraq, would never have seen the light of day.[148]

It is in this gap between the truth and mediated truth that, as Žižek states, the reality projected out from systems in the US acquires 'the features of a staged fake'.[149] This is shown to be the case even now, and is still evident in the announcement on bin Laden's death which is discussed at the beginning of the chapter. In seeking to strike out at the 'forces of intolerance, superstition, and fanaticism' responsible for 9/11 it would seem that instead of grasping 'its chance to be with the world', US systems of control became desensitised to the subtle nuances of the attack by looking for answers in its own ominously familiar cultural and historical mythologies (seeking revenge and comfort through weapons and technology; painting external forces as evil to justify attacks and sustain a perceived level of higher morality).[150] The mining of the nation's own unstable historical narratives has proved an inward-looking strategic campaign though, strengthened and invigorated, paradoxically, by the type of 'self-willed amnesia' needed to justify retaliatory attacks based on 'shock and awe' tactics.[151] Rather than legitimising the possibility of 'an American Hiroshima in the nation's capital', rhetoric of the kind to follow from Donald Rumsfeld can only lead to further questioning of hegemonic stability:

> Reports that say that something hasn't happened are always interesting to me, because as we know, there are *known knowns*; there are things we know we know. We also know there are *known unknowns*; that is to say we know there are some

[147] For an extensive reading of the Abu Ghraib photographs see Susan Sontag. 'Regarding the Torture of Others'. *New York Times Magazine*. 23 May 2004.
[148] Žižek. *Violence*. p. 146.
[149] Žižek. *Desert of the Real!*. p. 14.
[150] Louis Menand. 'Patriot Games'. *The New Yorker*. 17 May 2004.
[151] Andrew Martin. *Receptions of War: Vietnam in American Culture*. Oklahoma. 1993. p. 77; Boyd. *Losing America*. p. 194.

> things we do not know. But there are also *unknown unknowns* - the ones we don't know we don't know. And if one looks throughout the history of our country and other free countries, it is the latter category that tends to be the difficult one.[152]

While attempting to justify the threat from a 'nuclear Mujahedeen', the most intriguing part of the statement is the omission of the 'unknown knowns', the Freudian unconscious of 'beliefs, suppositions, and obscene practices' that are denied, leading us back to the layers of concealment evinced in the innocent psychological responses of Foer's Oskar Schell.[153] But such a powerful nation can surely only feign the naivety of a nine-year-old child who, even by the end of his short quest, had become conscious that he 'had buried too much too deeply' (*EL* 216)?

Politely summarised by Niall Ferguson as a nation suffering 'an attention deficit', perhaps even 'touchingly forgetful' (*WW* 114), America's political outpouring at the first ever penetration of its borders is part of a longstanding act of imperial denial which does not value or 'count the dead in the same way from one corner of the globe to the other'.[154] Such confused ethics are apparent from Britain's 1924 bombing of Arab and Kurd villages that were 'practically wiped out…inhabitants killed or injured by four or five machines', to the dreadful and sublime testing of weapons capabilities in Vietnam, and the unnecessary annihilation of many thousands of 'non-combatant women and children' in the mushroom clouds over Hiroshima and Nagasaki.[155] Do these not place 9/11 within a linear, at least century-old, global flexing of technological might on civilian targets? Looked at in greater detail in the next chapter, when the political and economic branding of military actions is removed, Jean Baudrillard's interpretation that the events in Vietnam 'perhaps in fact never happened', and only existed in America's unconscious as 'a dream, a baroque dream of napalm and the tropics', does not look so far-fetched.[156] Baudrillard stuck by and updated

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[152] Holmes. *Matador's Cape*. p. 309; Donald Rumsfeld. 'Department of Defense News Briefing'. 12 February 2002.
[153] George Bush 'Don't wait for Mushroom Cloud'. 7 October 2002; Žižek. 'Between Two Deaths'. p. 3.
[154] Niall Ferguson. 'A World Without Power'. *Foreign Policy*. July/August 2004. p. 3; Derrida. *Time of Terror*. p. 92.
[155] 'Bomber' Harris cited in David E. Omissi. *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force 1919-39*. Manchester. 1990. p. 154; William D. Leahy. *I was there*. London. 1950. p. 504.
[156] Baudrillard. 'Apocalypse Now'. p. 59.

this analytical perspective in his later years, positioning both Iraq wars as virtual wars. His point was that behind the national narrative rests the possibility that Vietnamese and Iraqi lands were just extraordinary technological laboratories: further sites, after those described in chapter one, upon which to perform dreadful and sublime human experiments.[157] Mediated politico-economic, technological, and militaristic missions, but truly to what end? What brings 9/11 into this narrative is also echoed in the centrepiece to *Extremely Loud*, the 'crying' *and* 'laughter' (*EL* 189) which accompany Oskar's class presentation on Hiroshima reflecting America's inability to fully assimilate what these previous militaristic acts mean within its own political, cultural, or moral history, making them 'very little to do with the past', and 'everything to do with the future'.[158]

What has been referred to as the 9/11 decade and its narratives have been filled with these uncertainties over time and status, solid perspectives on them clouded by a feminisation of American soil born from its own frontier mythology. As recipient rather than administrator of 'combat and rape' for the first time in its history, perceived by Judith Herman to be the 'complementary social rites of initiation into the coercive violence at the foundation of adult society', the symbolic peace-time deflowering of US territory unleashed 'the ultimate American paranoiac fantasy': the puncturing of its idealised self-image and future confidence.[159] The US were also caught at a weak moment, the history and right-wing religious invective of the Bush administration, and accusations of corruption over the 2000 presidential election result, making it ripe for an attack of this type and magnitude. The fall of the towers in particular certainly mirrored, made material, but also masked, an accelerating three-decade juggernaut of financial deregulation spectacularly hitting the wall. From the Enron scandal in 2000 to the corrupt practices of the 'shadow banking system' at the 'core' of the current financial crisis, the collapse of the towers was not just a symbolic assault on the 'liberal idea', but more a shedding of global capitalism's skin behind which new layers

[157] Jean Baudrillard. *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*. Sydney. 1995.
[158] Paul Boyer. 'The Cloud over the Culture'. *New Republic*. August 1985. p. 26; Gar Alperovitz. *The Decision to use the Atomic Bomb and the Architecture of an American Myth*. London. 1996. p. 14.
[159] Judith Herman. *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. 1992. London. 2001. p. 61; Žižek. *Desert of the Real!*. p. 12.

form.[160] There is the hint that amongst the shadows stretching from 9/11, the transnational fight for democracy is but a side-show to the real question, the corruption of the democratic process in the West and the manipulation – extortion even – of its markets. If the West is looked on as a body, then the 'Age of Terror' is cachectic, one symptom in a larger more profound state of constitutional disorder.

Ironically, in destroying the towers the Al-Qaeda operatives validated their existence and what the towers stood for, and in the subsequent initiation of costly military actions and further interventions to prove as much, financial power flushed ever faster out of the US, turning the attack's symbolic potential into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Up to the 18th March 2011, Congress had 'approved a total of $1.283 trillion for military operations' in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other 'Terror Operations' in the years since the 9/11 attacks.[161] Amassing increasing amounts of surplus capital, China reinvested this heavily in 'US treasury bonds to cover the growing indebtedness of the United States', financing that has helped cover the cost of these military operations.[162] Mooted for so long, the shift in hegemony towards the East is now more than a whisper. It is even evident in the new WTC complex currently under construction. The new design denies the twinning of the previous towers in favour of reflection and interconnections based on architectural linguistics. If the previous towers were symbolic representations of markets functioning alongside pre-1990s political and ideological oppositions, the new designs are those of mirrored patternation, transnational aesthetics that bridge the old century with the new across the contours of the New York skyline.[163] Could the controversial decision to not repeat the Twin Towers be an indicator of an increased sophistication in American thinking? While it bears the symbolic notes of previous American historical imaginings (the antenna reaching vertically into the sky like the Empire State Building and Statue of Liberty, new 1WTC reaching 1776 feet in recognition of US independence), the glass panelling and overall effect on the New York skyline – in terms of

[160] Paul Krugman. *The Return of Depression Economics and the Crisis of 2008*. 1999. London. 2008. p. 186.
[161] Amy Belasco. 'The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11'. Congressional Research Service. 29 March 2011. http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL33110.pdf.
[162] Harvey. *Enigma of Capital*. p. 206.
[163] For images and video of the new designs see http://www.wtc.com/about/.

design if not obtrusiveness – are influenced by architects like Waldman's Khan working on constructions in booming centres of capital like China and the United Arab Emirates. Is this a sign of acceptance of a global order of interconnectivity over domineering brute force, reflecting reciprocal global interactivity and new transnational connections in terms of global economic influence?

There are glimmers from the political shadows that the 'chain' of historical and transnational 'reconsiderations' DeLillo calls for are eroding the apophenic illusions conjured from old and terrible lies which have left many with a sense of stasis.[164] In his speech in Prague on April 5th 2009, President Obama announced 'America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons', and outlined the nation's responsibility, 'as the only nuclear power to have used a nuclear weapon', to prioritise 'the right of people everywhere to live free from fear in the twenty-first century'.[165] In the same speech Iran and North Korea are clearly marked out as looming threats. Again, speaking on 5th January 2012 with regard to the Defense Strategic Review, amid extreme cuts to military spending claims are made for 'turning the page on a decade of war', yet a strengthening presence in the Asia Pacific is advocated, 'budget reductions' not coming 'at the expense of that critical region'.[166] This fluctuation between shadow and light implies the 9/11 narrative is not one that can yet be 'frictionlessly absorbed and filed' as a beginning or end-point in a linear global timeline.[167] Did the attacks stem from mania, one final crescendo in a wave of feeling created by the unequal distribution of global resources? As time since passes into decades, could 9/11 be posited as the final shrill shriek of fundamentalism, terrorist attacks after it mere ripples in the technological movement towards an age where there is no longer a human need for religion? It could also be merely the brutal punctuation mark on a surge of twentieth-century American political, economic and military domination.

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[164] DeLillo. 'Ruins of the Future'. p. 39.
[165] The speech can be viewed online at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/04/05/obama-prague-speech-on-nu_n_183219.html.
[166] Barack Obama. 'Remarks by the President on the Defense Strategic Review'. January 5 2012. www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/01/05/remarks-president-defense-strategic-review.
[167] Amis. 'September 11'. p. 206.

The shadow of 9/11 hangs over the US like late afternoon. The wars spreading from it are vague, with no clear winners or losers of the kind history made us accustomed to. Their cessation seems based on economic constraints rather than issues of morality or protection of human life. They are distorted confrontations with blurred disengagements. The 9/11 attacks may have made New York 'a city where time stood still' (*EL* 209), but the collision and interaction of mirrored forces within the texts here highlight the watermarking of a nation caught in a cycle of compulsive repetitions. The consequences of these repetitions resonate far beyond America's own boundaries. 9/11 took anxieties that remained latent in the US and made them real, virtualised and mediated them into an age of terror. The constellation of texts chosen accurately reflect 9/11 and its after-effects, and the asymmetrical atmospherics of a geopolitical situation still in motion. The terror-states of fictional survivors and bereaved (like Keith, Claire, and Oskar) resemble the networks of less obvious but no less anxious American subjects delineated in the first two chapters. In motion since at least the end of World War Two, fear and terror have lingered in the West, been given an American edge. Now palpable, the inescapable proximity to this state-mediated terror tries to force Western subjects into living in fear, and in the instant. In doing so the West gives the appearance of having no future, at least in terms of tangible progress. The final chapter considers how effectively the anxiety of the contemporary Western subject is soothed in the act of consumption. Technology and terror have speeded up time; shattered it, made it multidirectional, in the latest volatile chapter of a cycle of reflective violence seemingly without end.

4.

Consuming 'Planet Brand':
Revolutions in the Mirror-Worlds of William Gibson and Hari Kunzru

> It seems evolution (or involution) towards an integral universe is irresistible. But it seems, at the same time, that the dual form is indestructible.
>
> There is no way for us to guess how this contradictory double movement will work itself out. We are faced with a confrontation between a dual form and total integration which cannot be resolved.[1]
>
> Jean Baudrillard, *The Intelligence of Evil or The Lucidity Pact* (2004)

Extending the transnational perspective from the previous section, in this final chapter I look closely at the relationship between brands and consumption. Of particular interest is the virtualisation of brands, consumers, and what is consumed, especially in terms of residual effects from technological and cultural products to have spread out from the US into other territories. The chapter commences in the period where the thesis began, returning to the latter stages of the nineteenth century to give some historical context to the tensions arising from what Jean Baudrillard describes above as the apparently unavoidable movement of human existence towards a version of 'total integration'.

In keeping with the latter half of the project's emphasis on reflecting the influence of American culture from the outside, it draws a critical locus from aspects of philosophical models proposed by Baudrillard and Friedrich Nietzsche, as a means of unpacking what is perceived as the collision of experience and representation: a seemingly irreconcilable conflict between a still-forming 'integral universe' and the 'dual form'. A parallel but unacquainted European contemporary of Emerson and Whitman, Nietzsche's philosophical approach sought to get to the core of unmediated facts. As Emerson opines in 'Experience', through the gradual developmental phases of human consciousness we have learned that 'we do not see directly, but mediately'.[2] Calculating the inner and outer reflections of human spirit, doctrines become a central concern, especially when they are forced onto the subject at the expense of the natural impulse. As well as dealing with the nature of reflection, these

[1] Jean Baudrillard. *The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact*. 2004. Oxford. 2005. p. 21.
[2] Emerson. 'Experience'. p. 304.

philosophical perspectives are also linked by the desire to convey the connection of faith – in all its senses – with systems of communication and their control. To reduce this to a single question, as also seen in the 9/11 narrative, what are the consequences for humanity as our material existence is systematically set adrift, altered, and displaced by new artificial or virtual forms of reality? Woven into this conceptual framework is an analysis of recent fiction by William Gibson and Hari Kunzru. As authors who use the gradual and unsettling synchronisation of material and virtual as leitmotif, their works help to assess how advertising, product branding, and the proliferation of information technology and computer-mediated entertainment can be added into texts and impact on their structure. Gibson's *Pattern Recognition, Spook Country*, and *Zero History* (2010), are placed alongside Kunzru's *Transmission* (2005), *My Revolutions* (2007), and *Gods Without Men* (2011), to measure the extent to which content, form, and characterisation in these novels accurately reflect the predicament of the twenty-first century global consumer.

More specifically, this chapter intends to scrutinise the social conditions that lead both authors to describe the twenty-first century Western landscape as a 'mirror-world', a terrain of images where truth is separated from meaning and individual narratives diverge and intersect in a space of topographic uncertainty.[3] If chapter three drew on the asymmetrical qualities shaping the capitalist nation-state, then what is of interest here is the effect of virtual technologies within that state on scale. Much can be ascertained from these fictional mirror-worlds, or as Gibson puts it the iridescent 'logo-maze' (*PR* 18) controlled by organisations that transmit product information to global audiences to promote connection, yet have a vested interest in building hierarchical corporate structures that preserve distance between themselves, the end user, and other consumers. Thematically, expansion and contraction of our perception is met by questions over mobility and distanciation. To date little critical attention has been paid to Gibson, and even less to Kunzru.[4] This is despite

[3] Hari Kunzru. *My Revolutions*. London. 2007. p. 79. Henceforth cited as *MR*; Gibson. *Pattern Recognition*. p. 20. Henceforth cited as *PR*.
[4] Of the few published academic studies see Cavallaro (2000) on cyberpunk, and Rapatzikou (2004) on Gibson and the gothic.

Fredric Jameson's intimation in the introductory notes to *Postmodernism* that Gibson's early cyberpunk fiction is 'the supreme *literary* expression if not of postmodernism, then of late capitalism itself'.[5] Short acerbic texts, they powerfully harness and prioritise the escalation of technological consumption and accumulation of virtual forms of wealth and power in the decades since America's rise to a position of cultural and economic dominance. Of-the-moment concerns are stretched into near-future environments.

The obvious route here would be to delve into the rich canon of US writers dealing with the forces surrounding consumer technology and its excesses that includes, but is not exclusive to, Pynchon, DeLillo, and Foster Wallace. Instead we have Kunzru, who is of British/Kashmiri Pandit descent, and Gibson, who although brought up in Virginia has been a Canadian resident since 1967. By shifting emphasis onto authors with similar preoccupations but from alternative locations, we find new nuanced perspectives emerging from the material and virtual networks that spread out beyond American borders as the aftershocks of US policy and culture are absorbed back into the fictive form. On an axis alongside Gibson and Kunzru, the individual strands of this chapter meet in an engagement with what Kunzru terms the 'emotional magma' emanating from 'the core of planet brand', the coagulation of unstable psychological eruptions from technologised individuals subjected to realities driven by stringent consumerism.[6] Finally, while extrapolating how this substance is shaped into often overlapping themes and narrative structures, it is also my intention to capture the shifting relevance of 'revolution' throughout the timeframe, and in doing so question what it now means as a word and socio-political concept for twenty-first century consumers ensconced in a world of brands and reflective surfaces.

Reflecting Revolt

Attempts by outside agencies to impose objective truths onto the subject that run throughout the thesis lay some foundations for Baudrillard's work on simulacra. So too do the

[5] Fredric Jameson. *Postmodernism*. p. 419.
[6] Hari Kunzru. *Transmission*. 2004. London. 2005. p. 21. Henceforth cited as *T*.

challenges to authenticity closely associated with the post-WWII US perspective. Here one is reminded of any number of examples, from the mediation of the bin Laden killing, to the 'MOST PHOTOGRAPHED BARN IN AMERICA' from DeLillo's *White Noise* (*WN* 12). A pact is made, sometimes without choice, to be part of a 'collective perception'; a 'religious experience in a way, like all tourism' (*WN* 12), the dual form – virtual and material – circulates from a single contested point of origin back to a state of total integration. On the fleeting and selective teleological path towards Baudrillard we find Nietzsche. Riddled with abstractions, a particular *bête noire* in Nietzsche's body of work was the pinpointing and subsequent debunking of any systemic division of existence 'into a "real" and an "apparent" world'.[7] Whether the unswerving perception of Christian afterlife as gigantic fraud, or Platonic identification of a transcendent world of forms with the material world as its imperfect copy, any attempt to do so was deemed 'only a suggestion of *décadence* – a symptom of *declining* life'.[8] That decline can be read as the waning vitality of Western societies built on centuries-old vertical frameworks of mass-deception and false truths. The originality of Nietzsche's work came in the reversal of the philosophical tendency to reach for the transcendent, to give an alternative and altogether more pessimistic viewpoint that attacked the imposition of false moral hierarchies. Indeed, his conceptualising of the devolution of man, perhaps more appropriately the ongoing disappearance of the human, is why Michel Foucault correctly considered Nietzsche to mark 'the threshold beyond which contemporary philosophy' could 'begin thinking again', and 'will no doubt continue for a long while to dominate its advance'.[9]

The century-long amelioration initiated by a self-conscious calling out to 'these philosophers of the future' has made Nietzsche's idiosyncratic philosophy, and delineation of a world of appearance, into something of a reflective surface, one where new images become visible as fresh elements are placed in front of it.[10] Whereas the transcendent used

[7] Friedrich Nietzsche. *Twilight of the Idols*. 1889. London. 1994. p. 49.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Michel Foucault. *The Order of Things*. 1966. London. 1985. p. 342.
[10] Friedrich Nietzsche. *Beyond Good and Evil*. 1886. New York. 1997. p. 31.

to act as moral barometer and imagined ideal made literal – say the monotheistic polarisation of the space into good/bad (heaven/hell and all its variants) – the new virtual frontiers explored through consumer technologies make excursions into an elsewhere a realisable conscious experience. In this sense while the desire to transcend the material form may be questioned through time, it has never been entirely eradicated from our consciousness, and from that yearning markets continue to open to exploit and fulfil this particular human requirement.

In a mirroring of the first chapter where the finite geographic frontier was virtualised, traversed and adapted, what is of interest here are the effects when this deep-rooted search for something beyond material existence entails the collapse of the subject's consciousness into the consumer object. Does the possibility of relinquishing the material form significantly alter the orientation and depth of human perception, and who controls access to these new virtual spaces and the language through which to communicate within them? As already mentioned there is a long-standing dualistic argument handed down from Plato to Kant over the legitimacy of real form over representation. However, there is now also the possibility that the development is reciprocal, that a chain of influences co-evolves between humanity and what it creates. Gilles Deleuze, for example, reconciles the fragmentation and multiplicities of the lived experience by reasoning that '[p]urely actual objects do not exist' and never have, every actual object always surrounded by a circuitous play of forces or 'cloud of virtual images'.[11] Deleuze is not considering this in dialectical terms, or even necessarily referring to virtuality manufactured out of technology, but rather attempting to articulate a more emergent doubleness that conditions our existence, one that may well be an experience that is still not wholly representable. Seen in this light, two such split social elements as technology and religion can both be considered communication channels and amplified manifestations of human awareness. Echoing the geometry and metaphorical potency of Packer's 'asymmetrical prostate' in *Cosmopolis*, the Deleuzian notion of a mirrored reality where every object 'is double without it being the case that the two halves

[11] Gilles Deleuze. 'The Actual and the Virtual'. *Dialogues II*. 1987. London. 2006. p. 149.

resemble one another, one being a virtual image and the other an actual image', becomes as relevant to the non-digital generations as it is now to the expansive technological hinterland in which Gibson and Kunzru manoeuvre.[12]

The double object or dual form is as applicable to the way people perceive objects and each other as it is to the way products are sold to us and consumed. To cite a recent technological example, software giants Microsoft unveiled their $300 million advertising campaign 'Windows: Life Without Walls' in September 2008. Developed by the Crispin Porter + Bogusky agency, the promotion set out to assuage the negative consumer response to the Windows Vista operating system. Appearing in every physical and virtual advertising space, the scale and ubiquitous implementation of the campaign was uncannily mirrored by an absence of the product being promoted, Vista being extracted from the series and replaced by a focus on unquantifiable benefits and interconnectivity with Microsoft's other devices and applications. A marketing strategy endorsed by chairman Bill Gates, the assertion that 'Windows enables people to live a life without walls' – with a commitment to connect a 'billion diverse and unique' customers to the 'four corners of our own digital lives and to each other' – brings to light a displacement of the item to be sold in favour of an abstract notion of lifestyle on a borderless virtual frontier. Amongst a prototypically American vernacular of inclusivity ('us') and emancipation, these promises of human interactivity and network affiliation are in stark contrast with the services Vista has to offer, notably a system based on the partitioning of information and files: 'armed with enhanced protections' to maximise the stealth, security and privacy of the virtualised individual.[13] Yet in the Vista sloganeering there are no walls, as the homogenous language of advertising accentuates the formation of the transparent self through brand identity. Apolitical terminology is preferred as it diverts from the act of separation, even though windows, like political systems, can only truly be defined by their opposite or what exists outside them.

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[12] Gilles Deleuze. *Difference and Repetition*. 1968. London. 1994. p. 209.

[13] See http://www.microsoft-watch.com/content/marketing/windows_life_without_walls.html; http://imapc.lifewithoutwalls.com; www.lifewithoutwalls.com; see also http://cpbgroup.com and http://www.microsoft.com/windows/products/windowsvista/seeit/safer.mspx.

Referred to in the first chapter as a reformulation of the pioneer in relation to the exploration and definition of virtual environments, Žižek labels Bill Gates and many of the new wave of technological magnates made extremely wealthy through selling products to the post-1960s information generation as 'liberal communists'.[14] And such a politically woolly term is thoroughly appropriate for figures whose well published philanthropic and humanitarian offerings are underwritten by economic exploitation. The 'Windows Without Walls' campaign mirrors this in microcosm. It is a staged fake, a virtualised socialist utopia sold as a commodity, the profits from which add to a material reality of pollution, wont, crumbling communities and social links corroded further by violence and theft. Like most actions or campaigns couched as philanthropic endeavours, Microsoft creates over and over again the very thing it purports to solve. The effect on real human-to-human contact by the currently unbreachable distances created through the screen is never questioned. The contemporary consumer – the typical World Wide Web surfer today, be they observing a screen in public or private – is a monad with increasingly less contact with their material surroundings, choosing instead virtual interaction and immersion in increasingly diverse networks of global communication. For every new technological iteration made available for consumption, what Žižek recommends is to 'move the postcard a little' from what is advertised for the virtual mask to slip; by doing so you will inevitably 'catch a glimpse of the obscene figure of the liberal communist at work beneath'.[15]

Discussed later in the chapter, Gibson fictionalises and fully unravels the inner-workings of such entities in the recent trilogy's depictions of 'Hubertus Bigend' and his 'Blue Ant' agency. And the technological accomplice to such dextrous gestures is undoubtedly the screen. However artificial, like the mirror before it the screen now adds dimension to our lives, sharing its predecessor's illusory capacity for expanding space. And as the mirror once afforded 'the self-indulgent bourgeois individual' of previous centuries 'the opportunity to exercise his privilege – to reproduce his own image and revel in his possessions', the

[14] Žižek. *Violence*. p. 14.
[15] Ibid. p. 32.

interactive screen now offers this too through applications, virtual promotional tools, file sharing, and social-networking sites.[16] Yet, due to its ubiquity, we tend to forget in technologically advanced nations that less than forty percent of the world's population is internet-connected.[17] The psycho-social consequences through dependence on screen interaction also tends to be bypassed, the possibility that it encourages disconnection and alienation from the material world as we fill the blank void with everything from violence to titillation denied altogether in the advancement of profitable opportunities. In this way the screen, like the mirror, is also used to enchant.[18] But the left-right reversal of the mirror image is an instant reflective exchange that can be controlled by the subject to an extent, the discerning of an appearance that is then projected back out into the physical world. This is not replicated by the screen, where images transmitted are signals, hypertextual and never quite instant.

Intrusive, conformist, the layers of extraneous content that surround virtual images online are beyond our control, where panels of advertising are now accepted as the norm in a trade-off for information: a currency that impinges upon everything from encyclopaedic content to the most innocuous yet personal of virtual spaces such as the homepage of an email account. Unlike the television or radio where advertising can be pre-empted, there is no mute button or filtering device to entirely temper the absorption of this predominantly optical invasion. The Microsoft campaign a single example of global branding offered through the screen this side of the millennium, it is compatible with what, by 1967, Baudrillard and Guy Debord (and György Lukács before them) had categorised as one of the acute effects of commodification on awareness and authenticity, a rupture in the 'unity of the world'.[19] As will become clearer throughout the chapter, the continued effectiveness of such campaigns is highly questionable, but be it advertising of consumer goods or the 9/11 narrative discussed previously, this breach of perception has continued unabated, strongly

[16] Jean Baudrillard. *The System of Objects*. 1968. London. 2005. p. 21.
[17] See http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm.
[18] For an engaging historical account of the mirror see Mark Pendergrast. *Mirror, Mirror: A History of the Human Love Affair with Reflection*. New York. 2003.
[19] Guy Debord. *The Society of the Spectacle*. 1967. New York. 1995. p. 13.

affecting the consistency of an existence 'split up into reality on the one hand and image on the other'.[20]

Hari Kunzru's *My Revolutions* charts the widening of this systemic abrasion and its consequences for British culture within a specific thirty year period. Winding back through the previous three decades, the autobiographic account of Mike Frame begins in 1998. The first-person narrative, shaped into an 'elliptical game' (*MR* 109), begins with the reader glimpsing Frame's sedentary middle-aged life alongside excerpts of a previous underground existence as Chris Carver, a well-known activist and member of radical counter-revolutionary organisations formed across London in the 1970s. Plundering the word's temporal, spatial, and psychological etymology, these 'revolutionary' reminiscences read like a chain of vignettes. The actions of US-influenced post-war baby-boomers coming of age in the shadow of a turbulent global climate, are interwoven with the same generation's gradual dissolution of its value-systems: their transition into a 'mirror world of flash and spin and graphic design' (*MR* 224).

The international events of 1968 in particular – the assassination of Martin Luther King on April 4th as examined in chapter two, the ineffectiveness of the riots in France, America, and Britain – have become an emblematic focal point for a perceived deflation of utopian principles and genuine public attempts to influence the political and social order. It is also an historical marker for the deterioration of trust in the relationship between wielders of power and those voting in democratic systems, an undercurrent that is prevalent to themes throughout the thesis and one that only gains momentum as we reach into the present day. The 'heady atmosphere of revolution' was felt deeply in France, the suppression of the protesting French students and workers – actions later reduced to the appropriately hesitant shorthand of simply 'May' – provoking a sense of uncertainty that coincided with the emergence of the New Left. Adding credence to Silvio Gaggi's claim that forces operating against change in the West are not always external and 'generally subtler than guns' alone, the broader levels of civil unrest across at this time were tempered by an influx of US-

[20] Ibid.

inflected consumerism where the 'only thing at issue', or so it was sold, was 'when and how people were going to achieve a universal standard of civilization' through technological dissemination.[21]

Carver's journey through the British socio-political establishment in *My Revolutions* is sealed in this retrospective twentieth-century arrangement, one that includes within its circumference the 1968 clashes outside the US Embassy in Grosvenor Square and stretches around to the inaugural months of Tony Blair's New Labour administration.[22] By avoiding events that have brought added complexity to life this side of the new millennium – the rise of the anti-globalisation movement, the Al-Qaeda attacks on major Western locations – Carver remains 'fixed in the past like amber' (*MR* 275), *My Revolutions* being the counter-narrative of a naïve individual unable to adapt to the political exigencies that aid the transformation of a distinctly pre-digital generation 'preaching revolution' into a governing network fluent in 'the language of choice and competition' (*MR* 139).[23] A departure from the nub of human and technological interaction so prevalent in *Transmission*, and Kunzru's other contributions to publications like *Wired* earlier in the decade, *My Revolutions* offers a convincing meditation on the fusion of the political scene with the unstable nature of fixed identity. Kunzru's own 'sense of disconnection' as a child because of his mixed ethnicity is channelled into the fleshing out of Carver, heterogeneous subject and British society converging in the portrayal of a nation that 'remains conflicted about consumerism' (*MR* 7).[24]

Britain, like the US, already in a (d)evolutionary phase Paul Virilio sees as 'the dreadful decline of *representative democracy* in favour of a democracy based on the rule of opinion', in *My Revolutions* we witness the descent into obsolescence of an aporetic individual caught in the movement towards the rise of '*virtual democracy*', Carver inflexibly programmed to

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[21] Silvio Gaggi. *Modern/Postmodern: A Study in Twentieth-Century Arts and Ideas*. Philadelphia. 1989. p. 178; for the situation in France see Chris Marker's documentary *Grin Without a Cat* (1977).

[22] Footage of Grosvenor Square with a strong pro-government commentary can be viewed at http://www.britishpathe.com/record.php?id=81632; Mick Farren gives a personal insight on the day at http://www.nme.com/artists/mick-farren.

[23] The first phase of the anti-globalisation movement is covered comprehensively in Naomi Klein. *Fences and Windows: Dispatches from the Frontline of the Globalization Debate*. London. 2002.

[24] Hari Kunzru cited from Lindsay Pereira. 'Literary critics will never grow up'. *Rediff*. 12 September 2007. www.rediff.com/news/2007/sep/12inter.htm.

believe in no-longer existent ideological substance and 'revolutionary transformation' (*MR* 109).[25] Whether you believe a hollowed-out form of the democratic process is still imminent, or already in place, it is appropriate that a novel so explicitly interested in connections between current and former selves should begin with Carver finally recognising the series of belief systems he has invested in have left him little more than a product for consumption by public and private agencies, 'fists clenched, glaring at the William Morris wallpaper' (*MR* 3). Manipulated to varying degrees by partner Miranda and step-daughter Sam, Workshop Thirteen comrades Anna Addison and Sean Ward, and sometime associate/government informant Miles Bridgeman, Carver's idealistic tendencies make him static, influenced throughout the narrative by a cast of characters whose mutability is empowering. Be they 'developing aliases, preparing to go underground' (*MR* 220), or openly performing at the system's surface, these more sophisticated actants are fluent in the language and methodologies at work in planet brand. Conscious or otherwise, they are devoid of belief in ideological substance or permanence, and as such are fluid in a multipronged network of social relations. They function at a level beyond the twenty-year-old Carver's rustic bifurcation of society into 'two worlds': the first physical on 'a human-scale…basic and sensual', the other an 'abstract place…of Law and War and Institutions' (*MR* 78-9).

Some of Virilio's concerns for the amalgamation of advertising, art, and politics with new technologies – the loss of temporal and spatial depth through the technology of transport and communication – are acted out when Carver's antiquated binaries are pitted against the cutthroat cynicism of Miles Bridgeman. Bridgeman coldly reiterates to Carver that '[i]deology's dead now', redundant in a global culture where '[e]veryone pretty much agrees on how to run things', while a population of 'mildly bored people' are distracted with 'gardening and watching the soaps and having kids and going shopping' (*MR* 259). During their sustained conversations towards the end of the text, as Carver's duplicitous twin in this reflective existential exchange, Bridgeman suggests that the new era requires us to not

[25] Paul Virilio. *Art and Fear*. 2000. London. 2006. p. 19.

'believe in anything' (*MR* 259). Bridgeman plays to – and antagonises – Carver's revolutionary self-image to guarantee cooperation. Again, in the play of visible and invisible, we find the promotion of apathy, the dampening of human energy. One of many now widespread state programming techniques seesawing between the political and economic spheres, Kunzru rightly explains it in *Transmission* as a component within the 'most modern of European arts: the exercise of control without the display of power' (*T* 249).

Reviewing *My Revolutions* for *The New York Times*, Will Blythe mistakenly interprets Bridgeman's beguiling of Frame as the jeopardising of 'Carver's carefully constructed identity'.[26] I propose that Carver's identity, as already intimated, is neither carefully constructed nor something of his own making, but is instead an empty vessel swept along by a cultural tide and loaded with meaning by other social agents.[27] It is Anna, one of the love interests that seem to catalyse Carver's ideological travails, who chooses the alias 'MICHAEL DAVID FRAME' from a dead child's gravestone, one with the eerily suitable epitaph 'RESTING WHERE NO SHADOWS FALL' (*MR* 218). As the moniker 'Bridgeman' connects the Stygian space between surface and underworld, the choice of 'Michael' or 'Mike' colloquially puns the conception of Carver as a joke figure, one also capable of amplification. *Frame* reinforces his position as a bordered blank surface, waiting to be filled or indeed programmed with ideological data by, amongst others, Anna and Sean.

Committed revolutionaries, Anna and Sean 'had always been in front, daring one another to go out on to the ledge' (*MR* 219) for a view outside the parameters of the British establishment. It is this peering over the ledge into an unknown life of extremist crime, assassinations, and bombings, that causes Carver to divulge the operation to Bridgeman, and in turn condemn Ward and Addison to their respective fates, the former ambushed and shot dead by police in a botched armed robbery, the latter radicalised further and eventually killed by explosives in an attack on the German embassy in Copenhagen in 1975. First posed by Bridgeman in a Bow Street cell after the embassy attack in 1968, the questions

[26] Will Blythe. 'Underground Man: Hari Kunzru's *My Revolutions*'. *The New York Times Book Review*. 10 February 2008. p. A12.
[27] This also pertains to Pran Nath in *The Impressionist* (2003), and Arjun Mehta in *Transmission*.

that echo around Carver's consciousness are: 'what kind of future' do we seek, and what 'do you think it will look like' (*MR* 42, 193) after the revolution? In *Catechism of the Revolutionist* (1869), Sergi Nechayev insists that the revolutionary

> refuse outright to suggest models for living conditions in the future, for that would be incompatible with our activity…[O]ur society does not intend to impose on the people any organization from above…[O]ur task is terrible, total, universal, merciless destruction.[28]

Taking the 'ideas of his own generation to an unjustifiable extreme', the group's adoption and imposition of Nechayev's stark anarchism is the point at which Carver rejects a brand of underground indoctrination insistent on 'blind obedience'.[29] As Anna confirms, it demands unflinching belief in 'historical process' and an ever more unlikely future 'determined by the will of the masses, not a few individuals' (*MR* 193). Considering herself 'unimportant, except as a vehicle for the revolution' (*MR* 110), Carver is drawn to Anna as much physically as by her conviction and clarity of purpose.

Captivated by the lifestyle, the truth is that Carver can only ever enact a cheap imitation of an already outmoded form of the European revolutionary. An unattainable image, this position is as much of an aspirational façade as Mike Frame many years later 'watching whole seasons of American drama on DVD…[while eating] ice cream on the couch' with Miranda, the 'very model of the modern consuming couple' (*MR* 22).[30] Once acted out in 'external struggle[s]' between nations and 'social classes', Carver's 'personal mythology' instead reads as a faddish inner cycle of hopes and disappointments, one in which Nechayev can be incongruously referenced alongside the 'Four Noble Truths of Buddhism' (*MR* 19, 219). Carver the product of an altering post-sixties scene rife with contradiction, Kunzru eloquently mirrors the movement from externalised ideological conflicts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – the attempt to transcend technological and industrial

[28] Sergi Nechayev. 'Catechism of the Revolutionist'. 1869. London. 1974. pp. 231, 229.
[29] Richard Peace. *Dostoyevsky: An Examination of the Major Novels*. 1971. London. 2002. pp. 143, 148.
[30] DVD players were first available in Europe during the second half of 1998, making it an unlikely viewing format considering the availability of machines and accompanying releases.

alienation through revolution – to an internalised 'ritualistic devouring of objects and gestures': an ephemeral state of unreliable perception and diet of transient belief-systems.[31]

Carver is, in effect, only comfortable with the imagining of 'carving out a Utopia' (*MR* 225) rather than with revolutionary praxis. The decisive but deadly action against the group reduces him to behavioural patterns similar to those associated with shell-shock and other contemporary neuroses frequently diagnosed in war veterans since 'mechanistic barbarism and bureaucratic mass murder' became a reality.[32] For Carver these symptoms erupt in the need for flight, in this instance a wandering to the East, against the grain of the mythology promoted by the US and the frontier. The journey is accompanied by a regression to silence, a state of anxiety which re-enacts the 'introjection' that emerges 'in infancy when the mouth's emptiness is experienced' for the first time.[33] Trapped in the 'mirror-stage', the innocent subject answers the Oedipal question 'Who (or what) am I?' by establishing a relationship with the image of the self through an-'other'. Traumatised in the aftermath of the betrayal, the act of shattering what he is defined by – the euphemistic 'mirror' in the 'animal's cage' – leaves Carver on the run with no identity, with no impression.[34]

Without even the 'apparent solidity of a proper name', the physical and mental void is filled, anaesthetised by burning opiates.[35] However, narcotic consumption, already discussed tangentially in texts like *Brave New World* and *White Noise*, can only suppress a psychological burden that eventually manifests in the hauntological spectre of Anna Addison. A symbol loaded with being and non-being, ideological present and past, an Anna-like figure stalks Carver's consciousness: a melancholic labyrinth presided over by a chimeral ghost in a narrative that only ever looks back. Trapped in a matrix of looped reminiscences, the text ends in the moments after Carver confronts the figure onto which 'Anna's tribal mask' had been projected, Bridgeman's pragmatic reassurance that 'she's dead…been dead for ever'

[31] Baudrillard. *System of Objects*. p. 144.
[32] Habermas. *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*. p. 26.
[33] Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok. 'Mourning or Melancholia: Introjection versus Incorporation'. 1972. *The Shell and the Kernel Volume 1*. Chicago. 1994. p. 127.
[34] Anthony Wilden. 'Lacan and the Discourse of the Other'. *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis*. 1968. Baltimore. 1997. pp. 160-6.
[35] Ibid. pp. 160-1.

(*MR* 275) allowing delusional idealism to be relinquished in favour of immersion into a system which had previously been fought and resisted. It is belated acceptance that in twenty-first century populations with advanced economies revolution can no longer be conceptualised because 'the forms of left-wing political organization established in the period 1945-73' are not possible in this stage of technologised capital, the possibility of actual opposition not allowed to infiltrate a space where uniform consumption has usurped any form of political diversity or its endorsement.[36]

Indeed, more than a hundred years after Dostoyevsky mined Nechayev's chaotic yet ruthless revolutionary actions for comic effect in *The Devils* (1872), Kunzru reiterates and updates the impossibility of – and dangers associated with – ideological opposition for a generation in the throes of late-capitalism and what, if it even has a name, lies beyond it.[37] The technological and economic climate developing throughout the timeframe of *My Revolutions*, for example, takes Hannah Arendt's 1963 discourse on the viability of political and social revolutions and fixes it as a strictly historical document. The conflation of political, economic, and media institutions in advanced technologically-driven liberal democracies now makes the enactment of either impossible. Deactivated, 'revolution' has returned to its initial state in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as cyclical and celestial, the digitisation of the clock making it no longer even attached to the movement of time. It is now more a metaphoric afterthought for 'an eternal, irresistible, ever-recurring motion to the haphazard movements, the ups and downs of human destiny'.[38] So what remains if the possibility of confronting – or even the fantasy of deposing – such a system is removed, the view of 'the proletariat' as 'the unique agent of historical transformation' reduced to mere theoretical enquiry in a cloud of centralised 'democracy'?[39]

The redundant pockets of resistance working inside the mirror-world circuitry of Kunzru's *My Revolutions* certainly do not heed the Nietzschean nineteenth-century warning that 'if

[36] Virilio. *Art and Fear*. p. 38; David Harvey. *The New Imperialism*. Oxford. 2003. p. 172.
[37] Peter Verkhovensky is based on Nechayev. See Fyodor Dostoyevsky. *The Devils*. 1872. London. 1971.
[38] Hannah Arendt. *On Revolution*. 1963. London. 1990. p. 42.
[39] Harvey. *New Imperialism*. p. 170.

thou gaze long into an abyss, the abyss will', inevitably, 'also gaze into thee'.[40] This again resonates with technologised societies made of reflections and surface values controlled by vertical hierarchical structures. In *My Revolutions*, the defection of two members of Workshop Thirteen to a '*Sponti* commune' is as a result of the group's descent into violence and reproduction of 'all the worst forms of hegemonic domination', an accusation that pinpoints the 'malevolent potential' for re-enacting the 'latent group Fascism' and 'perverse fascination with horror' (*MR* 192-3) perceived in the system it seeks to overthrow. The movement slips into the trap of 'acting as an aristocracy of labour out to preserve its own privileges, by imperialism if necessary', and in doing so secures its own demise.[41] Nietzsche's clichéd maxim goes unheeded in the last decades of twentieth-century Europe in *My Revolutions*. Just as disturbing when discovered and given an American angle, the maxim is also adopted and bastardised by Schmidt at the beginning of Kunzru's *Gods Without Men*. An aircraft mechanic turned delusional paranoiac by the 'terrible new evil' of post-WWII nuclear energy, Schmidt purchases land around the Trona Pinnacles to begin work on a mission to 'connect the mysteries of technology with those of the spirit'.[42]

Amid an arrangement of calcium carbonate spires located in the northern section of California's Mojave Desert, on land known to the Native Americans as a 'threshold, the opening between this world and the Land of the Dead', Schmidt devises a new belief system generated from 'written truths' (*GM* 240, 10). Nietzsche's prophetic quotation, unnamed, is 'picked out of an old copy of *Reader's Digest*' along with a proverb from Napoleon Bonaparte, sparking what develops into a cult seeking 'contact with extraterrestrial intelligences' (*GM* 10, 13). It marks the fictionalising of the increased difficulty in distinguishing consumption of knowledge from consumption of information. What starts out as a marginalised collective based on rejection of mainstream American principles has, by 1970, turned into its dark mirror image; ignoring its original tenets, it mutates into a sinister front for drug trafficking, drug consumption, thinly-veiled misogyny, and sexual abuse.

[40] Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy*. 1872. London. 1993. p. 52.
[41] Harvey. *New Imperialism*. p. 171.
[42] Hari Kunzru. *Gods Without Men*. London. 2011. p. 13. Henceforth cited as *GM*.

Evident in the examples from Baudrillard used in the first chapter, the desert is a key symbolic measure of blank space in the US, that space also functioning as a powerful theoretical site and virtual frontier. In *Gods Without Men*, Kunzru writes the desert as both a fixed space impervious to the vagaries of time, and as a mystical purifying void. The novel illustrates a series of transient characters passing through 'Three-Fingers Rock' (*GM* 126) during America's global ascension (1778-2008). Each generation colouring the space with their own lives and personalities, it in turn reflects the desires, beliefs, and anxieties of US society at each respective point visited on that timeframe, moving from Native American mysticism through to the power and dangers associated with contemporary financial and communications technology.[43] Through the interaction of human beings with natural/supernatural elements, the area of the Mojave is turned into a simulator, the novel creating an open-ended augmented reality that, in a similar way to David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ* (1999), reveals narrativised identities emanating from the minds of its various protagonists. On the 'white plane of a salt flat' (*GM* 187), reality is virtualised, as non-material perception simultaneously emerges into material reality. There is constant oscillation between visible and invisible, and presence and absence. People and objects 'vanish' and 'reappear' (*GM* 221) throughout the novel, Three-Fingers Rock a monolith around which flows violence, transformation and sacrifice. Caught in the flux, Deighton, a 1920s philologist whose wife absconds with a young Native American, 'wasn't sure if the country he was seeing was real anymore' (*GM* 239); Nicky Capaldi, a petulant British musician on the run from his band, from contemporary LA, and from himself, sees the stars as 'pinholes' into 'some incredibly bright world on the other side of the darkness', the desert slowly 'inhaling and exhaling' (*GM* 31, 34) during a hallucinatory episode brought on through peyote consumption.

Like mescaline interacting with the human system, entering the desert space deconstructs the brand of each character, stripping away layers of identity and burdens attached from

[43] Much like the perception of Vietnam and Iraq from chapter three, the desert is a lingering recreation of American frontierism, and also a physical space used by the nation to test its technology.

involvement in American – née Western – social hierarchies. Read through Emerson or Nietzsche, *Gods Without Men* becomes a comparative study of the interrelation of faith and simulation. To give two of many examples, there is Schmidt's foundation of the Ashtar Galactic Command in the rejection of Cold War technology and its ideologies, and teenager Dawn's 1969 elopement to the Galactic Command commune from the barely-suppressed perversions and sexual initiations into patriarchal small-town America similar to those evoked in David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986) and *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991). Fostered from a deep-rooted sense of dissatisfaction, all are shown looking for alternate systems to believe in and abstention from the traumas of hegemonic societal doctrines.

Another of Kunzru's porous marionettes is Jaz, a Sikh MIT graduate enticed into the world of 'hedge funds' and 'quantitative finance' as part of a wave of 'computer scientists' employed to help Wall Street revolutionise and 'tame the uncertainties of international capital flows' (*GM* 91). On arrival at MIT, the remodelling of Jaswinder into Jaz is portrayed as a priority, the transition to 'a new person' sought through a rebuking of cultural heritage in favour of complete immersion into an atmosphere of 'rowdy parties' and 'buzzcut bristles' (*GM* 56). Using Jaz and his new financial colleague's conversation as a metafictional centrepiece, as the pair peruse Wiener Werkstätte objects Kunzru self-reflexively outlines the novel's premise through Cy Bachman's breathless explanation of 'Walter', the company's latest 'global quant model' (*GM* 133). Not a program built for the accumulation of wealth, the new code is an 'attempt to stand outside time' and hunt for 'hidden presences': the key to unlock the 'face of God' (*GM* 138-9). Jaz fails to comprehend Bachman's transcendent vision because, like his MIT studies 'reconciling competing mathematical descriptions of the physical world' (*GM* 59), his perception is shown as only comfortable in a mirror-world of ordered binaries and closed systems. The text, however, contrarily refuses to tie up loose ends, Kunzru remaining ambivalent to the mixed consequences of entering the metaphysical space on the other side of the desert's invisible threshold.

Akin to the central male protagonists from Kunzru's other novels, Jaz is out of step with society and its frontier-edge, a repeat of the innocent and impressionable foil. From the

depiction of his marriage to Jewish wife Lisa, to the fleeting fantasy of throwing his disobedient four-year-old autistic son Raj 'into the pool', Kunzru tests Jaz's desire for American conformity to its limit by putting him in situations 'which had no charts', positions that were 'entirely un-hedged' (*GM* 51, 60). It is the disappearance of Raj on a visit to Three-Fingers Rock that shapes the novel and stretches the temporal patterning of absence and unknowable into the twenty-first century. Never confirmed, if patterns of meaning are applied from the flanking of technology and spiritual transcendence throughout, then the reader is left to surmise that Raj was either abducted by a higher (alien) presence, or by the cynocephalic spirit-figure from Native American folklore from the fable that opens the text.[44] The two virtual – technological, spiritual – streams correlate in the Ashtar Command insignia emblazoned on the cover of the album that Iraqi refugee Laila finds in a local thrift store, a 'jackal-headed man' along with a 'spaceship' (*GM* 277) converging in the lines of force making up the record's logo.

Appropriate to this correlation, among dozens of references to the coyote one is heard 'whining' (*GM* 14) prior to Schmidt's own illuminating 1947 extra-terrestrial encounter. Like Charon, the ubiquitous presence of the coyote in the text is significant as a mediator of virtual spaces. Attached to Native American folklore but also resembling traits displayed by other mythological figures such as Loki and Prometheus, the coyote in *Gods Without Men* shifts from occasional deadly trickster accompanying spirits into the afterlife, to a physical manifestation of the 'sacred creator who changes the nature of the world as he goes'.[45] Hence the human 'Coyote' character affiliated with the Ashtar Command since the 1960s professing to be part of the twenty-first century's 'communications revolution', the crystal meth he cooks and distributes – a corrupted, artificial transcendence – turning the desert people consuming it into 'hungry ghosts' (*GM* 355-6). While he is missing, Lisa, highly medicated, now caught up in the desert's 'paths and flows', dreams of Raj being with a 'dog-headed man' (*GM* 258, 357), the coyote often companioned by a child in its displays of

[44] Barre Toelken. *The Anguish of Snails: Native American Folklore in the West*. Logan. 2003. pp. 110-45.
[45] Ibid. p. 139.

cunning and positive-negative behaviours. Though his abduction is never explained, the 'little glowing boy' is discovered by Laila many weeks later, seemingly unharmed, having 'materialized out of thin air' (*GM* 309, 342) inside a sealed military base.

With strong overtones of DeLillo, Laila spots Raj while employed by the US military to be an individualised Iraqi 'character' in 'Operation Purple Rose', a 'fine grained simulation' (*GM* 289) of the Iraqi conflict absurdly practiced and scripted to the smallest detail on American soil. Being military land the mapping data is classified, just a 'blank' (*GM* 342) space filled with faith and simulation, a technological and spiritual unknown that territorially parallels the effect of the child's absence. In the fallout after Raj's reappearance Lisa finds faith, if not as 'God's representative' then as 'one of His signposts'; for Jaz, the boy's irrational return shatters his entire epistemological framework, leading to a denouncement of the market and all 'those giant abstractions, the gambles on thin air' (*GM* 359, 338). What Kunzru stresses is not the importance of the absence itself but what fills it, the mediation of this process and its repercussions. The morality of the relationship between ethics and technology is narrativised and acted out, be it in the simulations within the base or the feeding-frenzy media coverage of the missing child. To compensate for the unknown, the space is filled with actions and events as brands, the branding of diasporic human movement in the form of – military, cultural, technological – networks that, as Žižek notes, weave around the 'spatial dynamics of capital accumulation'.[46]

The effects from this intertwining are brought to light in the grief-riddled phase of parental terror felt while Raj is absent. The mirror-image of this state is the flushing of Lisa and Jaz through the machinery of the press, their loss manipulated into a surface campaign of interviews and 'a website with a counter and a Paypal button' (*GM* 244). The accompanying media narrative is involutional: constricting, complex, degenerative. As early as 'the end of the second week' (*GM* 326) it is metastasising, switching from compassion, to speculative analysis, to accusations of involvement in their son's murder, intricate character assassinations – '*a cold couple*…wealthy New Yorkers lost out West' – based on

[46] Žižek. *Violence*. p. 147.

stereotypes and assessment of previous media performances. Lisa in particular feels the full force of the 'witch-hunt' (*GM* 360). Suffering grief and guilt, the search to 'find a label for her' fails because of Lisa's inability to 'keep selling twists' (*GM* 253, 248); when footage of her arguing with a journalist goes 'viral' the media narrative turns full-circle, 'Mirror-Lisa' transformed from 'just the mother' to the 'woman who didn't cry for her son' (*GM* 243-53).

Lisa is vilified as her behaviour disrupts the intended trajectory of the mediated narrative, the story then becoming an interrogation of her lack of willingness to take on the fabricated role of the grieving mother. She is made into a commodity, a topic to fill space and force a glimmer of speculation across the dead eyes of talking heads on daytime television. Writing on commodities in *Society of the Spectacle*, Debord earmarks this virtualisation as the replacement of 'primary human needs' with the ceaseless manufacture of pseudo-needs'.[47] The dark side of giving large swathes of the Western population affordable access to global communication networks, the sharply observed torrent of misspelt and odious e-pinions break Lisa, make her catatonic (*GM* 250-5). To paraphrase Debord, contributors to such virtual tittle-tattle buy into a system of pseudo-needs, feed into spectacle and image as the products and weapons of a conscious world, ignorant to the unconscious at work behind it. Made a micro-celebrity, made infamous through exposure, this is why Jaz becomes so 'sensitized to obscenity', why 'it seemed to jump out at him everywhere' (*GM* 325). The pain of individual reality is consumed by the obscene spectacle. After the systemic attacks directed at a personal level, on Raj's return the refuelling of the narrative into a redemptive 'great American story of triumph over tragedy' (*GM* 336) understandably remains unforgiven.

The crucial point here is that Lisa and Raj are not punished for their actions or essence but for their lack of performative function. They do not have their story told, they are merely integrated into a larger cycle of information to be consumed. Riddled with inaccuracies, the misleading mediation of the circumstances surrounding the abduction expose the complexities of a system which residually markets what Jacques Derrida cogently articulates

[47] Debord. *Society of the Spectacle*. p. 33.

as a form of 'repression in both its psychoanalytical sense and its political sense'.[48] In a reciprocal arrangement like that with the terrorist outlined in the previous chapter, the system ends up 'producing, reproducing, and regenerating the very thing it seeks to disarm'.[49] What are sold to the public as the irrational, fundamentally egocentric activities of protestors or conspiracy-theorists are absorbed and reflected back by governing organisations to re-present their status as 'a rational entity', while the obedient are coaxed into a continuous sense of alert and 'instructed to keep on shopping'.[50]

To return to *My Revolutions* and the social dynamic, the point here is that in Carver's youth the majority of protests against the state apparatus were not even recognised in the media, so nothing was reflected back 'even for the participants' (*MR* 188). But politicians and news outlets no longer stifle such demonstrations because they can be narrated to divert attention and camouflage other corruptions and misdemeanours produced within the controlling body. We see the same process repeated in the mediation of the student protests in London towards the end of 2010. A supposedly different political regime and different set of grievances, yet we are force-fed the same narrative that distracts from the actual events of the G-20 summit held in South Korea, or the building circumstances around the financial rescue packages put in place by the European Financial Stability Facility to bail out Greece and Ireland. The violence against the state is now handled like this because it is appreciated as an essential by-product. A vital excess which greases the wheels of the system it rallies against, it is a contained display of outrage reminiscent of the psychological process evolutionary biologist Julian Huxley saw as early as 1957: the behaviour of 'individual human beings [who] feel themselves saddled with some burden of guilt or uncleanness or unrighteousness', dealing with the problem by 'projecting one's own guilt or wrongness outwards on to events or, if possible, on to a human or humanly personified enemy'.[51]

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[48] Derrida. *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*. p. 99.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Larabee. 'Empire of Fear: Imagined Community and the September 11 Attacks'. p. 25; Jacoby. *Picture Imperfect*. p. 148.
[51] Julian Huxley. 'Evolutionary Humanism'. *New Bottles for New Wine*. London. 1957. p. 297.

Armed and strengthened by the same information and product-technology available to the hegemonic centre, the G20 protestors transfer their own anger and consumer guilt onto the system, recalling a time when the 'subject sought to find transcendence of alienation in revolution', but not appreciating that in the 'later stages of simulation this mode of resistance (which was never, in fact, more than the "mirror of production") is absorbed, the dominant modes of resistance' becoming no more than 'ironic modes of conformity and withdrawal'.[52] Organised by educated professionals, promoted like an entertainment event or 'festival' by broadsheets offering 'minute by minute coverage of every demonstration…with video, audio and Twitter updates throughout', the G20 protests were little more than a vacuous simulation of real revolution, a capitulation to the system mobilised against.[53] They were as contrived and lacking in spontaneity as any contemporary political speech or party conference. While communication technology is prolific at spreading ideas, it does little to validate the position of the protestor or instigate the overhaul of entrenched systems. As in *Gods Without Men*, triumphant in these exchanges are publicity and media organisations able to seduce subjects into performances that are transformed, neutralised, narrativised, and then sold.[54]

The riots in England in the summer of 2011 showed the transition from organised protest to festival in extremis. Outlets were targeted stocking the latest technological objects (trainers, televisions, the latest media transmitters and communication devices): products made and sold by the world's richest companies. The riots were not based on ideology or extreme necessity. Their core motivation was theft for profit and personal gain. In methodically attacking for profit, those looting internalised and mimicked the very market activities (neutralising competitors, monopolisation) of the companies they targeted as enemies: reconfirming, like a racist sporting a permanent tan, that what is hated is also what is most desired. Reminiscent of video-game violence, the crimes committed during the riots

[52] Mike Gane. 'Baudrillard's Lucidity Pact'. *Theory, Culture & Society*. 2007. p.128.
[53] See http://www.g-20meltdown.org; Patrick Barkham. 'Carnival atmosphere turns ugly after demonstrators storm into RBS branch'. *The Guardian*. 2 April 2009. pp. 2-3.
[54] The smashing of the Royal Bank of Scotland windows, for example, is acted out as a wall of pre-warned cameras/cameramen smirk in anticipation of the impending carnage. See http://images.photo-visible.com/photo_public/2009/4/800/800_390.jpg,http://i.thisislondon.co.uk/i/pix/2009/04/smash-up-415x225.jpg, or http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x8uhvd_g20-violence-rbs-windows-smashed_news.

had a virtual feel, having no consideration for material consequences, lives destroyed, or small businesses ruined: a savage carnivalesque recreation of the January sale. There is little similarity here with the American urban youth of the late 1960s and early 1970s described in chapter two. Deprivation and social situation may play a minor role; however, there is no escaping that the riots confirm not only the basic desire for the objects looted, but also the hunger of disconnected youths willing to fight for a position within the system and its markets.

Moreover, the abundance of affordable technology has other hidden costs, as the opportunities for deception and revelation increase in equal measure. It gives as much as it takes away. What can be seen as the continuing democratisation of information that alludes to a society of unparalleled openness and transparency is simultaneously an era of unprecedented physical and more disturbingly virtual forms of surveillance; more disturbing because human activity is traced and traded, our digital pathways tracked through cookies, 'loyalty cards', and sign-ins in order to collate information on behaviour and demographics. And we are not just virtually tagged by governments, but also by large technological corporations. Data is collected and used to make assumptions about what our virtual 'selves' desire. Targeted with specific commodities, the advertising of image or lifestyle is garnish. Your future purchases are already in the system waiting for you.

From the examples of this state we are brought back to the illusory language of the Microsoft campaign and the Baudrillardian 'absorption of all virtual modes of expression into advertising'.[55] Functioning as consumer and consumed, advertiser and advertised, we remain complicit with a systemic reformation, the sign now a signal and use-value replaced by circulation of information. What is sold to us as connectivity, luxury, and anxiety-appeasement is actually a superficial ruse, the Debordian procession of 'pseudo-needs'. Baudrillard ruminates on this while turning over 'transparency' as a 'positive value' in 'Enlightenment discourse'; what is motioned as *transparent*, still 'one of the great buzzwords

[55] Jean Baudrillard. 'Absolute Advertising, Ground-Zero Advertising'. *Simulacra and Simulation*. 1981. Michigan. 2004. p. 87.

of European politics' and increasingly so in computer mediated environments, is merely a deception in a greater pool of data-saturation.[56] So, when transparency is truly reached it is indeed possible to arrive at a higher level of openness. However, total visibility can also be viewed as a form of moral obscenity, especially when it is presented as transparency but contaminated by misinformation and hearsay. The shift between openness and obscenity is a dilemma Jaz faces in *Gods Without Men* as he reflects on his former work in the financial sector and the mediated, technologically driven, witch-hunt acted out against himself and his family. The combination of exposure and rhetorical projection in the form of ubiquitous advertising (of brands, celebrities, politicians) brings with it a disguised but imposing sense of iniquity: a radiant snapshot of how malicious human intent can infiltrate and then ensconce itself in the banalities of the social machinery.

From different angles and continents Kunzru posits *Gods Without Men* and *My Revolutions* on the cusp of an age of seemingly depthless revelations that, in Virilio's words, has succeeded 'the age of clapped-out rotating revolutions that the past century literally exterminated through the extravagance of its accelerated "progressivism"'.[57] For progressivism, read the technological acceleration from industrial to information-conservatism. Both sides ensnared in a mirrored dance, subject and society caught in the infinite regress, it is this political system in *My Revolutions* to which Carver ultimately acquiesces. With no room to manoeuvre, Bridgeman satiates the part of Carver that always wanted to tell his story, exploitatively offering to feed 'explosive revelations' from his 'secret double life' (*MR* 240) to the national press. The mortal wounding of Pat Ellis' political ambitions is exchanged for money, a passport and another identity. Traversing the thinnest of lines between media and political circles, awash in the language and mechanics of both, Bridgeman offers an easy route through the 'flickering system of signs', sweetening the proposition by hinting that partner Miranda be compensated with a book deal, appearances on talk-shows, and a life of lunches 'with journalists from women's magazines' (*MR* 277).

[56] Jean Baudrillard. *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*. London. 1993. pp. 3-105.
[57] Paul Virilio. *The Original Accident*. 2006. Cambridge. 2007. p. 98.

Yet it would seem, as Kunzru subtly implies, that Carver rejects this Pyrrhic victory and instead inscribes the pages of *My Revolutions* with his own version of historical reality. Will Doig classifies the novel as 'part potboiler' and 'part existential muse on the meaning of protest'- while these strands bubble away at the text's surface, I would attribute the latter to Kunzru's instruction, the former an imprint Carver cultivates while still trying 'to make something unified from the broken threads' of a synthetic life 'inside' the grasp of the 'democratic velvet glove' (*MR* 273, 226).[58] The numerous passages of insipid prose in the novel – if intentional – act as a convincing parody of the type of personality-driven celebrity memoir a political scandal of this magnitude would make a marketable possibility.[59] *My Revolutions*, then, is not only a product to be sold but also a product of its time, the final shriek of a generation lost in 'the echo of advertising', and a measured critique of a static society where 'there is no longer any difference between the economic and the political, because the same language reigns in both', identity politics mediating a technological climate of no 'real news, just distraction' (*MR* 175).[60]

Shattered Dreams

That climate is also not unique to a UK Kunzru sees as 'in a very strange place at the moment', the social breakdown of communities and talk of 'irreconcilable differences between races and classes' reverberating through much of the First World.[61] However, Kunzru also shows how First World motivations and social conditions permeate other territories. Kunzru intimates in Carver's journey through the East that even here the desired escape from 'a non-alienated society', in which 'all "de-humanizing" forms of social mediation (private property, exchange relations, the money system)' are void, is now unattainable.[62] Withdrawing from heroin in a Buddhist monastery in Thailand, and also withdrawing further

[58] Will Doig. 'Anti Matters: Britain's novelist of rebellion Hari Kunzru tackles the '60s culture wars'. *Nerve*. 2007. http://www.nerve.com/screeningroom/books/interview_harikunzru.
[59] To give one example, reflecting on the white heat of the 1968 skirmishes, Kunzru/Carver conjures: 'Up close, coming towards you, police horses are bigger than you could imagine' (*MR* 17).
[60] Baudrillard. 'Absolute Advertising, Ground-Zero Advertising'. p. 88.
[61] Hari Kunzru cited from Lindsay Pereira. 'Literary critics will never grow up'. *Rediff*. 12 September 2007. www.rediff.com/news/2007/sep/12inter.htm.
[62] Kate Soper. *Humanism and Anti-Humanism*. London. 1986. pp. 102-3.

from the conspicuous consumption, desires, and power-displays of the UK, even the idyllic formlessness strategically attempted through religious transcendence is soured by the ubiquity of the commodity and its systems of exchange. The gifts, bribes and blessings bestowed on a local gangster prompt Carver to return to 'middle England' and a languid existence hiding from the free markets and entrepreneurialism of 'the sharp-suited eighties' (*MR* 272). So the lure of consumer objects would seem cross-cultural; in fact the desire for virtuality, like the desire to join in on 'the speculative dance of capital' regardless of the material effects, seems global.[63]

Assertions of this kind have led psychologists like Geoffrey Miller to not just investigate consumerism through a historical or political lens but in evolutionary terms, on the premise that the exhibition of goods by early modern humans maximises the individual in 'small social groups', at a time when 'attracting mates, impressing friends, and rearing children' were fundamental to the propagation of the species.[64] Countering the theoretical assumption that 'culture [now] shapes human nature', this inherited instinct to seek out status products is considered a primordial reflex still working away behind the veneer of twenty-first century technologies, social structures, and institutions. While conceding that the marketing of products is now the dominant force in human culture, Miller disagrees that advertising necessarily dictates preference. He cites the 'invisible revolution', the revolution that silently ran alongside the more obvious counter-cultural trends of the 1960s, as a reciprocal conversation between consumer and advertiser, a conversation in which consumers 'promiscuously and desperately' project outward, while advertisers hold 'a mirror to our selves, reflecting our beliefs and desires' so they 'can recognize, remember, evaluate, and transform them'.[65] Arguing that the relationship is open and equal, Miller trenchantly refutes the interpretation that dominant religious states, governed states, or news-media outlets utilising marketing techniques can be regarded as oppressive institutions. Social critiques elaborating on the manipulative practices of such organisations are deemed radical by Miller,

[63] Žižek. *Violence*. p. 11.
[64] Geoffrey Miller. *Spent: Sex, Evolution, and the Secrets of Consumerism*. London. 2009. p. 1.
[65] Ibid. pp. 21-42, 255.

the *modus operandi* of 'perplexing rants from postmodern French sociologists, like Jean Baudrillard'.[66]

The highlighting and dismissal of Baudrillard's extreme vantage point is unsurprising when Miller's research into consumer behaviour is from a biological (rather than social, theoretical, technological) perspective. With emphasis on the ways in which Darwinian natural and sexual selection are used to help sell products, Miller's concepts and vernacular develop around an assumption that we have evolved from and still function in a single version of reality. Baudrillard, by comparison, was the 'producer of a particular language that shares everything with the hypertechnologised languages of the science fictional paraspace', paraspace being Samuel Delany's term for works that proffer an 'alternate space' that 'sits beside', questions, allows movement between a technologically intensified form of reality and 'the real world'.[67] Despite the protestations, Miller shares Baudrillard's interest in the liquidation of core values and power of the sign or informatic signal over material worth. They remain at odds because Miller's belief in inherited instinct and objective reality cannot account for a technological existence interpreted in terms of 'play, challenges, duels, the strategy of appearances – that is, in the terms of seduction'.[68] A key stage in Baudrillard's theoretical development, the seduction of the subject by the object – that is the interplay of consumer gratification and frustration, the interaction of scene and obscene – brings with it a cajolement over the threshold into a counter-world of signs. Somewhat clichéd for twenty-first century audiences, this disappearance of the real into a world of signs does provide solid foundations for the now widespread exploration of the circulation of signals and 'belief that there's some kind of *actual space* behind the screen', the literal, theoretical, or technical 'nonspace' that we most commonly think of these days in terms of cyberspace.[69] It is a space Gibson poetically and prophetically fictionalised early in his career as a '3-D chessboard, infinite and perfectly transparent', holding 'dense concentrations of information'

[66] Ibid. pp. 9, 11.
[67] Bukatman. *Terminal Identity*. 1993. pp. 180-1, 157; Samuel R. Delany. 'Is Cyberpunk a Good Thing or a Bad Thing?'. *Mississippi Review*. 1988. p. 31.
[68] Jean Baudrillard. *Seduction*. 1979. London. 1990. p. 7.
[69] Larry McCaffery 'Interview with William Gibson'. 1986. *Storming the Reality Studio*. London. 1991. p. 272.

while ‘high above it all burn corporate galaxies and the cold spiral arms of military systems’.[70]

Conceptualised in the science fiction of the early eighties, cyberspace, in theory at least, is a technological distillation of the libertarianism of the counter-cultural movements of the previous decades. The texts produced by Gibson and Kunzru in the time since still generally conform to this tenet, as do the films of David Cronenberg. All share a terminology and set of preoccupations that come from outside the firmaments of the mainstream. Not overtly political but aligned to the left of centre and appearing from elsewhere, the new form’s roots are indebted to the twilight worlds of noir and the spy novel as much as they are previous theory, science-fiction, or horror. Whereas noir revels in the dark and gory underbelly of the post-World War Two consumer façade based on the nuclear family, these texts extend the embryonic critique of first-wave global advertising and mass consumption to reflect a world of global communication based on wars of perception and technological ambivalence.

They are *unheimliche* (uncanny) worlds of corruption, subterfuge, and moral ambiguity, where time and space are disrupted further by narrative structure. Much like earlier noir, bold slang-infused exchanges of dialogue meet anxiety and isolation in a realm of consumerism, and protagonists with no future are lured into convoluted schemes they are aware of but find irresistible. A technologically upgraded noir, posthuman fables, they are polysemic works that share noir’s ‘subjective framing devices’ and ‘mood of pervasive anxiety’, while also imbricating the maturation of decades of what Jameson terms Americanised ‘global paranoia’ and ‘transnational corporate realities’.[71] They should not, however, be aligned with the invasion narratives (the post-WWII cycle of science-fiction) from the first chapter. Noir took its stylistic influences from migrating proponents of French surrealism, poetic realism, and the black and white angles of German expressionism, and used them to trace the slithers of uncertainty appearing in traditional American optimism. Like our more recent texts

[70] William Gibson. ‘Burning Chrome’. 1982. *Burning Chrome and Other Stories*. London. 1995. pp. 195-7.
[71] Deborah Thomas. ‘How Hollywood Deals with the Deviant Male’. 1988. *The Movie Book of Film Noir*. London. 1992. pp. 67-8; Jameson. *Postmodernism*. p. 38; *Neuromancer* (1984), *Count Zero* (1986), and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988), the *Sprawl* trilogy bookends the creative zenith of the cyberpunk era.

they articulated this through the eyes of the stranger, and the stifling of that stranger's attempts to escape from a world seemingly gone wrong.

The enemy is already within, as it were, the evolving slipstream of this inside-outside mirror state crystallising literarily in the cyberpunk aesthetics of Bruce Sterling and Gibson's *Sprawl* trilogy, and visually in Cronenberg's parasitic allegories or venereal horror of the 1970s and 1980s. However, the way each chooses to document the 'high Reaganomics' of the era differs greatly.[72] Cronenberg does not treat the schismatic gloves-off capitalism of the period abstractly as a frictionless 'opening of windows into rich fields of data'.[73] The smooth virtual expeditions of the disembodied consciousness preferred by Gibson are instead replaced by an ergonomic testing of the ramifications of the body's attempts to adapt to and converge with consumer technology, the complications of the science behind its application, and the often ominous space(s) it is capable of generating. Gibson references Cronenberg's masterpiece *Videodrome* (1983) in *Virtual Light*, the first part of the aptly titled *Bridge Trilogy* (1993-1999). And in many ways *Videodrome* foretold and compressed Gibson's gradual career movement – from targeting multinational corporations, to mass media and the cult of celebrity, to the recent trilogy's probing of the duplicity of brand advertising – into a single textual entity.[74]

At the forefront of a new wave that collaborator Bruce Sterling defines as 'the first SF generation to not only grow up in the literary tradition of science fiction, but in a truly science-fictional world', Gibson has succinctly described in interviews the two-decade progression from (sub-)sub-genre to commercial author as less a conscious decision than culture crossing-over towards his mirror-world perception. It can be described as a journey towards a technological 'event horizon' that 'kept getting closer and closer' and was eventually passed through, the technological gold rush, dot-com bubble, and microchip-inspired product bonanza of the 1990s meaning where previously 'cyberspace was *there* and we were here',

[72] William Gibson. 'Clive Barker Interviews William Gibson: A Four Part Series'. www.burningcity.com. 13 December 1997. http://burningcity.com/CB_WG_P1.html.
[73] William Gibson. *Neuromancer*. 1984. London. 1993. p. 12.
[74] William Gibson. *Virtual Light*. 1993. London. 1994. pp. 246-54.

now 'cyberspace is here and those increasingly rare moments of nonconnectivity are *there*'.[75] Reworking Nietzsche's vital illusion in the years before his death in 2007, Baudrillard labelled perception such as this from behind the glass wall as 'Integral Reality', an 'irreversible movement towards the totalization of the world': the ongoing murder of the real by virtualisation.[76] Unlike *My Revolutions*, where the power imbalance between individual and organisations is still highly noticeable and chiefly analogue, this exponential advance 'through the screen' signifies an unprecedented level of technological autonomy that drains power from citizen *and* controlling systems, inadvertently drawing us into an information stage in which the future is impossible to envisage because it already exists in an inescapable and inexpressibly peculiar digital present.[77] This is why Gibson literally and metaphorically burns his SF bridges in *All Tomorrow's Parties*, because these once-imagined locations are no longer accessible when conjectured futures involving things like the 'megabuck online cash transfer' have now been reached, surpassed, made part of the everyday.[78]

Tucked into three short pages, J.G. Ballard's 1995 introduction to *Crash* (1973) verges on a manifesto for the type of consumer technoscape Gibson is outlining. The globe is now mapped and digitally charted, making it problematic for projecting fiction anywhere other than this moment (…or *this* moment), or allegorically backwards into history. Twenty-first century narratives are constrained by an acknowledgement, as Ballard saw, that in the world of the mass-consumer 'the future is ceasing to exist, devoured by the all-voracious present'.[79] And as a result the contemporary 'naturalistic novel', as Gibson recognised earlier than many, is now also unachievable without having some 'recourse to the tool kit of science fiction'.[80] It is a literary space where the instantly recognisable urban environs of Gibson's

[75] Bruce Sterling. 'Preface to *Mirrorshades*'. *Mirrorshades*. 1986. London. 1994. p. ii; Andrew Leonard. 'Nodal Point'. *Salon*. 13 February 2003 www.dir.salon.com/story/tech/books/2003/02/13/gibson/print; Joel Garreau. 'Through the Looking Glass: The Post-9/11 Era Has Caught Up With Gibson's Vision'. 6 September 2007. www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2007/09/05/AR2007090502582.html.
[76] Baudrillard. *Intelligence of Evil*. p. 18.
[77] Jean Baudrillard. 'The Murder of the Sign'. 2004. *Consumption in an Age of Information*. Oxford. 2005. p. 10.
[78] Gibson. 'Burning Chrome'. p. 213.
[79] J.G. Ballard. 'Introduction'. *Crash*. London. 1995. p. i.
[80] William Gibson. 'Cloning the Future: Science Fiction Film 1895-1996'. *Sight and Sound*. 1996. p. 22.

new digital realism are encoded through brands at the expense of description. And not unlike the brands so integral to its composition, the bulk of the design and background code in the twenty-first century trilogy remain intact from Gibson's previous work from *Neuromancer* onwards. Much like successful consumer items, characters, themes and interactions from Gibson's oeuvre are familiar, but upgraded to a new version that always bristles along just ahead of the contemporaneous present.

And up to the publication of *Zero History* in 2010, Gibson had been like a finely-tuned antenna to technological trends, always staying ahead of the curve when creating fictional environments in which production and the transfer of information co-exist alongside practitioners in the art of 'cool seduction' and the 'consumption of object-signs'.[81] A key figure in his examination of postmodernism as historical cultural phenomenon, Jameson returns excitedly to the first instalment of Gibson's recent trilogy while attempting to excavate utopian impulses from a varied selection of high and low cultural elements in *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005). Maintaining a position as reflector and irritant under the skin of all-consuming corporate capitalism, Jameson sees *Pattern Recognition* as similar to the parallel digital universes of Gibson's earlier work but 'refined and transistorized in all kinds of new and productive ways'.[82] Conforming to the Jamesonian emphasis on pastiche, *Pattern Recognition* follows the travails of Cayce Pollard, a coolhunter and unwitting agent of Hubertus Bigend, its fusion with contemporary realism creating a future-present amoral parody of a 'James Bond set', where benign corporate espionage is acted out through transnational liaisons within a porous deterritorialised 'threshold state' (*PR* 127, 22).

Cayce is drawn vaporously across the mirrored surfaces of a borderless technological expanse, touring a triangulated pattern of capital cities (London, Tokyo, Moscow) that all now, at some level, emit the 'cross-cultural echo' (*PR* 142) of the global trade in homogenised logos and trademarks.[83] Gibson's new narratives also epitomise a change in

[81] Gane. 'Baudrillard's Lucidity Pact'. p.127.
[82] Fredric Jameson. *Archaeologies of the Future.* London. 2005. p. 384.
[83] See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. 1972. London. 2004.

attitude from linear to more associative thinking. In *Pattern Recognition* the hyperlinking we see on the web is transferred onto people and places, affiliations are tenuous and insubstantial, and characters never stay in one place too long. The US as 'epicentre, but in no sense the sole embodiment of globalisation', Gibson only goes back to American soil through recollection, funnelling the most powerful evocation of the branded diaspora through Cayce's memories of 9/11.[84] Set in the summer of 2002, *Pattern Recognition* charts the months after the attack and the loss of her father who 'went missing in New York City on the morning of September 11, 2001' (*PR* 134). An 'evaluator and improver of physical security for American embassies worldwide', and archetype of an 'old Cold War' mind-state, it is mooted that Win Pollard simply 'ceased, in protest, to exist' in the moment American 'perimeter-containment' (*PR* 44-6) is globally questioned. Looking into the 'tiny display window of an eccentric Spring Street dealer in antiques' as the first plane hit its target, Cayce witnesses a 'single petal fall' from 'a dead rose'. The symbolic significance of the 'micro-event' can be interpreted as either the loss of her father, the descent of the tower from the Manhattan skyline, or an 'experience outside of culture' (*PR* 135-7): the literal and figurative detachment and descent of the Occidental from the heights of the global construct.

As already covered in greater detail in the previous chapter, *Pattern Recognition* and Gibson's follow-up *Spook Country* are redolent with the portentous scent of this dispersal. Encapsulated in Cayce's nomadic lifestyle, a state-less virtual self is formed with unofficial citizenship only taken through a new '.uk' 'hotmail account' (*PR* 355) at the narrative's conclusion. Indeed, the traditional appearance of the home is non-existent in Gibson's recent trilogy, with many characters having few or awkward blood-ties, and no permanent residence, ones that do often leaving those properties vacant in favour of temporary accommodation. *Spook Country* and *Zero History* in particular are set almost exclusively in transnational public urban spaces and hotel rooms. To return to DeLillo's *White Noise*, even in this earlier consumptive phase the idea of the home was confused and 'complicated by technology', with only the essential qualities of the 'kitchen' and 'bedroom' preventing the

[84] Baudrillard. *The Spirit of Terrorism*. p. 10.

whole living area from becoming just a 'storage space for furniture, toys' (*WN* 6, 22), and other consumables. In the twenty-first century narratives of Gibson and Kunzru even these essential qualities are jettisoned, the consumer clutter of previous decades shrunk, made portable, virtualised, characters like Cayce or *Transmission's* Arjun Mehta penned as isolated flâneurs strolling among the debris of the consumer wastelands.

The 'middle-class subject's quandary over disconnection' from familial, national and technological networks – a chronic insecurity attributed to many of DeLillo's lead figures – is concomitant with themes throughout the thesis and the recurring need for individuality and community in American frontier consciousness, also appearing as a more recent general global apprehension born from the conditions of living a consumer existence.[85] It is what Naomi Klein calls a 'reality of rootlessness', brought to the fore by Gibson and Kunzru in the extrapolation of ironic effects from anxieties resonating out of dispossessed but financially and geographically mobile characters.[86] They are characters coping with the redundancy of a branded technological world which is perceived as having no future because its 'present is too volatile' (*PR* 57). The texts produced in this vein cannot be classified as satirical as they are not corrective. The use of fragmented shards from other genres results in jaded apolitical texts inflected only with a 'politics of mockery' that is traceable through the Beat Generation, the 1960s, and the formative postmodern stylings of authors like William Burroughs, Kurt Vonnegut and Thomas Pynchon.[87]

For example, in a presumably intentional narrative strategy, Cayce is made featureless bar a boyfriend's passing comparison to 'Helmut Newton's nude of Jane Birkin' (*PR* 3). The closest thing in *Pattern Recognition* to a traditional protagonist, she is defined by, employed because of, her 'violent reactivity to the semiotics of the marketplace' (*PR* 2). A savant of sorts, her phobic reaction to derivative branding – say the 'simulacra of simulacra of simulacra' (*PR* 18) that is Tommy Hilfiger, who Klein refers to as 'less in the business of

[85] Willis. *Portents of the Real*. p. 99.
[86] Klein. *Fences and Windows*. p. 158.
[87] Leslie Fiedler. 'The New Mutants'. 1965. *The Collected Essays of Leslie Fiedler Volume II*. New York. 1971. p. 386.

manufacturing clothes than he is in the business of signing his name' – is both disabling and a revered skill, one that advertising agencies like Bigend's Blue Ant are willing to pay for at a premium price.[88] Dubbed by her friend Damien as 'CPUs' or 'Cayce Pollard Units' (*PR* 8), Cayce's android-neutrality is heightened by a strict wardrobe of blacks, whites, and greys, colour-codes that emulate the anonymity and efficiently cold exteriors of consumer electronics and mobile communication devices. A successful 'dowser in the world of global marketing', with 'every trademark carefully removed' (*PR* 18) from her attire, the impression generated of Cayce is, at best, a minimalist brand-free reflective outline. This lack of description not only affects our view of Cayce (do we care about her more, or less?), but queries whether physical accounts of characters are any longer necessary in fiction in general. Through Gibson we can question whether the reader is able to live on surface and texture alone. Can the reading experience edge any closer to the linearity of the first-person video game than this? The irony here is that in replacing physical characteristics with swathes of information on branded (where Cayce is concerned de-branded) products, we are left with an individual 'whose very austerity', or self-reflexively Gibson's, 'periodically threatens to spawn' (*PR* 18) a kind of (anti-)brand cult of its own making, successful despite being as hollow as many of the labels perused and rejected.

Deflating any traditional sense of formal tension, the text is concluded by a short section of prose and a collage of interconnected but cursory email correspondences that tie up and leave gaps in the remaining plot strands, their insertion showing how technology can have an effect on narrative rhythm. A chain of detached attachments, Katherine Hayles rightly argues that the infiltration of traditional literary techniques by technology takes us towards a phase in which information 'database[s]' have 'displaced narrative as the dominant cultural form'.[89] However, when blocks of code and statistical information usurp the narrative arc a layer of human complexity is taken with it. Not only this, but as with the reader, characters peppered with brand-detail are also left spellbound, constantly in the process of coding and

[88] Naomi Klein. *No Logo*. London. 2001. p. 24.
[89] N. Katherine Hayles. 'Traumas of Code'. *Cultural Inquiry*. Autumn 2006. p. 147.

decoding layers of information that seem to offer little protection against – distractions that in fact make them more vulnerable to – the combative signals radiating from planet brand's more ruthless participants.

Take the intriguingly cruel and complex Dorotea, an adversary of Cayce's whose 'black dress, for all its apparent simplicity, is still trying to say several things at once, probably in at least three languages' (*PR* 10). Eventually defeated by the vagaries of chance and her own malicious tendencies, Dorotea punctures Cayce's façade and exposes her weaknesses with relative ease, revealing her rival's 'gray interlining' (*PR* 16) with one well-placed Silk Cut to the back of a beloved Buzz Rickson's jacket. In contrast to Dorotea's arch manipulations, Cayce is correct in assessing her own mirrored reflection as that of a 'disjointed puppet', not employed by Blue Ant on the strength of her personality or confident logo endorsements but very much because of her inherent vulnerability, which is exploitable in a narrowing marketplace of 'fewer genuine players' (*PR* 3, 62). Be it supermarkets, record labels, mobile phone operators, or the advertising industry, the coalescence of companies into one or two all-powerful global entities who vigilantly control their specific field of expertise means it is 'no longer enough to simply look the part and cultivate an attitude' (*PR* 62).

Massification on this scale involves quicksilver restructuring of previous business models and unique selling points being chased aggressively, coveted and captured by magnates like Bigend until all diversity is eliminated. As we saw in the story of Hip Hop's corporatisation in chapter two, this attack on the cultural artefact can leave the impression there are 'no borders…no mirror to be on the other side of', 'not in terms of the bits and pieces, anyway' (*PR* 100). 'Relatively tiny in permanent staff, globally distributed, more post-geographic than multinational' (*PR* 6), Blue Ant is the type of agency built to cope with cost-driven outsourcing and virtual product distribution. In tune with the uneven erosion of national identities, national economies, and national state policy make its niche for locating distinctive concepts, brands and products in a market of diminishing potentialities a powerful commodity. More than any one character Blue Ant is a constant presence throughout the decade-long trilogy and synonymous with its overarching themes: the streamlining and

downsizing of transnational consumerism at a corporate level (the consolidation of equity in virtual markets), and the de-cluttering of everyday existence through the shedding of material objects in favour of the virtual. In the final pages of *Zero History*, situated between geographic borders on board an ekranoplan heading for Iceland – a territory Bigend now partly owned in 'some arcane and largely undetectable way' – Blue Ant is shown making the move from a consumer-focused agency working with nations and their political and economic structures, to a speculative financial technocracy that clandestinely holds state power.[90] Steered by Bigend, a 'nominal Belgian who looks like Tom Cruise on a diet of virgins' blood and truffled chocolates', the Blue Ant agency exemplifies its founder's vampiric needs and techniques; consumptive, opaque, reflection-free, it is first shown enticing Cayce to London on the pretext of re-branding 'one of the world's two largest manufacturers of athletic footwear', when her principle unspoken assignment is to open up a line of communication with the makers of 'the footage' (*PR* 6-9, 66).

The footage itself is a commodity-free sequence of monochromatic film fragments created by an unknown auteur, released sporadically to different locations and then circulated online amongst a growing legion of followers. Its popularity increases because the clips offer something 'outside of geography and beyond time zones' (*PR* 4): a luxurious liminal space of 'semiotic neutrality' external to the accustomed order of tightly mediated surfaces and controlled signification.[91] Cayce is inexorably drawn to the unbranded footage, desiring blankness as a haven from the 'tame pathologies' (*PR* 65) brought on by logo-sensitivity, drawn into the consumption of a prototype product that embodies and mirrors her own interior state. Interest in the clips which escalates to the point of obsession in the restless period after her father's disappearance, Cayce finds an approximation of home in an internet forum discussing the cult of the footage. In his three volumes on *The Information Age* (1996-2004), Manuel Castells views communication through online forums as an expansion of 'weak ties', the 'linking of people with different social characteristics' around a specific

[90] William Gibson. *Zero History*. London. 2010. p. 402. Henceforth cited as *ZH*.
[91] Jameson. *Archaeologies of the Future*. p. 389.

theme, offering a version of friendship strong on 'reciprocal supportiveness' but with a high mortality rate due to distance and the mediated nature of the interactions.[92] During the round of promotional interviews for *Spook Country* in 2007, speaking with Tim Adams, Gibson gave a conflicting interpretation of how our exchanges are developing in virtual environments:

> I think we are getting to the point that a strange kind of relationship would be one where there was no virtual element. We are at that tipping point: how can you be friends with someone who is not online? In a couple of years we will be no more disturbed by our relationship with virtual worlds than we are by our relationship with broadcast television.[93]

Acquiring a place to retreat to, a social network, and by the end of the novel a partner from the forum 'F:F:F', Cayce is precariously balanced on that tipping point between virtual space as an alienable form of communication and its integration into our consciousness as just another normalised mode (fax, phone) or meeting place (café, bar) for human interaction. *Pattern Recognition*, indeed the whole trilogy being a narrative regularly punctuated and carried by information transferred electronically, CayceP, Mama Anarchia (Dorotea), and Parkaboy (eventual partner Peter Gilbert) all effortlessly navigate the unruly interstitial corridors between the forum and the material world despite, as the names suggest, having to negotiate the transition between material persona and virtual alter-ego. Although virtually adept, the construction and exclusivity of this online social space place the novel just prior to the explosion of much more public social networking sites like Facebook that have attempted to commodify human relations in virtual environments. Representations of the earlier forum variant now seem prosaic too, in comparison to the instant and open lines of communication offered by Twitter.

Sensing the synergy between Cayce and the ambiguity of the footage (a product that may not even exist), it is from this still-arcane forum atmosphere that Bigend procures her like an item from a glass case. Initiating a *Wizard of Oz*-like escapade to solve the mystery of the

[92] Manuel Castells. *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture, Volume I: The Rise of the Network Society*. 1996. Oxford. 2000. pp. 388-9.
[93] Tim Adams. 'Space to think'. *The Observer*. 12 August 2007. p. 8.

footage, Cayce is an unwilling Dorothy sent to find what lies behind the curtain, and in doing so harness the 'most brilliant marketing ploy of this very young century' (*PR* 65). In Gibson's version Kansas is the virtual anxiety-free dreamscape of the footage, the Emerald City an all too real physical world of Technicolor capitalism and exchanges in which ideas, images and brands are always given precedence over the things themselves. Cayce is a single cog in a signification business that relentlessly catalogues, assesses and orders, Western standardisation dissolving 'the membranes between mirror-worlds', as all experience is gradually reduced 'by the spectral hand of marketing, to price-point variations of the same thing' (*PR* 341, 194).

John Marx categorises Cayce within a group of 'professional women working the mid-levels of the marketing industry', a global tendency towards a sector of women 'now in the service of very wealthy men'.[94] This viewpoint attempts to map Cayce's position onto outmoded industrial business structures, neglecting her role as an updated noir protagonist working the margins by offering services 'for hire to an upper-class [to say high-end corporate] clientele'.[95] The fact is that no characters are involved in labour-intensive business in these texts, reflecting the wholesale exodus of workers from the industrial mode of production through the service industry and into the mode of consumption. Conventional industrial understanding of employer-employee relations are reworked and deconstructed in this world. Blue Ant's financing of the search for the footage, for example, immediately elevates anyone involved with the project to executive status. This incorporation into the new service industry does not, however, open all impermeable borders or otherwise impenetrable 'boundaries of privatisation'.[96] What being in the employ of the new consumer elite does allow for is a heightened social mobility and financial accreditation, the political/financial or physical/virtual 'barriers which charge for movement across space' being accessed immediately, more opulently, and through more distinguished channels.[97] Cayce, then, is not

[94] John Marx. 'The Feminization of Globalization'. *Cultural Critique*. 2006. pp. 11, 16.
[95] Paul Meehan. *Tech-Noir: The Fusion of Science Fiction and Film Noir*. North Carolina. 2008. p. 16.
[96] Iain Borden. 'Boundaries'. *City A-Z*. London: Routledge, 2000. p. 22.
[97] Ibid.

so much a 'narrative agent who does not understand the sort of plot in which she is embedded', as Marx argues, but more an agent in a hierarchy determined by access to information rather than by gender.[98] In the case of Gibson's fiction the characters are better described as a pool of independent human (male *or* female) information resources that all advertise their services to be consumed. Resistant to higher authorities or the existence of a grand narrative, their final purpose – even as high up the chain as Bigend – is always fluid, seemingly in doubt, and subject to change.

Under these terms the only certainty in Gibson's current trilogy is the application of 'hardware, software, or human "ware"' to maximise the life cycle of the product.[99] *Pattern Recognition*, *Spook Country*, and *Zero History* are all reliant on representations of disparate teams relaying information that is essential to capitalising on the potential of a specific object or product. In *Pattern Recognition* these lines of communication extend from Bigend all the way down to the litany of dysfunctional transnational tech obsessives that help Cayce along the globalised yellow-brick road towards the footage. Appearing incidental, these peripheral collectors are instrumental in understanding Gibson's interpretation of the modern subject.[100]

In *The System of Objects* (1968) Baudrillard writes extensively on the growing impulse to collect. He strongly contends that capitalism's incessant cycles and the 'relations of production' formulated by Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) have been enveloped by consumption, with judgements on use-value gazumped in this epoch by accumulation, which takes in everything from data storage to 'the everyday passion for private property', and as we see here variations on the individual obsession with 'the loved object'.[101] Technological relics like the Curta calculator or Clive Sinclair's ZX 81 – to the outsider just a 'rather tragic looking rectangle of scuffed black plastic' (*PR* 32) – are feverishly coveted by their suitors, dealt in clandestinely and with a passion usually reserved

[98] Marx. 'Feminization of Globalization'. p. 13.
[99] Linda D. Garcia. 'The Architecture of Global Networking Technologies'. *Global Networks: Linked Cities*. London. 2002. pp. 42, 54.
[100] See Japanese otaku Taki; or crazy 'for Curta' Hobbs-Baranov, a drunken mathematician with connections to 'American intelligence' (*PR* 32, 215).
[101] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. 'Bourgeois and Proletarians'. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. 1848. p. 5; Baudrillard. *System of Objects*. p. 91.

for living objects of affection. Referring to Hobbs-Baranov, the product of a marriage between a wealthy British heiress and Soviet diplomat, in stating that he 'had lived his whole life within that hyphen' (*PR* 242), the inference here could be as much to a more general metaphor for this type of collector's position in the recesses of the consumer space as it is to the specifics of individual ethnicity.

These characters are throwbacks to Gibson's earlier fiction, examples of lives driven by what they obstinately collect, the detritus that populate the murky depths of the consumptive scale far away from the on-trend laser-quick zeitgeist of the consumer industry and its pretty people. Characters drawn to Cayce during the pursuit and collection of the technologically archaic, the brand bankruptcy of such coveted objects is a means of neutralising and shielding themselves from the onslaught of contemporary advertising and its bandwagoneering. Such fusion with obsolescence can be seen as a skewed form of consumer compliance, or indeed an act of resistance to an infantilised consumer society with strict rules. Baudrillard continues:

> For children, collecting is a rudimentary way of mastering the outside world, of arranging, classifying, and manipulating…[T]here is in all cases a manifest connection between collecting and sexuality, and this activity appears to provide a powerful compensation during critical stages of sexual development…[A substitute for] active genital sexuality…it constitutes a regression to the anal stage, which is characterized by accumulation, orderliness, aggressive retention.[102]

Baudrillard's playful suggestion of regression to the anal stage is rife in *Pattern Recognition*, Gibson giving us sterile regions scattered with mostly asexual loners bearing the 'stamp of solitude', a side-effect of 'totalization by means of objects'.[103] Perhaps a myoclonic response to the insecurities of a distinctly post-9/11 worldview of 'panic disorders' and 'critical event stress' (*PR* 354), the formulation of childlike friendships (i.e. sexless, based around objects and the fantastic), product-accumulation, and the obsessive-compulsive need for ordering are profuse in Gibson's mirror-worlds. And unlike much contemporary fiction Gibson leaves a great deal between the lines, an anachronistic prudishness meaning the fiction never

[102] Baudrillard. *System of Objects*. p. 93.
[103] Ibid. p. 114.

descends into overexposure or what could be termed literary pornography. Indeed, Cayce's own overcoming of style codes, mantras and brand anxieties is only possible when coping mechanisms are forfeited and the obsession with the footage is replaced by an adult sexually active coupling with Peter Gilbert in the book's cursory last pages.

While these collectors have not disappeared in *Spook Country*, they have at least been reworked again for our more virtualised times, introduced abstractly through religion, addiction, informatics and locative art. The two significant anomalies in this virtual arrangement are Brown and his 'phantom gun syndrome', and the coveted money container the retrogressive ex-military rogue agent is seeking out.[104] There is more on the significance of the container below. But for Brown, deranged, hawkish, a product of the American military with 'a fundamental need to obey orders', the experience of the absent gun is like the spatial displacement of a recent amputee 'itching to scratch toes that were no longer there' (*SC* 212, 247). This underlying and fundamentally American military-industrial itch that runs through the thesis remains unconscious for Brown, Gibson's narrative never offering him redemption because of his proximity to and compliance with the hegemonic system and its hierarchies.

In fact the level of awareness each character has for their own manias is tightly controlled by Gibson, imposed by but also a screen from an anxious 'social space' where the play of presence and absence is 'continually being blanketed by stratum after stratum of commodities'.[105] Real or virtual, harmless or deadly, the fixation on a single commodity or object for this effect brings the subject into the sphere of the fetishist. When implemented by Gibson, however, this palpable 'celebration of artifice and surface' cannot be fully aligned with cultural decadence or 'other fetishistic philosophies', the sexual excitement usually associated with the fetish displaced by commodification, always 'in some sense conjured away and foreclosed in the technical realm'.[106] Distinct from establishment agents like Brown

[104] William Gibson. *Spook Country*. London. 2007. pp. 247, 212. Henceforth cited as *SC*.
[105] Debord. *Society of the Spectacle*. p. 29.
[106] Amanda Fernbach. *Fantasies of Fetishism: From Decadence to the Post-Human*. Edinburgh. 2002. p. 42; Baudrillard. *System of Objects*. p. 141.

that are trained to repress (if not the sexual feeling, then at least the comfort and attachment the prosthetic object satisfies), Cayce and the other members discussing the footage consciously acknowledge their dedication to '*a tempered mode of sexual perversion*' in the forum's title: 'Fetish:Footage:Forum' (*PR* 3).[107] It is a place where the minutiae of the artefact can be 'the subject of hundreds of posts', and anything other than the footage is strictly 'Off Topic' (*PR* 23, 46). The heated debates amongst footageheads, the endless exchanges over linear or non-sequential narrative permutations because of the absence of stylistic cues, are a direct result of their urge to conjoin with it physically, spiritually, or intellectually.

In his perceptive reading, Jameson notes that the footage is not 'the central issue' in *Pattern Recognition*, even though it undoubtedly 'supplies the narrative framework'.[108] The true core of the text is the discursive treatment of the contradictory forces at work in the interplay of the branded, de-branded and brand-free object. Within this the footage is a rare form of prophylactic that protects against the 'toxicity' of 'the logo' and the poison of the brand in Gibson's mapping of a 'new geopolitical Imaginary'.[109] And in a landscape which fluctuates erratically between coincidence and 'an overarching pattern of conspiracy' (*PR* 294), Cayce is set adrift behind the lines of an ideological nemesis that still gnaws at the edges of recent American history. Linking into the themes from the first and third chapters, while the Cold War may be a distant memory, sediments from the animosity between the superpowers still dwells in the atmospherics of transnational relations.

This makes the use of Russia as Cayce's final destination and the creative/administrative centre for the footage both fitting and problematic. It is fitting as a fledgling centre of global capital buoyed by post-9/11 oil demands and governed by 'ex-KGB' that are 'lawyers first, then spies' (*PR* 338); fitting as a territory where global brands are not yet entrenched in chain store multiples and the imbalanced patterning of the modern world is given distinctive form: problematic because Gibson's depiction of one of the more exceptional examples of European renovation in the twenty-first century is streaked with ennui and distaste, a

[107] Baudrillard. *System of Objects*. p. 107.
[108] Jameson. *Archaeologies of the Future*. p. 389.
[109] Ibid. pp. 391, 385.

malaise of Russian politics and organised crime that Gibson – via Cayce – summarises as somewhere 'she wouldn't care for' if she were to be there very long, the ostentatiousness of the fashions making it 'Rodeo Drive with an extra helping of cheekbones' (*PR* 275-84). Gibson transcribes Moscow as 'the most interesting place in the world…[and] *horrible*', an emergent scene of people 'doing late-90s capitalism and not only are the gloves off, but they don't have a ring'.[110]

From this perspective the Russian situation is ripe for infusing with American anxiety, the type that stems from a nagging doubt that the exportation of the corporate consumer fantasy that we still see in everything from Hip Hop to mainstream Hollywood has somehow gone wrong. This crumbling of consumer perception has been thematically worked and reworked for decades from the American interior, and pre-empted most recently in a wave of US cinema that includes *The Truman Show* (1998), *American Beauty*, and *Memento* (2000). Its transposition to Russia, the only zone in which Cayce is put in any real danger, adds to the uneasy imprint of a country 'being made up as it goes along' (*PR* 345), an impression which trickles down into Gibson's prose and is also symbolically replicated in the questions over the footage and its narrative credibility. Extending into the normally incisive Western product-placements, Gibson's lightness of touch is blunted by 'the dark weight of Russian', the brutalism of the brands drenched in a propinquity that makes a coffee-house not 'Starbucks' but 'кофеин' (Caffeine), and sub-cultural effects like the 'Cyrillic skater's tags' bulge only 'in clumsy homage' to their pioneering counterparts in 'New York and Los Angeles' (*PR* 276-300).

Paradoxically, alongside difficulties with brand lag and linguistics outside the sphere of the Anglo-American corporate *lingua franca*, what Gibson's mirror-world interpretation lacks is the ability to treat the Russian assemblage in and of itself, in isolation. It is not so much 'overlaid with an international blandness' like the erudite characters populating the episodes in London and Tokyo – even more so in the geographically limited, almost provincial movement between London and Paris in *Zero History* – but anachronistically splintered *and*

[110] Gibson 'Cloning the Future'. p. 22.

energised throughout by refractive slivers of Western culture and the market that runs it.[111] The footage is the brainchild of Nora and Stella Volkova, twin sisters responsible for its production and distribution. Each twin the half of a complete whole, in an operation overseen by their uncle, one of a new breed of invisible Russian oligarchs, not even the kind of political distance and economic leverage gained from such a position is enough to shield the Volkovas or the footage from the rapacity of the capitalist nation-state and its markets.

Consider the debilitating head injuries Nora sustains as a child in the blast from a Claymore mine. With no external scars and only 'the skewing of the bone' remaining visible, it is a sealed physical wound inflicted from an item mass-produced 'by an automated press in some armory in America'; penetrated by American technology, the pressure of a permanent fragment left inside the skull results in the footage being imparted from an internal space where tissue merges with the 'T-shaped fragment in her brain' (*PR* 304-5). Speaking 'wordlessly in the dark' (*PR* 305), it is a crossbred state diametrically opposed to the varieties of optional body augmentation and lifestyle choices deliberated in the first chapter. It also differs from the intellectualised psychosomatic trauma we see in Cayce, Nora being a subject invaded by an object from outside her own culture: a brand of involuntary casualty not only to 'have been penetrated and co-opted by their [own] technology', but also by the technological products of others.[112] With each segment of footage digitally watermarked into a computed geography of 'one specific part in the manual arming mechanism of the US Army's M18A1 Claymore', a virtual map is produced of the alien component resting 'between the lobes' (*PR* 274, 288), making the images Nora manipulates both indigenous and foreign: a replication of the synthesis of human and technological memory. Katherine Hayles has said of the footage that it

> represents a complex transmission pathway for trauma…[.] Experienced consciously but remembered nonlinguistically, trauma has structural affinities with code. Like code, it is linked with narrative without itself being narrative. Like code it is

[111] Christopher Palmer. '*Pattern Recognition*: "None of What We Do Here is Ever Really Private"'. *Science-Fiction Studies*. 2006. p. 476.
[112] William Gibson. *No Maps for these Territories*. 2001.

> somewhere other than on the linguistic surface, while having power to influence that surface.[113]

Like the quant model in *Gods Without Men*, Hayles is describing the footage as a type of code, like sign and signal, which fluctuates between technological autonomy and a more circular interrelation between subject and object. Oblivious to audience, commercial potentialities, and the 'integration of the system of needs into the system of products', it is the unequivocal purity of Nora's footage made from trauma that makes it unique and precious.[114] Art for art's sake in its truest sense, it carries with it no didactic, moral, or practical purpose. Sharing her dreams as art, projected without language and direct from the psyche, it is little wonder that Cayce's first correspondence sent after the acquisition of Volkova's email address feels 'like writing a letter to God' (*PR* 266). Except neither address nor footage are spiritual pathways. Despite resembling a Grail Quest the symbols and rituals on the road to the footage are technological, the mesmerising intimacy of the work being as close as these characters can get to realising divine intervention or an ethereal state.

In a set of stringently secular commodity-driven texts the role of the omniscient being is toyed with and debased, its narrative and social validity questioned. To return to Kunzru, *My Revolutions* offers up 'elderly alcoholic' God(frey) Kerr as apathetic proprietor of 'Pelham Antiquarian Books', 'God' at the helm of a 'refuge' from the 'economically efficient high-street hell', who 'doesn't seem to give a toss whether he makes any money or not, as long as no one disturbs him before eleven or asks if he has anything by Jeffrey Archer' (*MR* 25-6). To share a line from Walter Benjamin's 'Capitalism as Religion' (1921), if 'God's transcendence has fallen, but he is not dead', and 'He' has indeed been 'drawn into the fate of man' as we see in *My Revolutions*, then where are twenty-first century subjects to obtain transcendent reassurance?[115] As construed by Samuel Weber, human experience and its religious belief systems have gone through – are still in – a stage of being reduced to the finite.[116] But this in

[113] Hayles. 'Traumas of Code'. pp. 142, 141.
[114] Baudrillard. *System of Objects*. p. 205.
[115] Walter Benjamin. 'Capitalism as Religion'. 1921. *The Frankfurt School on Religion*. New York. 2005. p. 260.
[116] Samuel Weber. 'Closing the Net'. *Consumption in an Age of Information*. Oxford. 2005. p. 131.

turn has also been superseded in recent times by societies that are humanised and *technologised*. And like previous brands of organised religion, the bond between Nora, Cayce, and the other footageheads, is cultivated, propagated, *mediated* by a code which (re)connects them with a new system of faiths that still work away at both the conscious (systemic) and unconscious (individual) planes of human perception.

Built from a following that would otherwise feel 'alienated and abolished' by a social discourse whose rules escape them (the rules of governance, consumption, the corporation), Nora and the footageheads that revere her work are exponents of what Baudrillard coins 'narcissistic manipulation'.[117] The subject strives to 'reconstitute a discourse that is transparent' to them amongst other consumer discourses, one in which 'signifiers' can be controlled and 'whose referent *par excellence*' is the self.[118] The footage offers this psychologically through what is now known in branding circles as the Zargonic Effect, where the consumer is given enough of a 'projected figure' through the 'visual cortex' for the 'electrochemical process caused by the projection' to 'complete itself in the brain' and produce the 'percept of a complete whole' in the consciousness.[119] Put simply, the Zargonic Effect plays on the power of the mind to automatically complete an incomplete circle. Compared with most advertising this effect is unintentional in the footage, its translucent iconography, as Hayles puts it, also a 'complex entanglement of signifiers' in which 'the hidden message' points 'in two directions at once'.[120] The trauma built into it is certainly abstract and indulgently self-referential, but at the same time the object materialising from Nora's distress is universal, hence its limitless readability and the readings/misreadings from its globally-dispersed band of devotees.

So, if capitalism is a religion as Benjamin suggests, perhaps 'the most extreme there ever was', serving 'to satisfy the same worries, anguish and disquiet formerly answered by so-called religion', then the footage is probably best understood as a cult within cults.[121]

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[117] Baudrillard. *System of Objects*. p. 111.
[118] Ibid. p. 114.
[119] Rudolf Arnheim. *Art and Visual Perception*. 1954. Los Angeles. 1974. p. 69.
[120] Hayles. 'Traumas of Code'. p. 145.
[121] Benjamin. 'Capitalism as Religion'. p. 259.

Religion anaesthetises and reassures against the finality of death. Capitalism's missionaries (the financial sector, consumer goods, corporate industry) postpone and distract with a similar rationale. The footage, as unintentional technological by-product, functions as an alternative to or sedative from the potency of these forms of indoctrination and global branding. For Cayce the footage unifies strands of existential conflict, reflecting on the wordless and instinctual brand reactions used in her career, bringing the mainstream closer to the cutting-edge as well as soothing the feelings of loss and jarring electrical – at least beyond physical – hallucinations of her dead father.[122]

There is, however, an inherent limit to the effectiveness of the footage as a therapeutic device for escape or transcendence. Technologised, it is the upscaling of the same cruel trick Nietzsche saw as played on primitive cultures that endeavour to 'know a *second real world* in dreams'.[123] At best a material reconstruction of intangible manifestations or the religious illusion, by the end of the novel Cayce remains embroiled in a kind of consumer vortex, caught in a state of exasperated temporal, spatial and cultural bilocation. In the last section of prose we are given, she is viewed 'weeping for her century' while visiting Damien's filmed excavation of World War Two relics from old Russian trenches, unsure whether the tears shed are for 'the one past or one present' (*PR* 356). This is because the recurring concerns from both twentieth and twenty-first centuries bleed into one another and congeal. Cayce, although not named, is revealed in *Zero History* to be the underground clothes designer Bigend is interested in locating. Found recycling the concept of the secret brand to launch her 'Gabriel Hounds' range, Cayce reveals Nora's death had occurred 'a few years after I found her' (*ZH* 335). The flattening effect of the news is also reflected in the collapse of technology in *Zero History*. Objects with transcendent powers in the previous novels are trumped by perfunctory communication devices, evidenced in the banal ubiquity of Apple's iPhone brandished by characters sending and receiving signals (messages with

[122] Malcolm Gladwell brought 'coolhunting' to a wider audience in 'The Coolhunt'. *The New Yorker*. 17 March 1997. p. 78.
[123] Friedrich Nietzsche. *Human, All Too Human*. 1878. London. 1994. p. 16.

no depth) on every other page. Any ideas of Nora as a revolutionary figure, a post-millennial figure at the vanguard of a new messianic age (a new Muhammad, Christ, or more appropriately a new post-industrial variant of the *Maschinenmensch* in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927)), are inexorably shattered – like Gibson's narrative trajectory – under the pressure imposed by the controlling arm of the system and its cyclical markets.

Remote Control

The fate of the footage, too, is spelt out in *Spook Country*, during this conversation between Bigend and Hollis:

> 'I've learned to value anomalous phenomena. Very peculiar things that people do, often secretly, have come to interest me in a certain way. I spend a lot of money, often, trying to understand those things. From them, sometimes, emerge Blue Ant's most successful efforts. Trope Slope, for instance, our viral pitchman platform, was based on pieces of anonymous footage being posted on the Net.'
> 'You did that? Put that thing in the background of all those old movies? That's fucking horrible. Pardon my French.'
> 'It sells shoes.' He smiled. (*SC* 108)

Though the exact nature of Trope Slope is never revealed, the viral pitchman platform could be any or all of: 1) the utilisation of just the steganographic technology taken from the footage to insert and track the progress of an assortment of viral advertising campaigns; 2) the digital insertion of product placements into the original footage fragments (that ostensibly look like 'old movies'); or 3) the crude superimposition of new products into actual old movies which are then broadcast through online channels like YouTube or other digital media. Apart from dispelling any previous claims of cultural altruism, Bigend's flippant retort that whatever Trope Slope may be it 'sells shoes' oversimplifies the flensing of the footage and the broad set of global opportunities created from the dispersion of its authenticity.

As we saw with Hip Hop in chapter two, artistic expression and ideological weight are flushed out of the cultural artefact, distanced in the act of commodification. A process shown at the end of *Pattern Recognition*, the hunt for the maker(s) of the footage has already been cunningly sculpted into a major marketing ploy. A node between old West and new East, Bigend is pictured on CNN connecting the US 'Secretary of the Interior' with the Volkova

twins' oligarch uncle, already being spun and rebranded by Blue Ant as 'a sort of Saatchi-like patron figure', cleansed of anything 'nouveau riche or mafia or otherwise foul' (*PR* 352-3) as he is introduced to the global market. The supervision of the new Russian wealth's translation into mirror-world acceptability is the public face of the disquieting and borderless coalescence of political and private business fuelled by media agencies like Blue Ant. They facilitate the passing of financial power into 'private hands', which in turn empowers such conglomerates with 'a margin of political and even military autonomy'.[124] Similar to Bigend's pending influence over the democratic state formerly known as Iceland at the end of *Zero History*, though less abrupt, anyone familiar with the infiltration and infection of Britain's economic, cultural and political, infrastructure by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation over a period of four decades will see the arch-manipulation of a nation's trajectory is not solely a fictional conceit.

With political and economic governance poured into the sphere of global franchising, the Bigends of this world become munificent yet influential makeweights in a new form of unhinged empire, facilitating transactions that allow resources and power to be drawn from cartographically fixed nation-states into itinerant transnational firms. And if these new pools of economic power eventually and somewhat inevitably search for some kind of political influence then what of its corollary? Does the other side to this coin not suggest that when political energy and resources are concentrated on fiscal accumulation it can only be to the detriment of human rights, social order, foreign policy, and the rule of law? Aided and accelerated by the steady uptake of available digital technology, exchanges between these interested parties make transnational trade links and the spread of information powering it 'viral' (*PR* 85). The depthlessness and toothlessness of opposition to this circulation of power is due, as Baudrillard marked out in 2004, to the fade of 'critical consciousness' in the 'consumer stage', there no longer a space left in which to be truly 'critical or reflexive'.[125] With no need to be obtrusively propagandist, the economic and political are little more than

[124] Fredric Jameson. 'The Dialectics of Disaster'. *South Atlantic Quarterly*. 2002. p. 302.
[125] Baudrillard. 'The Murder of the Sign'. p. 12.

overlapping categories in a larger consortium of global enterprise, the subject left, in Baudrillard's eyes, to choose to either reject it or totally accept it': like a consumer.[126]

However, dealings at this level of a '[b]oom and bust' industry do have high stakes, and whether fact or fiction it seems clear that getting '*one's hands dirty at the brandface*' (*T* 22, 122) can be a treacherous and unforgiving business. In *Transmission,* in an already contracting economy sent into rapid meltdown by the Leela virus, 'Market Visionary' (*T* 12) Guy Swift and his agency *Tomorrow** – the antithesis of Bigend and the shatterproof Blue Ant – are swallowed, digested and eliminated while securing a salvational contract to modernise the Pan European Border Agency's customs and immigration regime. Sold through platitudes, the border authority is redesigned through the ludicrous 'metaphorics of leisure' as a nightclub security firm in the 'seventies disco'-inspired campaign '*Europe: No Jeans, No Trainers*' (*T* 257-8). Here we face the mirror-image of Microsoft's 'Windows Without Walls'. While Gates lays claim to a system of frictionless capitalism, new borders are being raised across the globe. As with the reinforcement of the Mexican border in the first chapter, the policing of human movement between territories remains a transnational priority. Products move freely across borders; migrating humans with questionable levels of productivity risk detention on new EU frontiers.[127] In *Transmission* Kunzru paints it as glitter-ball fascism, global security enforced to a disco soundtrack.

Guy is caught with no identification in the first sweep of Operation Atomium, mistaken for a migrant after a debauched night of premature celebrations. Brutally dragged across Europe's underbelly, a glitterless journey of deportations and abuse legitimised by discrepancies due to a viral infiltration of the EU immigration records, Guy's punishment for the excesses and extravagance is exile from the system. Exposure to the realities of migration and unfixed identity leave him a (literally washed-up) recluse pondering the 'geopathic stress' (*T* 277) of city life from a cottage in the North Pennines. During the initial

[126] Ibid.
[127] See http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/sep/21/eu-border-police-bline-eye-migrant-abuse; and http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/13/world/europe/13iht-union.4.10025419.html.

meeting with PEBA, Signor Bocca remarks that the 'question of the border is a question of information'; 'not certain what he meant' (*T* 251), Guy passes over the statement on which *Transmission* is centred. Accustomed to selling and believing in a fabricated globe of polyphonic harmony, Guy is relegated to just another wordless voice in a world full of noise where information – or in signal-processing terms data without meaning – is used to subjugate individuals and maintain leverage, the manipulation and mediation of this powerful cultural dissonance enough to determine the fates of characters and their place inside/outside the system's boundaries.

While always keen to sieve the tragi-comic potential from 'the barbarous dark side of capitalist globalisation', there is a romanticism and sentimentality for the plight of the disenfranchised subject in Kunzru's fiction that is not apparent in Gibson.[128] In *Transmission* the interrelationship between man and political/techno-social machine remains a principle target; in this text in particular the totalisation of the globe is prone to multiple exceptions, the complications arising from the disappearance of the human form and its resistance to the system meticulously interrogated along with the taxonomy of the modern border and exploitation of intercontinental labour.[129] Supporting Nigel Thrift's contention that 'modern complex systems are so overdetermined that in their interleavings all kinds of gaps are likely to be found in which new kinds of "excursions" can be coaxed into existence', Kunzru, for example, allows Arjun and Leela to just 'dissolve into the wires', to escape into an entropic void found somewhere amongst the media assisted campaigns and inscrutably organised contemporary planes of perception.[130] To different ends, the prose of both authors is suffused with cultural cathexis that rummages through the lives of budding refugees within global consumer culture, ones that if not powerless against are at least neutered by a system that repulses and absorbs. If Kunzru laments then Gibson revels in outlining the asymmetrical contours of a mirror-world where the consumer experience morphs into a

[128] Frederick Luis Aldama. 'Hari Kunzru in Conversation'. *Wasafiri*. Spring 2005. p. 11.
[129] The play of Western illusions in the East (Indian agencies farming IT workers to the US, the objectification of Western women, and the programming of Indian call-centre workers with customer-friendly Australian culture and jargon), warrants further research outside this study's framework.
[130] Nigel Thrift. 'Remembering the Technological Unconscious by Foregrounding Knowledges of Position'. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*. 2004. p. 188; Aldama. 'Kunzru in Conversation'. p. 14.

vicarious thrill ride inside the confines of an ever-expanding but inescapable sliding puzzle. Whereas Kunzru imagines undisturbed pockets of free space amid the 'breakdowns, aneurismal ruptures…crashes, viruses' and 'terrorism' of a tentative and spasmodic technological state, Gibson sees subject and object as interchangeable in a liquid mosaic populated by technophiles that communicate often but rarely connect.[131]

Back in the world outside the text, those who either evade capture or fall through the mesh of the net – the type of people Kunzru envisions reaching beyond the mirror-world framework – are still relentlessly coerced back into the structure by what Aldous Huxley perceived in the middle of the twentieth century to be 'expert salesman' promoting the coagulation of power within a centripetal configuration.[132] As a recent example, we might take the much-vilified Charlotte Beers. Former CEO of Ogilvy & Mather, Beers was appointed as 'Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs' by the Bush Administration after 9/11 to, as Klein puts it, 'work her magic on the greatest branding challenge of all: to sell the United States and its "war on terror" to an increasingly hostile world'.[133] This, however, is imprecise. A less barbed assessment of a post in which the vague remit included 'cultural programming' and 'US Government efforts to confront ideological support for terrorism', would be not so much selling of war, as a reselling of American foreign policy and products to 'create a more favorable impression of the United States overseas, especially in Arab and Muslim countries'.[134]

Likened by Beers in late 2001 to overhauling IBM's 'big, powerful, and arrogant' image, the winning of Middle Eastern hearts/minds/wallets could only end in abject failure when the intangible assets usually spotlighted in consumer advertising here reveal the 'emotional underpinning' of the political branch of the brand as darkly flawed and self-serving. Resigning due to 'health reasons' just prior to the invasion of Iraq, Beers gave a clear-eyed

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[131] Baudrillard. *The Intelligence of Evil*. p. 186.
[132] Aldous Huxley. *Brave New World Revisited*. 1959. London. 1994. p. 70.
[133] Klein. *Fences and Windows*. p. 184.
[134] See www.historycommons.org/entity.jsp?entity=charlotte_beers_1, http://www.state.gov/r/, and http://dir.salon.com/story/news/feature/2003/09/30/deception/index.html; for an even-handed assessment of Beers, see Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber. *Weapons of Mass Deception: The Uses of Propaganda in Bush's War on Iraq*. London. 2003. pp. 12, 13, 25-36.

synopsis of the venture to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 27th February 2003, confirming that the 'gap between who we are and how we wish to be seen, and how we are in fact seen, is frighteningly wide'.[135] The 'Brand America' campaign was a contaminated public relations exercise from its inception, an impossible task that could only ever succeed in proving the limitations outside the consumer-sphere of propaganda as a genuine form of communication. Political intelligence is, after all, 'advertising turned inside out' (*SC* 108).

The scorn shown for Charlotte Beers though, internally as well as from the intended Islamic audience, is as much to do with a larger rejection of American efforts to franchise other nations as it is a personal attack on a specific style of brand methodology. And whether in the shape of Bridgeman, Bigend, Swift, or Beers, some like Linda Garcia still believe that technology, through the multiplication of connective nodes such as 'search engines and filtering devices', can 'eliminate the role of traditional middlemen' by 'restructuring economic relationships and directly linking consumers to the products and services that they desire'.[136] Although the type of stealth advertising introduced by Google that traces the digital fingerprint to then cluster products around specifically targeted consumers does hint at the purging of the middleman, this seems wildly optimistic at a time when many online spaces and flows of exchange are already manned and regulated by just such human or now more commonly automated mediaries. It is in the interests of financial companies and media conglomerates to strengthen this position, as indicated by the paywall ambitions of Murdoch's News Corporation, actively implementing paid content initiatives on previously free publications and information sources since 2010.[137] Indeed, far from eradicating the middlemen, information technology has so far brought us up 'ultra-close against them' in a world where the desire is for everything to be 'immediately realized'.[138] Another case of Gibson crossing subject into object, characters like Cayce and Hollis are

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[135] Alexandra Starr. 'Building Brand America'. *Business Week*. 10 December 2001. *BusinessWeek Online*. http://www.businessweek.com/bwdaily/dnflash/dec2001/nf20011210_2325.htm; from the 'Hearing on American Diplomacy and Islam'. Cited from Brian Rosen and Charles Wolf Jr. *Public Diplomacy: How to Think About and Improve It*. Santa Monica. 2004. p. 3.

[136] Garcia. 'Global Networking Technologies'. p. 41.

[137] See http://www.techdirt.com/articles/20110330/03151513693/news-corp-claims-79000-subscribers-to-its-paywall-times.shtml.

[138] Jean Baudrillard. *Passwords*. London. 2003. p. 28.

paid to mimic the attributes and functionality of online facilities, becoming human search engines in an uncanny reversal of the 'virtual double'.[139]

Yes, platforms diversify, are superseded, even inherit kitsch value, as regimes are modernised through new-wave crusades. But while any space exists between consumer and the object for consumption there will always be room for agencies to invade and negotiate – by that I mean lubricate, block or reroute – the circulation of capital. Tangentially, the partitioning of human exchange can be seen in the most commonplace of transactions, the daily intimacy of hand-to-hand contact between purchaser and retailer now impeded by a wall of chip-and-pin technology. With staff trained to understand, especially in corporations and large chains, that 'all commercial transactions are digitally recorded and stored in databases', paper money as an object is now scrutinised and treated with suspicion.[140] Not only is there the possibility of it being counterfeit, this suspicion is also due to the now-unfamiliar nature of the material exchange, and acceptance that it stalls the flow of money into the system. What we are left with is a dehumanised exchange that typifies the switching of the mind between the desire for the machine to take over mundane tasks and the very real dread of human redundancy.

Back in the virtual, the fictional cyberspace Gibson brought to the fore always acted 'as a metaphor for dematerialized, immaterial, or friction-free capital-in-circulation'.[141] While arguably not quite there yet, we are far closer to it than we are to the utopian fantasies of the academic and scientific communities around at the internet's inauguration. No longer a moneyless super-smooth information highway, the cyberspatial world we now inhabit grows ever more into a reflection of its material double, a precarious balance of crime, gossip, high-street surrogate and virtual toll booth. Problematic in terms of illegality, but with no advertising and free from censorship, the last vestiges of Gibson's original vision seem to be the 'darknets' or 'private internets' (*ZH* 300-1) mentioned in *Zero History*, colourless

[139] Ibid. p. 40.
[140] Mark Poster. 'Future Advertising: Dick's *Ubik* and the Digital Ad'. *Consumption in an Age of Information*. Oxford. 2005. p. 36.
[141] Mark Bould. 'All that Melts into Air is Solid: Rematerialising Capital in *Cube* and *Videodrome*'. *Socialism and Democracy*. November 2006. p. 218.

communication channels intended purely for the transfer of data. In terms of textual form, *Spook Country* and subsequently *Zero History* pierce the thin layer between fiction and reality more convincingly than any of Gibson's previous novels. As Gibson confirms they aim to be as close to 'interactive fiction' as can be achieved in printed form, unseen hypertextual links that hover 'just outside the printed page' allowing for every minute element in the text to be crosschecked, itemised, and addressed by the reader.[142] In the recent novels a chapter-on chapter-off assemblage of *petits récits* is used (which Kunzru also implements in *Transmission*), the perspective switching between Hollis, Milgrim and Tito in a technique which guarantees if not a traditional conclusion then at least a final coming together of the ensemble. As much a chain reaction or technological bricolage as traditional fiction, Gibson's work says a great deal about contemporary structuration of texts and the incapacitation of the epic sweeping narrative.

But the fate of the intermediary in whatever form, and consequences of their work commodifying these new dimensions, is really a sideshow, an obfuscation of the main issue: the pecuniary administration and profiteering that has left advanced technological nations asking where, exactly, did all the money go? Rippling throughout *Spook Country*, traces of the commercial and covert appear and disappear as the focus of attention changes from locking down the services of Bobby Chombo and the locative artists, to the hunt for a $100 million money container that went missing from the real-life '$12 billion in US currency' sent to Iraq by the Federal Reserve from April 2003 to 2004.[143] Taking verbatim from the coverage and then speculating on the trajectory of a portion of the transition money, the fictional hundred million expunged from the actual $2.4 billion rushed out on 22nd June 2004 is less a trite statement on blood money and the spoils of war profiteering as it is a

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[142] Warren Ellis. 'Q&A: William Gibson discusses *Spook Country*'. *Wired*. 24 July 2007. http://www.wired.com/culture/culturereviews/magazine/15-08/pl_print; Gibson's ideas/cultural references seep into the technological mainstream like few other authors (Bigend has a 'real' Wikipedia page, the fictional Node magazine was made available as a 'mirror site' at http://nodemagazine.wordpress.com/).

[143] At least $9 billion of the $12 billion flown to Baghdad went missing. For mishandling of the Iraqi money see Christian Miller. 'Worries Raised on Handling of Funds in Iraq'. *L.A. Times*. 22 June 2005. http://articles.latimes.com/2005/jun/22/nation/na-cash22; and see also Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele. 'Billions over Baghdad'. *Vanity Fair*. October 2007. http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2007/10/iraq_billions200710.

commentary on ‘a sort of permanent resident in the system, never quite arriving’, and an allusion to the tarnished status of the ‘US hundred’ (*PR* 309-60, 132) as international currency.

‘Money tends to virtuality’ (*T* 272), as Kunzru rightly points out, and in a far less problematic way than the human form. But what effect does this have on its power? The cash consignment is tracked by one of a network of ‘old spooks…forced out because they wouldn’t toe a party line’, part of a dying breed who ‘would’ve been in charge of something, in America, when grown-ups still ran things’ (*SC* 310-9). The usually unchallenged breaking down of public paper money into private virtual wealth is scuppered in this instance by a successful attempt to infect the bounty with ‘medical cesium’ (*SC* 347). Performed and backed by an old Cold War guard hovering at the edges of the Bush regime, the prank to irradiate the container destined for a laundering operation run through a church in Idaho is, however, a slingshot attack that holds more metaphoric value than real impact. Last seen travelling back towards the US, the fortune does have all its intrinsic value removed by the stunt, and is made into a cursed object, a cancerous hazard forced back into the system from whence it came. Yet Gibson also makes clear that the system is so vast and so ingrained that ingestion of an antigen of this size is easily manageable. The same, too, can be said of the Leela virus in *Transmission*. Infections and viral infestations that can be cataclysmic for the individual are seemingly absorbed and neutralised by the vastness of a greater technological order from which they may originate. When imparted on the individual they have the capacity in an absurd sense to purify or destroy. As Hollis is warned by the old man, the ‘whole business had to play out initially in spook country, and might well remain there for a very long time’ (*SC* 369), the infected money suspended in and eventually glossed over by conspiratorial networks (criminal or otherwise) that lurk beneath/hover over the surface of planet brand.

And like the intermittency of a flickering bulb *Spook Country* is refulgent with such surfaces that are both there and not there. In a text that feels, like digital environments, oddly claustrophobic, spooky apparitions appear everywhere in myriad form. Tito’s ‘Cuban-

Chinese' crime family are 'illegal facilitators' that perform 'like ghosts' (*SC* 230) amongst the everyday; the dirty money is a centrifugal force, real but elusive and transient; the almost paranormal V.R. celebrity art set up by Chombo using the same GPS technology that tracked the container makes it possible to overlay a 'virtual rendition of Scott Fitzgerald's heart attack' (*SC* 38) at the actual location it took place. In addition to the virtual celebrity re-enactments clipped rigidly over the top of the material world, the central characters are also not visionaries as such but witnesses to varieties of floating digital consumer detritus that bulge in and out of the human consciousness, be it Milgrim's lorazepam/clotiazepam-inflected 'glimpses of spectral others', or the 'translucent' tentacles 'the length of nebulae' (*SC* 211, 205) Hollis experiences while talking with Bigend. Be they hallucinations brought on by addiction to anti-anxiety drugs or the appearance of tentacles that resemble the imagined Mongolian Death Worm which Hollis adopts as 'a sort of mascot' for her 'anxiety' (*SC* 349), these are responses which correlate to an extent with Alex Link's description of Gibson's 'urban landscape[s]' as sites 'for the uncanny…now pregnant with repressed threat'.[144] No longer repressed, these are palpable manifestations of the pressure exerted on the modern technological subject, by an awareness of what Virilio calls 'underhand administration' and the ambient terror heaped onto the subject by living in a state of 'fear management' and continuous replication.[145]

Smudging the already thin lines between art, advertising, and propaganda, *Spook Country* ends with a congregation admiring a communal avant-garde form of one such defence mechanism: a 'giant cartoon rendition of the Mongolian Death Worm', tail winding 'through the various windows of Bigend's pyramidal aerie like an eel through the skull of a cow' (*SC* 370). Left deciding whether to approve Bigend's request to use her band's hit 'Hard to Be One' for a 'zillion-dollar Chinese car commercial', and also acting as the barricade between the old man and whatever designs were in place for Blue Ant to commodify the truth about the money consignment, the shared virtual projection of the Death Worm is both display and

[144] Alex Link. 'Global War, Global Capital, and the Work of Art in William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*'. *Contemporary Literature*. Summer 2008. p. 215.
[145] Virilio. *The Original Accident*. pp. 17, 16.

trophy for Hollis and the other anxious subjects caught in the agency's web. The anxiety monster confronted as virtual projection, it is a minor victory over Bigend's brand capitalism which is also laced with the daunting prospect of grudgingly integrating into a 'network of financial flows' that shape 'social relationships over the entire planet'.[146] Fantasies of joining the market are never far away in Gibson, the suggestion being that it may be better to be in on it ironically than outside it altogether. The introduction of the Chinese commercial also ties into the shifting power relationships that undermine the impression still sold to many outsiders that America was and is always booming, a theme that remains prominent throughout the whole latter half of the thesis. What has been a specific concern throughout this chapter is the balance of allure and denial as subject collides with object, 'Hard to Be One' the consummate theme song in the march towards what Baudrillard perceived as total integration. As an anthem it mirrors the crisis between fear and prosperity, the demand for conformity and fragmentation of the self, and the controlling of lives played out globally in the still indeterminate spaces between the real and the virtual.

Whether in Gibson or Kunzru, when the individuals in these texts confront the inequalities and discrepancies of consumer society they are forced to accept they cannot compete with the speed, efficiency, or resources available to larger hierarchical structures within the apparatus. As a consequence the act of defiance is limited for the most part to a series of non-verbal ripostes, like the combative strategies we see gleefully enacted at the end of *Spook Country*, or the art of disappearance used by Kunzru. Devastatingly brought out in *Transmission*, the mirror world is full of noise and silence, a communications system that depends at its core on a series of tightly mediated outward messages made to look like a reciprocal pathway or conversation between two channels. The disproportionate formal division of *Transmission* into 'Signal' and 'Noise' reflects the shape and level of distortion in the 'signal-to-noise ratio' when lives and standards of perception are dictated to 'by the technical reproduction of a sound or image'.[147] The main body of text ('Signal') represents

[146] Castells. *The Information Age Vol. 1*. p. 502.
[147] James Der Derian. *Antidiplomacy: Spies, Terror, Speed, and War*. Oxford. 1992. p. 142.

the pure facts of Arjun's cry for help in the unleashing of the Leela virus. 'Noise', on the other hand, is a bowdlerised version of events, a truncation of the story's aftermath in which a frightened boy can be 'labelled a terrorist by governments and media agencies around the world' (*T* 287).

In both the pure signal and extraneous noise, Arjun is a consumed brand of digital martyr that fuels all factions. As we saw with 9/11, manufactured oppositional forces like Arjun are made into the 'phantasm of international terror', the 'reflection of global capitalism' in a 'world of illusion' (*T* 103). Whether such terrorists are real or mediated, as Baudrillard correctly points out the violence of modern terrorism is a 'simulacrum of violence, emerging less from passion than from the screen'.[148] As the military-connected Garreth tells Hollis in *Zero History*, terrorism is 'almost exclusively about branding' (*ZH* 285). Sanitised, filtered, kept at a distance, where there was once need there now only remains performance and excess. This is why Tiziana Terranova, looking from a posthuman perspective, displays wariness for older print and television media that benefits from the muzzling of the consumer in a staunchly one-way exchange. But 'interactive technologies' initiating a 'collective evolution from the passive consumption of corporate-dominated media', to active 'symbiotic relationships with intimate machines', is still propitious rather than a certain part of the cultural fabric, the older mediums resiliently fighting back by attaching new forms of CMC technology to old formats in order to give its consumers at least a sense of control and participation.[149] And while the texts looked at are all highly cautious of the power wielded by one-way mediums, they also embrace the possibility that the alternative – greater human collusion with so-called intimate machines new to the market – can also lead to different but still deeply problematic resolutions.

To emerge back at the entry point of this chapter, let us first borrow something from Debord:

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[148] Baudrillard. *The Transparency of Evil*. p. 75.

[149] Tiziana Terranova. 'Posthuman unbounded: Artificial evolution and high-tech subcultures'. *Futurenatural: Nature, Science, Culture*. London. 1996. pp. 169, 175; I am thinking here of the popularity of television talent shows and reality programming reliant on highly lucrative public voting systems.

> Isolation underpins technology, and technology isolates in its turn; all *goods* proposed by the spectacular system, from cars to televisions, also serve as weapons for that system as it strives to reinforce the isolation of "the lonely crowd".[150]

The idea of the lonely crowd consuming goods to fill a void, while still relevant, seems almost quaint and in need of updating when compared with the dimensions added to our perception by virtual technology in recent decades. Even as recently as 1991, Hayles, while criticising the extremity of Baudrillard's thought, suggested that virtual reality environments are

> limited by the length of the cables attaching the body apparatus to the computer. Only when these boundaries do not exist, or cease to signify that one has left the simulation and entered reality, does the dreamscape that Baudrillard evokes shimmer into existence'.[151]

The boundary dissolved, what could be dismissed as flippant technological speculation twenty or thirty years ago is now standard wireless practice, the sobering cable that once drew a line between material and virtual no longer necessary, now no longer an issue as human contact is made more and more obsolete by the sophistication and advancing transparency of the interface. At least some of the reasons why consumers feel the need to escape into new virtual technology should by now be apparent, but one final glance at *Spook Country* goes some way to explaining the kind of cultural pathology that new virtual realities can inflict on people that choose to flee into it.

Once consumers needed products to buy themselves time, now the emphasis is on purchasing space, the type Chombo constructs through a grid that allows flight to 'the other side of the screen' (*SC* 67). Expansive and profitable, the malleable, incomplete and ungoverned virtual is also, for the easily affected, an escape route from the treachery of the material world and its tyrannical representations. And as a true twenty-first century figure, Chombo's work with VR is a logical evolutionary step for technology beyond cyberspace, and a hint to the next phase in the restructuration of spatial perception which really began as far back as the Renaissance and, as mentioned in relation to Brecht, the development of the refracting telescope. While we may all be 'doing VR' every time we look at a screen, when a

[150] Debord. *Society of the Spectacle*. p. 22.
[151] N. Katherine Hayles. 'In Response to Jean Baudrillard: The Borders of Madness'. *Science Fiction Studies*. November 1991. p. 321.

subject like Chombo 'sees everything in terms of GPS grid-lines' (*SC* 68, 42) we are left dangerously close to Debord's forecast of the '*social hallucination*' standing in for 'the faculty of encounter'.[152] The individual is 'driven into a form of madness' by 'resorting to magical devices' and manufactured mind states in a misguided quest for freedom.[153] This crossing over into a state where our material lives are less than real, into something other than mere entertainment technology, is well summarised in Castells's use of the oxymoronic 'real virtuality', a system gradually taking hold in which a person's reality can be 'entirely captured, fully immersed in a virtual image setting'.[154] Leslie Fiedler saw the embryonic formulation of this crisscrossing bipolar condition on the American scene as early as 1965:

> It is finally insanity, then, that the futurists learn to admire and emulate, quite as they learn to pursue vision instead of learning, hallucination rather than logic. The schizophrenic replaces the sage as their ideal, their new cultural hero.[155]

And it is the 'schizophrenic phenomenon' that can make the socially impaired like Chombo into gurus for the wireless age, actants facilitating excursions into baseless parallel worlds that 'psychiatry used to call a loss of the sense of reality'.[156] Personality traits where 'there is often an exaggeration of the more intellectual, spatial, or schematic modes of consciousness and expression' find an outlet and are commodified.[157] This is the commodification of what is essentially an expression of mental illness, those 'dominated by spatiality' like Chombo, with a 'tendency to only see the skeleton in things', needing a delusional virtualised reality in order to properly function.[158] What is perhaps surprising is the frequency with which other subjects not displaying these traits are shown wanting to interact with this reified hallucination-space. In *Transmission* the motivation of one such borderline creature is financial, Li Kwan Young using an online role-playing game Elderquest to extract 'real-world value' from virtual 'potions, scrolls, weapons, and armour' sold on eBay. When the

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[152] Debord. *Society of the Spectacle*. pp. 152-3.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Castells. *The Information Age Vol. 1*. p. 404.
[155] Fiedler. 'The New Mutants'. p. 398.
[156] Joseph Gabel. *False Consciousness: An Essay on Reification*. Oxford. 1975. p. 314.
[157] Louis A. Sass. 'Self and World in Schizophrenia: Three Classic Approaches'. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, and Psychology*. December 2001. p. 256.
[158] Gabel. *False Consciousness*. p. 80; Sass 'Self and World in Schizophrenia'. p. 260.

Elderquest servers are reset due to the Leela virus, causing loss of virtual stock and prestige, the assassination contract placed on the source of the problem has every 'reality-challenged role player in the world' (*T* 290) acting as bounty hunters, leaving Arjun Mehta with a very real price on his head due to weak spots in a virtual system. The schizophrenic flux is again seen when Hollis's mind drifts to thoughts of 'echolalia' (*ZH* 5): what was once a psychological disorder involving verbal repetition now conformed to through memes and trending topics that assess the heat or worth of social information within the virtual network.

This gradual desensitisation to the unnaturalness and danger of movement between dual realities, for the mind as well as the body, is questioned by Hollis when pondering whether locative art going overground would 'mean that the untagged, unscripted world would gradually fill with virtual things, as beautiful or ugly or banal as anything one encountered on the web already' (*SC* 142). To bring the entire discussion full circle, in *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche wrote: 'Not infrequently, one encounters copies of important people; and, as with paintings, most people prefer the copy to the original'.[159] For all Nietzsche's work, the search for the world of appearance continues, not only in organised religions but also in the version of secular afterlife sold to us by the absurd world of consumer entertainment. In the formative decades of the twenty-first century we are living out Baudrillard's confrontation between the dual form and those with a vested interest in accelerating the movement towards the virtual. Have we reached a dystopian point where the consumer can no longer distinguish the material world from the virtual product? Not while it still remains a contestable space of utopian possibilities *and* realm for capital to 'exploit our own desires as the inexhaustible material of consumption'.[160] Whether the commodification of human desires is inexhaustible as Robert Markley mentions is open to debate. Although implicitly critical of an all-consuming system, it circumnavigates the archaeological school of thought put forward by Foucault, via Nietzsche, of a history devoid of human agency; it denies the possibility of humanity 'disintegrating before our eyes', the only thing left for analysis the 'void left by

[159] Nietzsche. *Human, All Too Human*. p. 176.
[160] Robert Markley. 'Boundaries: Mathematics, Alienation, and the Metaphysics of Cyberspace'. *Configurations*. 1994. p. 504.

man's disappearance'.[161] Such disappearance can be taken as literal, or more figuratively in an increased sense of detachment and weightlessness, in the virtual dissolve.

With Gibson the human element survives within the text, but at a cost. Engulfed by brand saturation and mimicry of the object, the traditional American transformation narrative is turned into a faddish play of techniques with no final redemption, humanity deformed and imprisoned by technology in a childish web-like world of actions without any substantial consequences. In Kunzru we get the possibility of escape through disappearance. If not in death it is at least offered to characters who find idealistic untapped crevices between material and virtual consumer realities. In attempting to stand back to reflect consumer culture, the work of both authors becomes tinged with an aloofness that only reinforces their status as products of the mirror world and its dialect. They trade in the currency of transparent aesthetics and the anti-climax, unavoidably so when the themes of the texts are so tightly associated with flatness induced by virtuality and what is represented through the screen.

[161] Foucault. *The Order of Things*. p. 342.

The Technological State

> To the States, or any one of them, or any city of the States, *Resist much, obey little,*
> Once unquestioning obedience, once fully enslaved,
> Once fully enslaved, no nation, state, city, of this earth, ever afterward resumes its liberty.[1]
> Walt Whitman, 'To The States' (1881-2)

> We are always in transition, slipping from one state to the next.[2]
> Hari Kunzru, *Gods Without Men* (2011)

In 'To The States', one of the pithy introductory poems added to the final edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1881-2), Walt Whitman converts the notion of the 'state' into a polychromatic display. The word is seared into the lines of the poem to raise awareness of the frailty of democratic freedoms, of individuality, and of resistance to systems of control threatened by totalitarian absorption. Similarly, the underlying conversation on 'state' throughout the thesis has carried with it several different meanings. Woven into the discourse has been an examination of global apparatus wielding political, economic, and administrative control, the groups and communities materialising in opposition to the actions of these controlling structures, and the physical and psychological responses of individuals existing within such formations. Like Whitman's poetry, that inquiry has crystallised around events unfolding in the United States.

The purpose of adopting the theme of the 'technological state', running it alongside that of 'virtual frontiers', was to open an aperture onto human existence as it is lived within contemporary technological arrangements. The two critical concepts were combined to shed light on what David Harvey describes as an 'administrative map of the world' constructed around 'a hierarchy of territorial units', all units functioning simultaneously at 'a variety of geographical scales (from urban neighbourhood to global power bloc)'.[3] If the intended contribution of the thesis to the field of techno-cultural American criticism is to be condensed

[1] Walt Whitman. 'To The States'. 1881-2. *Leaves of Grass*. Boston. 1959. p. 11.
[2] Kunzru. *Gods Without Men*. p. 351.
[3] Harvey. *New Imperialism*. p. 194.

into limited space, then it is perhaps best summarised as the defining of a virtual layer attached to the territories marked out on Harvey's 'administrative map of the world', and an extended riff on 'state' as metaphor for an increasingly connected global territory and technological condition.

Foregrounded by 'virtual frontiers', the addition of the 'technological state' as a muted theoretical framework has provided the flexibility to analyse the journey towards the technologised twenty-first century experience, a voyage between virtual and material loci that has observed technology from a set of multiple crisscrossing viewpoints. Strategies like this, common in heterogeneous fields like area studies, prioritise what Paul Giles outlines in *Virtual Americas* (2002) as a 'comparative dimension' often missing from readings of specific movements or national cultures 'wholly from the inside'.[4] Indeed, much of the critical purchase in the use of virtual frontiers and technological state as theoretical ligaments derives from the desire to move beyond the 'post-', to show there are alternative strategies for contemporary criticism other than the trading of prefixes that can never fully be detached from ideas and principles they set out to articulate a stand against. Here the research has been interdisciplinary and focused on identification of the global machinery of capital accumulation: its technologies, virtualisation, and the sites of resistance that offer alternative perspectives to state apparatus but remain attached to its construction. As such, partitioning of the kind transmitted by Huntington, reviewed in chapter three, is rejected in favour of permeability and the alignment of pathways. The relation of frontier and state to the US (and territories under its influence) has instead been treated as an intersubjective discursive phenomenon: an aporetic response to a global predicament still actively evolving between capital and techno-culture. It is a climate Karl Marx phrased well in *Grundrisse* (1858), in the observation that capital strives 'to tear down every spatial barrier…and conquer the whole earth for its market'; annihilating 'space with time', its primary concern is a reduction of the time capital spends in 'motion from one place to another'.[5]

[4] Paul Giles. *Virtual Americas: Transnational Fictions and the Transatlantic Imaginary*. London. 2002. p. 3.
[5] Karl Marx. *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*. 1858. London. 1993. pp. 358-9.

The persistence of this temporospatial dilemma is evident throughout Ernest Mandel's division of capitalist economics of recent centuries into undulating waves or cycles.[6] Each new financial crisis that occurs is posited as like no other before. Claims are made that it is impossible for the market to expand beyond a certain place or point. And yet, whatever configuration you choose to define it by, (late, post-industrial, neoliberal, global) capitalism and the flow of capital have remained integral to existence in the discussed timeframe. The type of growth the market requires is challenged by environmental and spatial constraints, hence the emphasis throughout the thesis on expansion and contraction. Only the remotest zones in Africa, Asia, and Latin America are 'yet to be fully colonised by capital accumulation'.[7] Nonetheless, new territorial units are in the process of emerging. Like those described towards the end of *The Submission*, new sprawling urban landscapes like those previously seen in the US are developing in zones still with the resources to be able to accumulate surplus wealth. This is mirrored in virtual terms by the capacity of technology to open up new spaces for human interaction. New virtual frontiers are made for capital to flow towards and through, creating networks that also allow for ever-deeper and more immersive modes of human-cybernetic exchange.

To bring the discussion back to Heidegger, and so full circle, what must be reiterated is the prioritisation of human awareness of the effects created in the exchange between humanity and technology. Heidegger rejected the philosophical perspective of 'industrial products' and technological objects as 'morally neutral'.[8] He instead claimed that:

> Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it. But we are delivered over to it in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral; for this conception of it, to which today we particularly like to pay homage, makes us utterly blind to the essence of technology' (*CT* 311-2).

For Heidegger, the perfectly ordered technological state is not utopian but dystopian. What Borgmann describes as 'the final phase' in a 'long metaphysical development', it is a chilling

[6] Ernest Mandel. *Late Capitalism*. 1972. London. 1978. pp. 13-43, 108-46; for an earlier interpretation see Nikolai Kondratiev. 'Long Cycles of Economic Conjecture'. 1926. *The Works of Nikolai D. Kondratiev*. London. 1998.
[7] Harvey. *New Imperialism*. p. 30.
[8] Mario Bunge. *Treatise on Basic Philosophy*. Dordrecht. 1985. p. 310.

conclusion for Heidegger, a point at which technology has assumed full control over being.[9] In the development of 'actor-network theory' Bruno Latour, also briefly mentioned in the introduction, criticises what he sees as Heidegger's overplaying of the domination of humanity by technology, observing that this kind of philosophical 'theory fails to capture practice'.[10] Rather than asymmetrically, or in opposition, actor-network theory allows for subject and object to be looked at symmetrically and dynamically, with human and nonhuman positioned as actants entangled in networks. Actants in networks, human and nonhuman are both seen as scripted, goal-driven, as both having a program of action, the results of their interaction – what results from the folding of human and nonhuman into each other – reclassified by Latour as the 'hybrid actor'.[11] Latour expounds on the hybrid actor through the causal relation of gun and gunman.[12] But this type of analysis has also been prominent through the thesis; in chapter three for example, in the impact of the exchange between plane and terrorist in the events of 9/11, or indeed what was created from the circuitous exchange between nation, President, and camera in the transmission conveying the news of the killing of Osama bin Laden. In comparison to Heidegger, Latour's approach to technological engagement is detached, systematic, from a more-settled global situation and historical position more comfortable with subject-object exchange and the process of virtualisation. Where Heidegger saw oppression, Latour sees interactivity. Heidegger and Latour meet, however, in the understanding that technology should be assessed as something other than neutral. What keeps Heidegger relevant to the contemporary moment, and so to this thesis, is that he did not view our relationship to technology as a problem to be solved but as a condition to become aware of and be treated, in order to break from the possibility that every human thought and action can be reduced to mere calculation. In this sense the advancement of technological objects as neutral needs to be contested, as it does not account for – indeed hides – the social values written into the technical code of devices,

[9] Borgmann. *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*. p. 60.
[10] Latour. *Pandora's Hope*. p. 174.
[11] Ibid. p. 180.
[12] Ibid. pp.177-80.

organisations, and systems. This is seen at work in the analysis of the attempts to sell Windows Vista, in the post-9/11 campaigns put in place by Charlotte Beers, and also on a broader social level in texts like *The Submission*.

In the set of case studies chosen for the thesis we also see the 'enframing' to which Heidegger referred become a recurring theme, a situation in which anything available or constructed is seen as resources to be manipulated by larger, more powerful, agents. For Heidegger we are standing-reserve, a resource, but at the same time we perceive ourselves to have power over those resources. Heidegger's point is that everything now treated as standing-reserve is done so to maximise efficiency, as this is what he saw as technology's purpose. Modern technology 'unlocks and exposes' but its effect is reductive, as it seeks the 'maximum yield at the minimum expense' (*CT* 321). When every natural object has been ordered, humanity, in 'the midst of objectlessness', as 'nothing but the orderer of the standing-reserve', stands on 'the very brink of a precipitous fall, as it has reached the point where humanity itself 'will have to be taken as standing reserve' (*CT* 332). What we are given is a false sense of control and empowerment, a technological understanding which is in fact an obscuration of reality in its entirety. We see this in extremis in *Moon*, where the entirely restricted and calculated life cycle of the Sam Bell clones is disrupted, the awakening of the subject from blinkered technological viewpoint leading to a richer and more complex understanding of their reality. In contrast, texts like Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*, or the fiction of William Gibson in the previous chapter, show how frightening it can be for characters to be so immersed in virtual technological environments that the ability to differentiate between technological reality and natural environment is erased entirely. *Brave New World* took the theme a step further. The population optimised to a point where it has no way of stepping out of the technological framework, reality in Huxley's advanced industrial society is so strictly controlled by technology and science that the majority remain unaware, are transformed into a resource from first breath to last.

But this vision of technology dominating human nature is not the full story. The vacuous and debilitating aspects of advanced technology Heidegger warned against, what Herbert Marcuse also marked out as a 'one-dimensional' existence of conformity and false-needs, is just one possible outcome of many. It is contrasted in *Extremely Loud*, where a destructive event based on technological optimisation (9/11) is worked through by returning to practices that reject efficiency, what from a technological perspective can be deemed marginal practices such as friendship, love, family, and community. In fact these traits, these marginal practices – like friendship, described in the introduction as a virtualisation – are central concerns for many of the leading protagonists throughout the chosen case studies.[13] Jaz in *Gods Without Men* is drawn in and then repulsed by the technological perspective; in *Cosmopolis*, Packer's testing of the market's parameters under the auspice of a cross-town haircut, itself a rejection of efficient practice, lead to his downfall and destruction. Similarly the appearance of Hip Hop as a new cultural paradigm, as discussed in chapter two, initially adopted technology for its own sake and to its own communal ends, openly attempting to challenge the notion that all forms of resistance can be rationalised and neutralised by the technological apparatus and its overtly uncritical dominant culture.

While technology has been folded into human perception during this time, it has also challenged the indigenous attachment to land, offering new virtual spaces to explore and novel cyberspatial territories to inhabit. But these spaces, although offering strong cultural bonds, provide an unnatural sense of attachment. Connectivity is made possible through interaction with and consumption of technological products. And in the disembodied virtual space available every social strata is offered choices in the distanciation of subject from material consequences. As well as connectivity, the possibility of subterfuge, brief allegiances, and swift excommunication are all also a button click away. What I have suggested throughout is that technology, capital, and the virtual, feed into each other, that the perceptual and transitional states created between them overlap, mirror each other, and

[13] See p. 12.

comingle. With recent cycles of capital accumulation and virtualisation through technology so closely tied to US economic and political systems (so in turn to global culture), the nation's narratives form a rich tapestry that allows critics to study the manifestation of fears and anxieties expressed by subjects positioned within this framework. Towards the end of the research I discovered Robert W. King's 1950 essay 'Whither the Technological State?', which pessimistically questions the adaptation of technology and its effect on the 'pattern of living' for American citizens and their counterparts 'in a world-wide movement':

> A good workman knows his tools- and, as a tool, technology has vast powers to shape political institutions as well as the material world. To lose political liberty were bad enough – a forfeit from which material standards of living would surely suffer – but to lose it, as now threatens, through heedless and uncritical judgments respecting the best way to achieve more ambitious technological heights would constitute a major tragedy in the checkered history of human freedom.[14]

King, like Heidegger, was writing against a tide of optimism at the beginning of a phase of ebullient US consumer expansion, but prior to the eruptions of revolutionary ideas deliberated in chapters two and four. King's uneasiness over the totalitarian vibrations beneath the gloss of America's post-1945 democratic projects is vividly conveyed six years later in Allen Ginsberg's 'America' (1956). Ginsberg's poem was part of the first stirrings of social dissatisfaction at racial inequalities and puritanical stigmatising of sexual/political difference generated by the 'machinery' at work in the post-WWII United States.[15] Echoing some of Whitman's formal techniques, Ginsberg lets the consciousness in the poem drift from national to personal: not just as an attack on the nation, but also as a critique of the American individual's acquiescence to the artificial 'impression' projected out by 'the television set'.

Ginsberg was clearly expressing the yearning for a life free from corruptive mediation, a key narrative in the historical composition of American identity. The unerring perpetuity of the condition is perhaps better defined in Emerson's 'Experience', where, as intimated in the quotation from the previous chapter, there is a gradual understanding that our perception

[14] Robert W. King. 'Whither the Technological State?'. *Political Science Quarterly*. March 1950. pp. 55, 67.
[15] Allen Ginsberg. 'America'. 1956. *Selected Poems: 1947-1995*. London. 1997. p. 64.

has been controlled to an extent since the dawning of human consciousness.[16] Emerson follows this up by stating that: 'we have no means of correcting these colored and distorting lenses', the power of their control over experience threatening to 'absorb all things…Nature, art, persons, letters, religions, objects, successively tumble in, and God is but one of its ideas'.[17] The thrust of this thesis has been the sequestration of the mediating 'lenses' to which Emerson referred, allowing for a unique assessment of the virtual dimension apparent in the historical and cultural (technological) narratives appearing out of the American ascent to major player within a controlling global apparatus.

A century later, Julian Huxley restated Emerson's point on the minimisation of religion while advancing an argument for secular humanism, noting the 'Newtonian and Darwinian revolutions' combined to 'push the deity ever farther into the background, until his only role in cosmic affairs appeared as that of initial creator of a self-running machine'.[18] To revisit Karatani, the inference is that the reality of religion and money as substance is an illusion. However, accusations of either sphere as illusory, as virtual, have not brought about their disappearance. Karatani, explaining how the drive of capitalism is so 'deeply inscribed in our culture', goes as far as to say 'it will never stop by itself. Neither will it be stopped by any rational control or by state intervention'.[19] With it not possible for capital or state to be fully 'dissolved by the globalization of capitalism', Karatani is suggesting the best we can hope for to keep capital in line is state regulation.[20] At this stage, the role of technology in the absorption or incremental virtualisation of human experience hardly needs to be stressed, though its complexity is summarised perfectly in a brief list of events from 1956. In the same year Ginsberg wrote 'America', the 'first transatlantic telephone cable' system was completed between Scotland and Canada, IBM introduced the first hard disk drive to the market and continued its work on 'automated business computing', while the Marshall Islanders gazed in sublime terror at the 'second sun[s]' created during the final nuclear

[16] See p. 199.
[17] Emerson. 'Experience'. pp. 304-5.
[18] Julian Huxley. 'Evolutionary Humanism'. *New Bottles for New Wine*. London. 1957. p. 284.
[19] Karatani. *Transcritique*. pp. 11-2.
[20] Ibid.

weapon tests in and around Bikini Atoll.[21] As groups sought to monopolise markets or connect people through transnational technological innovation, the American military evaluated the nation's capacity to decimate or at least lethally poison the biosphere. Attempting to piece together what exactly happened after 1945, the generations to follow have searched for new channels of freedom. These recent decades, marked by the digitalisation (decluttering/virtualisation) of our lives, can be viewed as a cultural/political/economic cleaning up of the wreckage from WWII, and the century of military and industrial advance that built towards it.

In the introduction I asked what effect the on-going virtualisation of our existence is having on the depth of human perception, and whether there was still space for opposition. First, as alluded to by Marx, the intertwining of capital and technology has restructured time, reified it, and made it complicit with the desires of the market. In doing so time has been reduced to imperceptible fragments, as new virtual spaces have opened up to allow for capital's accelerated circulation. Seen in texts like *Cosmopolis* and *Gods Without Men*, authors are now attempting to communicate how technology works in timescales that go beyond human perception, especially in terms of how technology is introduced, and how it is implemented/exploited by financial markets. The futures markets, quant models, and algorithmic trading that support the speculative fiction of credit are a rich technological narrative outside the bounds of this thesis, but one worthy of more detailed investigation in its own right. With regard to the frontier, these processing speeds have unleashed a new rich continent through the virtual, the acceleration of processing speeds also remoulding human perception, enhancing imaginative possibilities as we mimic the desire of processing speeds that reach towards the instant.

As the technological advance moved from industry, to transport, to leisure, human interaction with it has also moved from operation of machines, to data input, to engagement

[21] Lionel Warnes. *Electronic and Electrical Engineering: Principles and Practice*. 1994. Basingstoke. 2003. p. 538; Emerson W. Pugh. *Building IBM: Shaping an Industry and its Technology*. 1995. Boston, Mass. p. 190; Martin Cohen and Andrew McKillop. *The Doomsday Machine: The High Price of Nuclear Energy, the World's Most Dangerous Fuel*. New York. 2012. pp. 25-6.

with miniaturised and hybridised devices that can be prompted or interacted with through gesture. Referring to recent consumer products reliant on gesture and screen, in an interview from 2004 Baudrillard commented that:

> The screen is not a display case, it's interactive. It's a transition. An interface is something other than a mirror. As long as we had the mirror of production, consumption, and signs, we had the possibility of going beyond it and then returning. But you cannot return from beyond the screen. It's immersion; it's definitive.[22]

This is not the case, yet, although the ramifications of the transfiguration of the flesh into the world of representation have already been rigorously cross-examined in films like *Videodrome* and *eXistenZ*. However, until we reach an age where technology can tap directly into consciousness, human immersion can only ever be a virtual or artificial movement. What this interaction provides is a continuation of the pendulous swing between utopian and dystopian sentiment, the narratives enmeshed in the thesis an extension of an unceasing bourgeois infatuation with escaping the restraints placed on the human subject by capital and state.

From the beginning I have drawn attention to the importance of the crossing of thresholds to the human mind. A major incentive within the research has been to illuminate the transitions between internal and external, the frontier a measuring line in the complex ever-present exchange between one and zero. A human infatuation that has gained and continues to gain momentum, technology and digital code feed the desire to understand the exchange while satiating the continuing need for belief in the transcendent. Even the most pessimistic of dystopian texts – *The Road*, *Cosmopolis*, etc. – elevate the transcendent exchange, if only to narrate its deflation, its impossibility. Humanity craves further shifts from hierarchical structures towards egalitarianism. It is apparent in virtual platforms offering evaluations of worth in everything from the facile (YouTube) to the distribution of unfiltered news on social networks accompanying the Arab Spring uprisings. Too far-reaching for the constraints of this thesis, the technological possibilities and limitations placed on

[22] Baudrillard. 'The Murder of the Sign'. pp. 11-2.

revolutionary waves in the Arab world would be the next logical step in assessing virtual frontiers and technological state as critical concepts. As would a thorough treatment of the US National Intelligence Council's admission from 2008 that, in terms of 'size, speed, and directional flow, the transfer of global wealth and economic power now under way—roughly from West to East—is without precedent in modern history'.[23]

But the directive here has been to chronicle the progression of the two critical concepts through recent history, America presiding over the cultural narratives discussed within that timeframe. Many of them enunciate the non-conscious and non-mediated spaces coruscating alongside accepted historical trajectories and projected national realities. While decisions concerning state apparatus are still made within the upper chambers of constructed hierarchies, the chosen texts empower mathematical notions of emergence detached from top-down plans or dogmatic leadership. Global hybridised inflections are accentuated in the layering of historical, technological, and social realities. As in *Zero History*, in Europe we are now seeing the protection of national economies through centralisation, the stabilisation of traumatised nation-states overseen by financial technocrats.[24] In this state, mirrored across continents, democratic modes and political perspectives are jeopardised, leaving only ghosts: hollowed-out versions of party politics and voting systems that serve apparatus over citizen.

Inevitably, I am aware that this discussion could have slipped into a flat simulation of everything about the technological state it seeks to flag up. Approaching themes from such close historical proximity is a risk. This is not archaeological excavation. To reiterate a point from chapter four, in this mirror-world jurisdiction it can be stated that in the West 'there are no longer revolutions'.[25] The meaning of the word changed irrevocably, we are forced to face an inward devouring of space and subject in the ultimate form of consumerism. As Heidegger foresaw, in the absence of the object we in many ways consume each other. The

[23] National Intelligence Council. 'Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World'. November 2008. p. 6. Available online at http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Global%20Trends_2025%20Report.pdf.
[24] For the European financial crisis see Tony Barber. 'Eurozone turmoil: enter the technocrats'. www.ft.com. 11 November 2011. http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/93c5cb36-0c92-11e1-a45b-00144feabdc0.html#axzz25s1USjXo.
[25] Baudrillard. *The Intelligence of Evil*. p. 127.

texts approached in this thesis embolden unease over the replacement of the revitalising clockwork sweep of the social machinery with the stuttering technocratic convulsion. They leave us to make sense of nomadic transnational tales that deftly meld the positive illusion of progress with the dark empty undercurrent of consumer consciousness.

Like the Holographic Principle in Quantum Physics, the proposition Baudrillard put forward regarding total integration and the dual form opens up a kind of paradox involving separate yet connected dimensions which cannot be reconciled. What is lost in the exchange between material and virtual, in conversion from analog to digital, is depth: the virtual space, like outer space, has no atmosphere. Albeit a paranoid viewpoint, what Baudrillard conveyed, and what many of the operatives building narratives inside this thesis seem to crave, is the formulation of some form of constructive opposition. Caught between the desire to belong and being owned we are ruthlessly exploited. A picture is painted of a virtualised reality many decades into a resilient phase of stagnation over innovation. Trends and cycles are manufactured, reworked, and tightly regulated, in a world run by forces that would see us living in a static state of being, creatures enslaved and pacified by the objects we consume.

As an adjunct to the ecologically aware Viridian Design Movement, Bruce Sterling provided a manifesto in which he reflects on whether the twentieth century was lived out under the fatal delusion that 'philosophy trumps engineering', with 'technology, not ideology' being 'the twentieth-century's lasting legacy'.[26] This thesis is a testament to that enquiry. We adapt, attach, explore and decipher. We become something else, almost, as powerful resource-hungry structures vie for our attention against the tide of the technological advance. We have choice, at a price. Technology hits us like drops of water on a pond, the ripples – however temporary or permanent they may be – crafting new contours across the surface of human existence. In the contemporary texts examined, virtual or otherwise, the frontier is both as close and distant as it ever was. The future is near and now, has always been: this is the technological state.

[26] Bruce Sterling. 'The Manifesto of January 3, 2000'. www.fantasymaps.com. 3 January 2000. http://fantasymaps.com/stuff/manifest.html; for the Viridian Design Movement see http://www.viridiandesign.org.

Disc 1

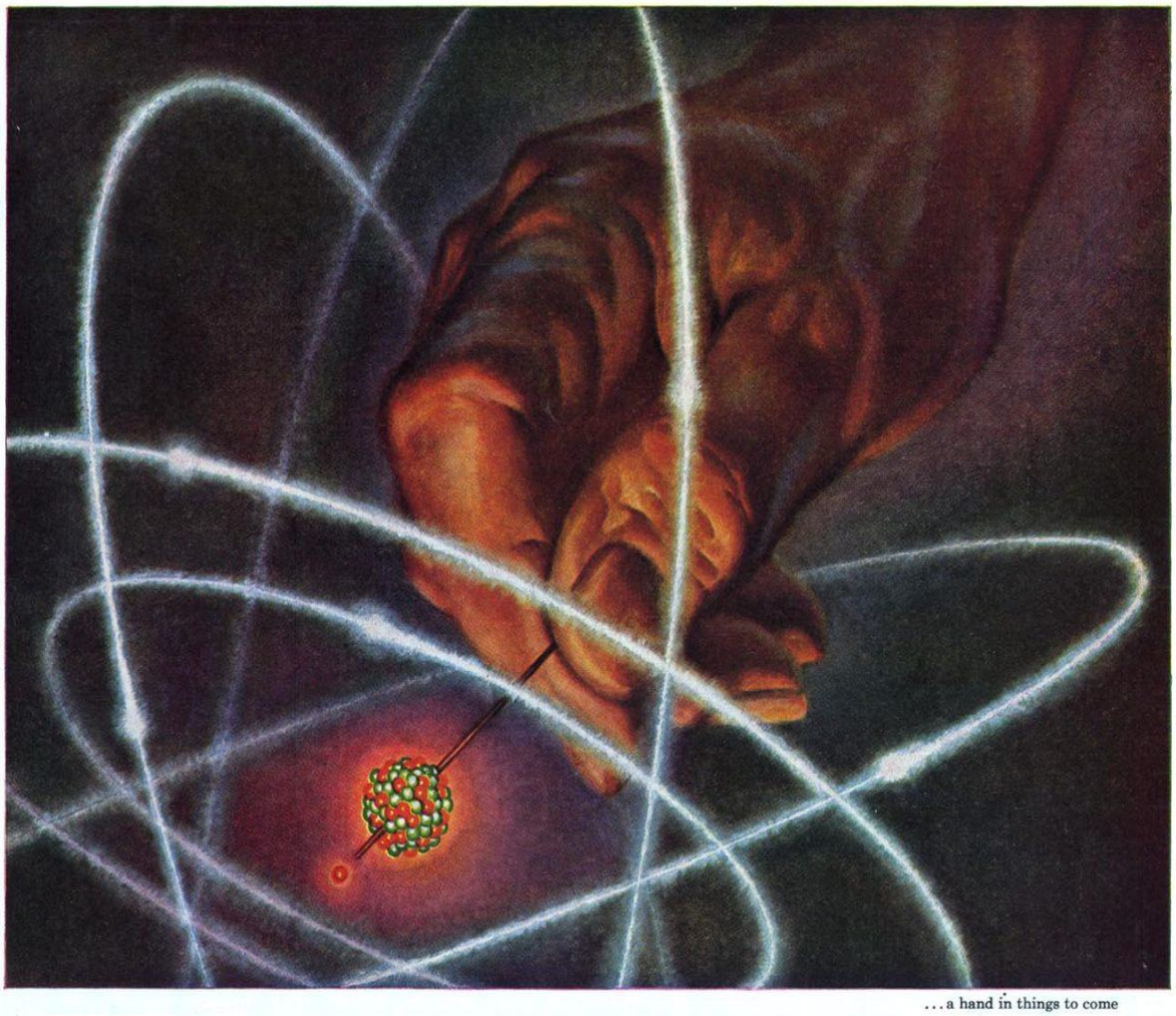
1. Jungle Brothers. ‘In Time’. Idlers Records, 1989.
2. KRS ONE. ‘French Connection’. Les Disques Du Crépuscule, 1997.
3. KRS ONE. ‘Outta Here’. Jive Records, 1993.
4. Nas. 'Hip Hop is Dead'. Columbia Records, 2006.
5. Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five. ‘The Message’. Sugar Hill Records, 1982.
6. Nas. ‘Represent’. Columbia Records, 1994.
7. Fab 5 Freddy. ‘Down By Law’. 1982. Beyongolia Records, 1998.
8. MC Shan. ‘Down By Law’. Cold Chillin’ Records, 1987.
9. KRS ONE. ‘Hip Hop vs. Rap’. Jive Records, 1993.
10. Das EFX. ‘Real Hip Hop’. EastWest Records, 1995.
11. Mic Geronimo. ‘It’s Real’. Blunt Recordings, 1995.
12. KRS ONE and Marley Marl. ‘Hip Hop Lives’. Koch Records, 2007.
13. Spoonie Gee. ‘Love Rap’. Enjoy Records, 1980.
14. The Sugar Hill Gang. ‘Rapper’s Delight’. Sugar Hill Records, 1979.
15. Chic. 'Good Times'. Atlantic Records, 1979.
16. Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five. ‘Superappin’. Enjoy Records, 1979.
17. Funky Four Plus One More. ‘Rappin’ and Rocking the House’. Enjoy Records, 1979.
18. Spoonie Gee and the Treacherous Three. ‘New Rap Language’. Enjoy Records, 1980.
19. KRS ONE. ‘Ah Yeah’. Front Page Entertainment, 1995.
20. The Pharcyde. ‘Ya Mama’. Delicious Vinyl, 1992.
21. Smoothe Da Hustler. ‘Broken Language’. Profile Records, 1995.
22. Big Daddy Kane. ‘Brother, Brother’. Cold Chillin’ Records, 1991.
23. Public Enemy. ‘Don’t Believe the Hype’. Def Jam, 1988.
24. Public Enemy. ‘Fight the Power’. Motown/MCA, 1989.
25. Terminator X. ‘Buck Whylin’. Columbia Records, 1990.

Disc 2

1. EPMD. 'Crossover'. Def Jam Recordings, 1992.
2. Blondie. 'Rapture'. Chrysalis Records, 1982.
3. K-Rob and RAMMELLZEE. ‘Beat Bop’. Tartown Records, 1983.
4. Schoolly D. 'Gangster Boogie'. Cut Masters Records, 1984.
5. Schoolly D. 'P.S.K.- What Does it Mean?'. Schoolly D Records, 1985.
6. LL Cool J. 'I Can't Live Without My Radio'. Def Jam Records, 1985.
7. Run DMC. 'My Adidas'. Profile Records, 1986.
8. Eric B and Rakim. 'Paid in Full'. Island Records, 1987.
9. Schoolly D. ‘Signifying Rapper’. Jive Records, 1988.
10. Boogie Down Productions. 'Poetry'. B-Boy Records, 1987.
11. Boogie Down Productions. 'Criminal Minded'. B-Boy Records, 1987.
12. Geto Boys. 'Assassins'. Def American, 1990.
13. Geto Boys. 'Mind of a Lunatic'. Def American, 1990.
14. Gang Starr. ‘Gusto’. Wild Pitch Records, 1988.
15. Top Choice Clique. ‘Peace of Mind’. Sample Records, 1989.
16. Geto Boys. 'City Under Siege'. Def American, 1990.
17. The New Seekers. 'I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing (In Perfect Harmony). Philips, 1971.
18. Geto Boys. ‘The World is a Ghetto’. Rap-a-Lot/Noo Trybe, 1996.
19. Notorious BIG. ‘Hypnotize’. Bad Boy Records, 1996.
20. Jeru the Damaja. ‘The Bullshit’. PayDay/FFRR Records, 1996.
21. Puff Daddy featuring Faith Evans & 112. ‘I’ll Be Missing You’. Bad Boy Records, 1997.
22. The Police. ‘Every Breath You Take’. A&M Records, 1983.
23. Dead Prez. ‘It’s Bigger than Hip Hop’. Loud Records, 1999.
24. Dead Prez. ‘Hip Hop’. Loud Records, 1999.
25. Mann. ‘Buzzin’. Mercury Records, 2010.
26. Dr. Dre ‘Let Me Ride’. Death Row/Interscope, 1993.
27. Nas ‘New York State of Mind’. Columbia Records, 1994.
28. Jay-Z featuring Alicia Keys. ‘Empire State of Mind’. Roc Nation/Atlantic, 2009.
29. Mac Miller. ‘Donald Trump’. Rostrum Records, 2011.
30. Tyler the Creator. ‘Yonkers’. Odd Future Records, 2011.
31. Boogie Down Productions. ‘Exhibit A’. Jive Records, 1990.
32. Jimmy Castor. ‘It’s Just Begun’. RCA Records, 1972.

July 18, 1959

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other persons to riot or to commit any act of physical violence upon any individual or against any real or personal property in furtherance of a riot. Nothing in subparagraph (2)(F) or (4)(A) of this subsection shall apply to the proprietor of any establishment which provides lodging to transient guests, or to any employee acting on behalf of such proprietor, with respect to the enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations of such establishment if such establishment is located within a building which contains not more than five rooms for rent or hire and which is actually occupied by the proprietor as his residence.

"(c) Nothing in this section shall be construed so as to deter any law enforcement officer from lawfully carrying out the duties of his office; and no law enforcement officer shall be considered to be in violation of this section for lawfully carrying out the duties of his office or lawfully enforcing ordinances and laws of the United States, the District of Columbia, any of the several States, or any political subdivision of a State. For purposes of the preceding sentence, the term 'law enforcement officer' means any officer of the United States, the District of Columbia, a State, or political subdivision of a State, who is empowered by law to conduct investigations of, or make arrests because of, offenses against the United States, the District of Columbia, a State, or a political subdivision of a State."

"Law enforcement officer."

(b) Nothing contained in this section shall apply to or affect activities under title VIII of this Act.

Post, p. 81.

(c) The provisions of this section shall not apply to acts or omissions on the part of law enforcement officers, members of the National Guard, as defined in section 101(9) of title 10, United States Code, members of the organized militia of any State or the District of Columbia, not covered by such section 101(9), or members of the Armed Forces of the United States, who are engaged in suppressing a riot or civil disturbance or restoring law and order during a riot or civil disturbance.

70A Stat. 4.

SEC. 102. The analysis of chapter 13 of title18 of the United States Code is amended by adding at the end thereof the following:

"245. Federally protected activities."

Penalties. Conspiracy against rights of citizens. 62 Stat. 696.

SEC. 103. (a) Section 241 of title 18, United States Code, is amended by striking out the final paragraph thereof and substituting the following:

"They shall be fined not more than $10,000 or imprisoned not more than ten years, or both; and if death results, they shall be subject to imprisonment for any term of years or for life."

Deprivation of rights.

(b) Section 242 of title 18, United States Code, is amended by striking out the period at the end thereof and adding the following: "; and if death results shall be subject to imprisonment for any term of years or for life."

42 USC 1973j.

(c) Subsections (a) and (c) of section 12 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (79 Stat. 443, 444) are amended by striking out the words "or (b)" following the words "11(a)".

62 Stat. 795. 18 USC 2071-2076.

SEC. 104. (a) Title 18 of the United States Code is amended by inserting, immediately after chapter 101 thereof, the following new chapter:

"Chapter 102.—RIOTS

"Sec.
"2101. Riots.
"2102. Definitions.

"§ 2101. Riots

"(a)(1) Whoever travels in interstate or foreign commerce or uses any facility of interstate or foreign commerce, including, but not limited to, the mail, telegraph, telephone, radio, or television, with intent—

"(A) to incite a riot; or

"(B) to organize, promote, encourage, participate in, or carry on a riot; or

"(C) to commit any act of violence in furtherance of a riot; or

"(D) to aid or abet any person in inciting or participating in or carrying on a riot or committing any act of violence in furtherance of a riot;

and who either during the course of any such travel or use or thereafter performs or attempts to perform any other overt act for any purpose specified in subparagraph (A), (B), (C), or (D) of this paragraph—

Penalty.

"Shall be fined not more than $10,000, or imprisoned not more than five years, or both.

"(b) In any prosecution under this section, proof that a defendant engaged or attempted to engage in one or more of the overt acts described in subparagraph (A), (B), (C), or (D) of paragraph (1) of subsection (a) and (1) has traveled in interstate or foreign commerce, or (2) has use of or used any facility of interstate or foreign commerce, including but not limited to, mail, telegraph, telephone, radio, or television, to communicate with or broadcast to any person or group of persons prior to such overt acts, such travel or use shall be admissible proof to establish that such defendant traveled in or used such facility of interstate or foreign commerce.

"(c) A judgment of conviction or acquittal on the merits under the laws of any State shall be a bar to any prosecution hereunder for the same act or acts.

Prosecution proceedings.

"(d) Whenever, in the opinion of the Attorney General or of the appropriate officer of the Department of Justice charged by law or under the instructions of the Attorney General with authority to act, any person shall have violated this chapter, the Department shall proceed as speedily as possible with a prosecution of such person hereunder and with any appeal which may lie from any decision adverse to the Government resulting from such prosecution; or in the alternative

Report to Congress.

shall report in writing, to the respective Houses of the Congress, the Department's reason for not so proceeding.

"(e) Nothing contained in this section shall be construed to make it unlawful for any person to travel in, or use any facility of, interstate or foreign commerce for the purpose of pursuing the legitimate objectives of organized labor, through orderly and lawful means.

"(f) Nothing in this section shall be construed as indicating an intent on the part of Congress to prevent any State, any possession or Commonwealth of the United States, or the District of Columbia, from exercising jurisdiction over any offense over which it would have jurisdiction in the absence of this section; nor shall anything in this section be construed as depriving State and local law enforcement authorities of responsibility for prosecuting acts that may be violations of this section and that are violations of State and local law.

"§ 2102. Definitions

"(a) As used in this chapter, the term 'riot' means a public disturbance involving (1) an act or acts of violence by one or more persons part of an assemblage of three or more persons, which act or acts shall constitute a clear and present danger of, or shall result in, damage or injury to the property of any other person or to the person of any other individual or (2) a threat or threats of the commission of an act or acts of violence by one or more persons part of an assemblage of three or more persons having, individually or collectively, the ability of immediate execution of such threat or threats, where the performance of the threatened act or acts of violence would constitute a clear and present danger of, or would result in, damage or injury to the property of any other person or to the person of any other individual.

"(b) As used in this chapter, the term 'to incite a riot', or 'to organize, promote, encourage, participate in, or carry on a riot', includes, but is not limited to, urging or instigating other persons to riot, but shall not be deemed to mean the mere oral or written (1) advocacy of ideas or (2) expression of belief, not involving advocacy of any act or acts of violence or assertion of the rightness of, or the right to commit, any such act or acts."

(b) The table of contents to "PART I.—CRIMES" of title 18, United States Code, is amended by inserting after the following chapter reference: 62 Stat. 684.

"101. Records and reports ..... 2071"

a new chapter reference as follows:

"102. Riots ..... 2101".

TITLE II—RIGHTS OF INDIANS

DEFINITIONS

SEC. 201. For purposes of this title, the term—

(1) "Indian tribe" means any tribe, band, or other group of Indians subject to the jurisdiction of the United States and recognized as possessing powers of self-government;

(2) "powers of self-government" means and includes all governmental powers possessed by an Indian tribe, executive, legislative, and judicial, and all offices, bodies, and tribunals by and through which they are executed, including courts of Indian offenses; and

(3) "Indian court" means any Indian tribal court or court of Indian offense.

INDIAN RIGHTS

SEC. 202. No Indian tribe in exercising powers of self-government shall—

(1) make or enforce any law prohibiting the free exercise of religion, or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition for a redress of grievances;

(2) violate the right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects against unreasonable search and seizures, nor issue warrants, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched and the person or thing to be seized;

(3) subject any person for the same offense to be twice put in jeopardy;

(4) compel any person in any criminal case to be a witness against himself;

(5) take any private property for a public use without just compensation;

(6) deny to any person in a criminal proceeding the right to a speedy and public trial, to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation, to be confronted with the witnesses against him, to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and at his own expense to have the assistance of counsel for his defense;

(7) require excessive bail, impose excessive fines, inflict cruel and unusual punishments, and in no event impose for conviction of any one offense any penalty or punishment greater than imprisonment for a term of six months or a fine of $500, or both; Penalty, limitation.

(8) deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of its laws or deprive any person of liberty or property without due process of law;

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