

# **Violence and Dystopia:**

*Mimesis and Sacrifice in Contemporary Western Dystopian Narratives*

DPhil Thesis

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## ABSTRACT

### *Violence and Dystopia: Mimesis and Sacrifice in Contemporary Western Dystopian Narratives*

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*Violence and Dystopia* is a critical examination of imitative desire, scapegoating and sacrifice in selected contemporary Western dystopian narratives through the lens of René Girard's mimetic theory. The first chapter offers an overview of the history of Western utopia/dystopia with a special emphasis on the problem of conflictive mimesis and scapegoating violence, and a critical introduction to Girard's theory. The second chapter is devoted to J.G. Ballard's seminal novel *Crash* (1973). It is argued that the car crash functions as a metaphor for conflictive mimetic desire and leads to a quasi-sacrificial crisis as defined by Girard for archaic religion. The attempt of the medieval *propheta*-figure to resolve the crisis through violence fails and leads to potential violence without end. The third chapter focuses on the psychogeographical writings of Iain Sinclair. Walking the streets of London he represents the excluded underside of the world of Ballardian speed. The walking subject is portrayed in terms of the expelled victim of Girardian theory. The fourth chapter considers violent crowds as portrayed by Ballard's late fiction, the writings of Stewart Home and David Peace's *GB84* (2004). In accordance with Girard's hypothesis, the discussed narratives reveal the failure of scapegoat expulsion to restore peace to the potentially self-destructive violent crowds. The fifth chapter examines the post-apocalyptic environments resulting from failed scapegoat expulsion and mimetic conflict out of control, as portrayed in Sinclair's *Radon Daughters* (1994), Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and Will Self's *The Book of Dave* (2006). In conclusion it will become evident that Girard's theory forms an indispensable analytical tool uncovering the pivotal themes of imitation and scapegoating in the discussed narratives: themes largely ignored in current scholarship on dystopia and secondary literature on the focussed authors.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Modern Dystopia

Lyman Tower Sargent, a leading theorist in utopian studies, has remarked that the twentieth century deserves its reputation as the dystopian century.<sup>1</sup> The modern dystopia as a literary genre, “depicting places worse than the ones we live in”<sup>2</sup>, with Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We* (1924) as a foundational text, has continually been fuelled by the human catastrophes of the century: “twenty-five million dead in the name of Nazism, one hundred million in that of communism”, the killing fields of Cambodia and major economic depressions, to name just a few. In the genre of dystopia these catastrophes are perceived as the result of its older enemy brother: utopia. While the latter term has, ever since its inception in Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516), captured the human striving for the perfect society – the *eutopia*: “good place” – it also carries in its name the impossibility of ever reaching this good place – *outopia*: literally: “not place.” Utopia is thus strictly speaking ambiguous: it describes the non-existing place that can be better or worse than the existing society, but it has more commonly been identified with eutopia.

More’s *Utopia* coincided with the early-modern age of discovery and it is thus not surprising that his and other early utopias, such as Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis* (1627), are displaced onto distant islands. It is these roots that gave birth to the utopian sub-genres of the Gulliveriana and the Robinsonade.<sup>3</sup> The discovery of indigenous

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<sup>1</sup> Lyman Tower Sargent, “Utopia and the Late Twentieth Century: A View from North America”, in *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World*, eds. Roland Schaer, Gregory Claeys, and Lyman Tower Sargent (New York / Oxford, 2000), p. 334.

<sup>2</sup> Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, Introduction. *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination* (New York / London, 2003), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> See Sargent (2000), p. 12.

peoples also provided a new impetus to the utopian idea of the perfectibility of man, leading to the paradisaical myth of the “dying and resurrected noble savage”.<sup>4</sup>

The sources of utopian thinking, however lie further back in the history of the West: a major source is the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Utopian thought has been inspired by the Old Testament Prophets’ hope of a restoration of Israel and by the Christian transformation of that hope into the expectation of the Second Coming and the establishment of the New Jerusalem on earth as described in the last chapter of Revelation. But until the Middle Ages the Kingdom of God was not of this world. According to Augustine, the City of God, in the form of the church or later Monastic intentional communities, could, despite its function as the pilgrim city leading towards the Kingdom of God, at best be a simulacrum of the Kingdom. The real Kingdom of God would be, however, “made without hands”, i.e. created by God. Medieval Millenarianism, which according to Danielle Lecoq and Roland Schaer shapes the coming of utopia in historical time<sup>5</sup>, was thus clearly condemned as heresy.

It is with the rise of modernity that the Augustinian ideal was gradually abandoned and utopia’s interest became firmly grounded in this world. Utopias brought about without human effort were replaced by utopias brought about with human effort, to use Sargent’s way of putting it.<sup>6</sup> The Judaeo-Christian idea of the Kingdom of God became fused with the Hellenic ideal city, as Krishan Kumar observes: “It was of course through Plato’s Republic, rediscovered along with other Greek writings in the European Renaissance, that the Hellenic ideal city most influenced Western utopia.”<sup>7</sup> Among other sources for the strange amalgam that forms the matrix of Western utopia, Kumar lists the myth of the Golden Age and the Arcadian idyll. But whereas these *outopoi* in

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Danielle Lecoq and Roland Schaer, “Ancient, Biblical, and Medieval Traditions”, in *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World*, eds. Roland Schaer, Gregory Claeys, and Lyman Tower Sargent (New York / Oxford, 2000), p. 58.

<sup>6</sup> Lyman Tower Sargent, “Utopian Traditions: Themes and Variations“, in Gregory Claeys, Lyman Tower Sargent, Roland Schaer, eds., *Utopia: The Western Search for the Ideal Society* (New York, 2000), pp. 8, 10.

<sup>7</sup> Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (Oxford, 1985), p. 5.

their original contexts lie in the past, they were appropriated by modernity to foretell the future: “‘The Golden Age of the human species is not behind us, it is before us’, declared Henri Saint-Simon.”<sup>8</sup> While early post-More utopias were still explicitly Christian, dealing with the problem of how to create a better society for the fallen, they were as clearly brought about by human effort.

The idea of the Kingdom of God was thus gradually transformed to become man’s perfected secular future. The age of modern science, as Jacob Bronowski explains in *Magic, Science and Civilization* (1978), does no longer suppose the existence of two separate logics of the natural and the supernatural but is trying to form a single picture of the whole of nature including man.<sup>9</sup> Here lies modern utopia’s continuity with the Judeo-Christian Kingdom of God, as Roland Schaer makes clear through the example of Francis Bacon: the latter explicitly saw the idea of the Kingdom of God, as propagated in the Jewish prophetic tradition and medieval Millenarianism, resuscitated through the agency of advancement of human knowledge. Thus the ground was laid for later utopias, such as socialism – the prime nineteenth-century utopia. Socialism was not only propagated by its most famous advocates Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, but also in the form of Edward Bellamy’s Christian socialism, as proposed in his *Looking Backward: 2000 – 1887* (1888). Both the Marxist salvific narrative and Bellamy’s vision depend not only on a total reorganisation of the whole of society but also on the modern belief in technological progress. In *News From Nowhere* (1891) on the other hand William Morris proposed an atavistic return to localised, agrarian communities and the rejection of technology and progress. This particular utopia is more akin to the anarchist vision of a decentralisation of society which survives to the present day in various forms of intentional communities.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Jacob Bronowski, *Magic, Science, and Civilization* (New York, 1978).p. 39.

The bright light of human-made utopias has blinded utopians to the cost involved, so much so that any price seems justified. Frédéric Rouvillois cites the example of the French revolutionary and Deputy of the National Convention of 1792, Jean-Baptiste Carrier: “I am ready to sacrifice all mankind to my beloved Republic.”<sup>10</sup> Sometimes the cost is altogether repressed, as is the case with twentieth century modernist architecture. Ruth Eaton comments on Le Corbusier: “For the Swiss theoretician, the first global conflict had created a tabula rasa as for a great new age that would be classical and orderly in accordance with scientifically established rules of harmony in tune with the universe.”<sup>11</sup> John Carey has pointed out that “the aim of all utopias, to a greater or lesser extent, is to eliminate real people.”<sup>12</sup> This, as he continues to explain, might not necessarily be a bad thing, when one considers the atrocities that real people have committed. But one can also already see how the attempt at a transformation of real human beings into perfect utopians can turn into hell on earth. As Rouvillois points out, utopia can emerge

as the site of perpetual inversion: unanimity becomes isolation, freedom alienation, and transparency emptiness. Totalitarianism, like utopia, purports to have triumphed over the anguish of time and the accidents of history. The new era it announces will be everlasting, and the new self can confidently expect a smooth and reassuring future wherein his supremacy will only be confirmed.”<sup>13</sup>

While, as Sargent further observes, the prophets and most apocalypses – portraying utopias made without hands – stress the troubles to come, with only a brief description of a better society,<sup>14</sup> the inverse seems to be true for utopias brought about by human effort. The troubles to come are justified and marginalized, eclipsed by the

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<sup>10</sup> Frédéric Rouvillois, “Utopia and Totalitarianism”, in Gregory Claeys, Lyman Tower Sargent, Roland Schaer, eds., *Utopia: The Western Search for the Ideal Society* (New York, 2000), p. 317.

<sup>11</sup> Ruth Eaton, “Architecture and Urbanism: the Faces of Utopia”, in Gregory Claeys, Lyman Tower Sargent, Roland Schaer, eds., *Utopia: The Western Search for the Ideal Society* (New York, 2000), p. 304.

<sup>12</sup> John Carey, Introduction. *The Faber Book of Utopias* (London, 1999), p. xii.

<sup>13</sup> See Rouvillois (2000), p. 322.

<sup>14</sup> See Sargent (2000), p. 9.

promises of utopia. The troubles can thus assume the function of redemptive violence. This accounts for the fact that despite the horrors of the twentieth century, the utopian imagination survives, for example in the novels of H.G. Wells, to form a dialectic with the dystopian impulse.<sup>15</sup> It is in that sense that “utopia and anti-utopia support each other, forming two sides of the same literary genre.” With the foundation of the UN out of World War II, the pattern of Wells’ narratives was realised in history: out of the destruction of an old world order emerges a (supposedly) lasting new world order.

The belief in redemptive violence is a belief in war as the only hygiene, as Roland Schaer has pointed out,<sup>16</sup> a hygiene reminiscent of violent, medieval millenarianism. It is also the dilemma, as Carey has argued, that confronts all utopian projects: they aim at a new world, but must destroy the old.<sup>17</sup> Rouvillois writes: “And what we see beyond the common project of seeing ‘the kingdom of heaven fulfilled at last upon earth’ is a similar wish, inherently linking utopia and totalitarianism, to put man in God’s place, even if he must endure all the torments of hell to reach it.”<sup>18</sup>

It is the role of dystopia as a literary genre to display openly the horrific, repressed undersides of these modern, “made by hand” utopias – not unlike the tradition of the Jewish prophets and the apocalyptic tradition. After the horrors of the twentieth century one can look back at More’s *Utopia*, as Sargent does, and perceive it as clearly dystopian: “But being fallen Christians, the people do not live up to the perfection expected, and a quite vicious legal system is needed to make sure they do.”<sup>19</sup> Carey points out how, in their attempts to perfect humanity, “More’s Utopians are in favour of exterminating the Swiss, on the grounds that their savage, warlike disposition makes

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<sup>15</sup> As Kumar (1985), p. 387, points out, Wells himself seems to have abandoned the utopian hope in the last years of his life.

<sup>16</sup> Roland Schaer: “Utopia and Twentieth-century Avant-gardes”, in Gregory Claeys, Lyman Tower Sargent, Roland Schaer, eds., *Utopia: The Western Search for the Ideal Society* (New York, 2000), p. 278. However, Carey points out with respect to Wells that he is one of many utopian authors who possibly regard their utopias as dystopias (see Carey (1999), p. xii).

<sup>17</sup> See Carey (1999), p. xi.

<sup>18</sup> See Rouvillois (2000), p. 331.

<sup>19</sup> See Sargent (2000), p. 8.

them unfit to survive.”<sup>20</sup> The decision over who is fit to live and who has to be eliminated to achieve utopia has taken various forms in history and includes nineteenth-century discussions about the elimination of criminals and Nazi-eugenics. The latter two examples resurface in the (post)modern guise of attempts at identifying a criminal gene and bio-genetic engineering.

But utopia has also suffered heavy blows from within its own system in the twentieth century. The discovery of the Second Law of Thermodynamics puts strict limits on the scientific utopia and posits an end state of chaos and entropy in the universe. M. Keith Booker, in *Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide* (1994), has pointed out how technological utopianism reached its peak in the nineteenth century, with scientific discoveries already beginning to undermine the unlimited faith in the power of science, leading to the ghastly vision of a gradually decaying universe.<sup>21</sup>

A darker view of humanity and human progress, as Booker further points out, was also espoused by Darwin in his theory of evolution. While explaining the emergence of humanity scientifically through “natural selection”, it also foreshadowed humanity’s dark future: Thomas Huxley’s fears that evolution would develop in ways antithetical to human nature, leading to a gradual increase in human misery and eventually to a downfall of civilization were soon to become the horrendous reality of social Darwinism.

The elimination of human beings as a step towards utopia can be related to modern psychology and Freud’s theory of a darker origin of civilization itself, through the expulsion of a scapegoat in the founding murder. According to Freudian psychology the self is conflicted between the pleasure and the reality principle: individual desire is constrained by social order. At best, therefore, the Freudian drives can be sublimated into a useful service to society. The point of civilization is thus to limit individual

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<sup>20</sup> See Carey (1999), p. xviii.

<sup>21</sup> M. Keith Booker, *Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide* (New York / London, 1994), p. 5f.

liberty and to avoid a primitivism and anarchy that would be even worse. It is these psychological *topoi* underneath the “cordon sanitaire” of civilization that modern Dystopian fiction portrays. This is why, as Booker further contends, scapegoating – as the outlet for human aggression – often occurs in Dystopian fiction.<sup>22</sup>

The post-war period has witnessed a new type of totalitarianism, transcending the parameters defined by Zamyatin in *We* and Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). The rise of the post-industrial era in the West and the collapse of the Soviet Union gave birth to a global, utopian consumerist society in which the mass culture described by Theodor Adorno,<sup>23</sup> and prophetically portrayed by Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932), becomes the new Foucauldian, carceral society. As Kumar points out, science could deliver – and continues to deliver – now in the service of consumerism – utopia in real life and real time, despite the limits imposed on it by a decaying universe.<sup>24</sup>

While consumerism forms the new utopia, indulging the individual pleasure principle, its dark underside is threatening to become a fearful reality. The predictions of the Club of Rome in *The Limits of Growth* (1972), followed by the oil-price shock in 1973, sketch a nightmarish vision of the future, in which all natural resources will have been used up. Ulrich Becks’s *Risikogesellschaft* (1986), prophetically published only months before Chernobyl, argues that technological modernity produces “non-intended side effects” (“nicht-intendierte Nebenfolgen”), threatening to destroy the then emerging global consumer society. Recent history thus provides ample resources for the tradition of the canonical dystopias of Zamyatin, Orwell and Huxley to be continued by writers such as J.G. Ballard, Philip K. Dick, Kurt Vonnegut and Ray Bradbury. Their “new maps of hell”, as Kingsley Amis put it, document the continuing alienation of

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Adorno, Theodor W. *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*. J. M. Bernstein ed. (London, 1991).

<sup>24</sup> Krishan Kumar, “Utopia and Anti-Utopia in the Twentieth Century”, in Gregory Claeys, Lyman Tower Sargent, Roland Schaer, eds., *Utopia: The Western Search for the Ideal Society* (New York, 2000), p. 257.

human beings by technological modernity, the negative effects of “metal into flesh” as Will Self succinctly summarizes modernity.<sup>25</sup>

The “non-intended side effects” of technological modernity are changing shape, but are present today in the form of “global warming” due to carbon dioxide emissions or the recent Deepwater Horizon disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, fuelling the dystopian imagination. At the same time, the critique of one particular utopia can give rise to a rival utopia. In the case of the criticism of environmental pollution it is the “green utopia”, the “ecotopia”, paradigmatically exemplified by Ernst Callenbach’s eponymous novel (1978). The line between utopia and anti-utopia thus becomes blurred, as Kumar observes.<sup>26</sup> Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan have labelled these particular proponents of the utopian genre as “critical utopias”. The latter, inspired by the oppositional political culture of the late 1960s and early 1970s, are shaped by ecological, feminist and New Left thought and “reject utopia as blueprint while preserving it as a dream. [...] By forging visions of better but open futures, these utopian writings developed a critique of dominant ideology and traced new vectors of opposition.” Among critical utopias are the novels of Ursula K. Le Guin and Marge Piercy.

“In the 1980s”, as Baccolini and Moylan further observe, “this utopian tendency came to an end.” The critical utopia was replaced by the “critical dystopia”.<sup>27</sup> The dystopian impulse was revived by films such as Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner* (1982) or “cyber punk” novels such as William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* (1984). In the face of the intensifying Right-wing fundamentalism in the 1980s of Reagan and Thatcher, the future seemed once more bleak and totalitarian to these writers. But unlike the canonical dystopias of Orwell, Zamyatin and Huxley, there is still room for hope in the critical

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<sup>25</sup> See Baccolini and Moylan (2003), p. 2 and Will Self, *My Idea of Fun* (London, 1993), p. 313: “You see I find this image [...] to be almost integral to any understanding of the modern world. Metal into flesh – the impact of metal on flesh. Isn’t that the whole of progress in a nutshell[?]”

<sup>26</sup> See Kumar (2000), p. 262.

<sup>27</sup> See Baccolini and Moylan (2003), p. 2.

dystopia, as for example in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) or Marge Piercy's *He, She, and It* (1991). In contrast to critical utopias, however, the critical dystopias maintain hope outside their pages. This particular subgenre is thus structurally similar to utopias made without hands and the idea of the Kingdom of God: the ideal society is indicated only as a faint hope on the horizon of a portrayed apocalypse.

The blurring between utopia and dystopia is, as Kumar writes, also the reason why

[t]he end of the millennium sees a confused picture. Apocalypse wars with optimism, utopianism with an acute sense that a "new world disorder" is upon us. Perhaps that is why it seems to have been so difficult for anyone to produce a convincing utopia or anti-utopia in traditional literary form.<sup>28</sup>

Both the utopian and dystopian imagination continue to be inspired by current trends in society. Technological modernity has led to the creation of the "global village" in the network society, as predicted by Marshall McLuhan. While the internet paves the way for a global, utopian community, dystopian fears also haunt "computopia", as for example in the millennial-apocalyptic instance of the "Y2K"-bug or the possibility of "cyber-terrorism", explored by "cyber-punk" fiction. Consumerism, rooted in the expansion of Western capitalism, also sees a return of the repressed in the form of religious fundamentalism and the emerging threat of global terrorism. Francis Fukuyama's utopian vision of an "end of history" (1992) in the global spread of Western-style liberal democracies thus seems to give way to Samuel Huntington's dystopian thesis of a "clash of civilizations" (1996).

From an early twenty-first-century perspective, the realizations of utopian dreams with their haunting dystopian undersides have thus had many faces, providing rich and varied sources for the dystopian imagination. In the following discussion of recent, selected dystopian novels, the driving question will be, whether, underlying the

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<sup>28</sup> See Kumar (2000), p. 264.

various dystopias, and the utopian-dystopian dialectic, there exists a common cause, or deep structure, that can explain the diverse surface manifestations of dystopian worlds. Baccolini and Moylan observe that critical dystopias suggest causes rather than the mere revelation of symptoms.<sup>29</sup> G.K. Chesterton also suggests an underlying cause for the creation of dystopian environments, when he writes:

The weakness of all utopias is this, that they take the greatest difficulty of man [i.e. original sin] and assume it to be overcome, and then give an elaborate account of the overcoming of smaller ones. They first assume that no man will want more than his share, and then are very ingenious in explaining whether his share will be delivered by motor-car or balloon.<sup>30</sup>

Sargent, in “The Problem of the ‘Flawed Utopia’: A note on the Costs of Eutopia” relates Chesterton’s argument of an unlimited human desire to the problem of the cost of utopia.<sup>31</sup> He conceptualizes the cost of utopia in terms of the scapegoat, paradigmatically typified in Ursula K. Le Guin’s short story “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” (1975). The existence of the story’s utopian society depends on the sacrifice of one child. The story, as Sargent continues to explain, is rooted in a literary tradition leading back to Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880). The pivotal question is: “Would and should we be willing to punish someone or allow someone to suffer if to do so we would produce a good life for everyone else?”<sup>32</sup> Dostoevsky and Le Guin give an emphatic “no” for an answer. But the assumption is still that the expulsion of a scapegoat, even if rejected, would actually produce utopia. Would expulsion really solve the collective problem of desire: bringing a reconciliation of limited satisfaction and unlimited desires within a social context? And why should it in the first place?

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<sup>29</sup> See Baccolini and Moylan (2003), p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> G.K. Chesterton, “Mr H.G. Wells and the Giants”, in *Heretics* (London, 1905) p. 73-4.

<sup>31</sup> Lyman Tower Sargent, “The Problem of the ‘Flawed Utopia’: A note on the Costs of Eutopia”, in Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, eds: *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination* (New York; London, 2003), pp. 224ff.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 227.

Ruth Levitas and Lucy Sargisson have drawn attention to the anti-foundationalist influence of Lyotardian postmodernity on recent dystopian fiction.<sup>33</sup> This, as will be seen, is certainly true in general for most of the treated works in the following discussion, but it is also true in the more particular sense of scapegoat expulsions: the latter fail to found a new utopian, societal order. The critical examination of the failure of sacrifice and scapegoating in dystopian narratives has to be embedded in a coherent theoretical framework which evades the unconscious blurring of terms like “scapegoating” and “sacrifice”. In Sargent’s example just referred to, both Sargent and Le Guin use the terms interchangeably as synonyms. As will be seen in the discussion of the individual works, this unconscious blurring is a recurring phenomenon in criticism of dystopia and of individual authors.

René Girard’s mimetic theory provides coherent definitions of both terms, tracing them back to their roots in archaic religion.<sup>34</sup> Girard’s reading of archaic scapegoating and sacrifice is firmly based on the Gospel hermeneutic and deconstruction of pagan blood sacrifice. Girard locates the cause for scapegoat expulsions in the escalation of imitative (mimetic) and potentially conflictive desire. He has translated Christian intuitions – like Chesterton’s – into a coherent theory of human desire and culture,<sup>35</sup> which makes it possible, so runs the argument of the present thesis, to identify the cause at the heart of the creation of modern dystopian environments, both real and imagined. Before an overview can be given of how the fictional material will be treated, it is therefore necessary to introduce Girard’s theory.

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<sup>33</sup> Ruth Levitas and Lucy Sargisson, “Utopia in Dark Times: Optimism/Pessimism and Utopia/Dystopia”, in Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, eds: *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination* (New York; London, 2003), p. 15.

<sup>34</sup> According to *The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion* (general editor Jonathan Z. Smith, San Francisco, 1995) the term “archaic” or “primitive religion” refers to the religion of traditional peoples “who until the colonial expansions of the last half-millennia were largely uninfluenced by the cultures of Europe or Asia (p. 1087). For Girard, these traditional societies are established upon a functioning scapegoat mechanism.

<sup>35</sup> René Girard, *Battling to the End* (Michigan, 2010), p. 177.

## 1.2 René Girard's Mimetic Theory

### 1.2.1 Imitative Desire

In 1961 René Girard published his first book, *Mensonge Romantique, Vérité Romanesque*, which was translated into English in 1965 as *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (henceforth *Deceit*). The book is a diachronic study of five European novelists: Cervantes, Stendhal, Flaubert, Dostoevsky and Proust, roughly covering the time-span of Western modernity, from the publication of the first part of *Don Quixote* in 1605 to the death of Marcel Proust in 1922. As Girard has put it in *A Theater of Envy* (1991; henceforth *Theater*), his study on Shakespeare, he gambled on the possibility that his five novelists might have something in common.<sup>1</sup> This “something” is that human desire is not autonomous but mediated by another’s desire: desire is triangular. The source of desire lies not in the object of desire or in the desiring subject but in the other’s desire. This is the “vérite Romanesque – the novelistic truth” of the French title which Girard opposes to the “mensonge romantique – the romantic lie”. The latter consists of the belief often encountered in Romanticism that the individual’s desire is independent from the surrounding social context. The Romantic, for example, can brave the promethean horrors of industrialisation if only his autonomy of desire remains untainted. In one of his few coinages, Girard introduces the term “interdividuality” to capture the process of identity construction as embedded in a social context and influenced by the models surrounding the “interdividual”.

But Girard does not only extract a criticism of desire originating in the self from these five novelists but also argues for a gradual transformation of mediated desire from the time of Cervantes to that of Proust. In Girardian terms, “external” mediation is gradually replaced by “internal” mediation. Amadis of Gaul, Don Quixote’s fictional

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<sup>1</sup> René Girard, *A Theater of Envy* (New York, 1991), p. 3.

model of desire in matters of knight-errantry, never enters Don Quixote's world, but mediates the knight of La Mancha's desire from the outside. The world of Don Quixote is still the world of medieval feudalism and hence still rigidly structured. For Girard, as he puts it in *Evolution and Conversion* (2007; henceforth *Evolution*),

[t]he only way modernity can be defined is the universalization of internal mediation, for one doesn't have areas of life that would keep people apart from each other, and that would mean that the construction of our beliefs and identity cannot but have strong mimetic components.<sup>2</sup>

In *Deceit* the migration from external to internal mediation is captured in terms of transcendence, or transcendency as Yvonne Freccero puts it in her translation. Medieval vertical transcendency, with God as the ultimate transcendent model, becomes deviated transcendency in modernity or as Girard has put it: "Men become Gods in the eyes of each other."<sup>3</sup> When human beings replace God as the supreme model with each other, imitation becomes anything but harmless. Girard draws on Aristotle's observation in the *Poetics* that the difference between animals and the human being lies in the greater imitative capacity of the latter.<sup>4</sup> For Girard, however, "imitation operates on desire as well." When this is grasped, "it becomes easier to understand how mimesis could produce conflict and rivalries when desire is directed towards the same object."<sup>5</sup>

The emphasis on the conflictive potentials of imitative desire is what distinguishes his theory from other theories of imitation. The dimension of conflictive desire is missing from Aristotelian imitation, which is more concerned with the idea of representation. In recent scientific discussions on imitation, for example in ethology, cognitive science with the discovery of the mirror neuron or theories of cultural

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<sup>2</sup> René Girard João Cezar de Castro Rocha, and Pierpaolo Antonello, *Evolution and Conversion* (London, 2007), p. 240.

<sup>3</sup> René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (Baltimore, 1965), p. 53.

<sup>4</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 4, 48b.

<sup>5</sup> See Girard et al. (2007), p. 140.

evolution such as Richard Dawkins' meme theory, the emphasis is more on action rather than desire.<sup>6</sup>

Although not specifically explored in *Deceit*, Girard engages with a Freudian, triangular understanding of desire but formulates significant objections and modifications in his later books. In *La Violence et le Sacré* (1972; translated into English in 1977 as *Violence and the Sacred*), Girard revisits Freud's reading of the Oedipus myth and provides an alternative explanation for the "Oedipus complex".<sup>7</sup> Girard posits that Freud came very close to discovering the imitative nature of desire with terms like the child's "ambivalence" towards and "identification" with the father. According to Girard, Freud solved the latent conflict between the mimetic process of paternal identification and the autonomous establishment of a particular object as a basis for desire (the sexual cathexis towards the mother) in favour of the latter. In other words, Freud rejects the interpretation that the child innocently imitates the father's desire for the mother but posits rather an autonomous desire of the child for the mother, which then leads to the rivalry between father and son for the mother. Against the latter interpretation, Girard argues that "if we are to believe Freud, the little boy has no difficulty recognizing his father as a rival [...]. Freud is thus conferring on the child powers of discernment not equal but superior to those of most grown-ups."<sup>8</sup>

"The son", as Girard continues to explain, "is always the last to learn that what he desires is incest and patricide. [...] The incest wish, the patricide wish, do not belong to the child but spring from the mind of the adult, the model."<sup>9</sup> Girard introduces Gregory Bateson's concept of the "double bind" into the discussion of imitative desire. On the one hand the father encourages the imitation of the child, on the other hand, the imitation of the father's desire for the mother is strictly discouraged. What is repressed

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>7</sup> René Girard, "Freud and the Oedipus Complex", *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore, 1977), pp. 169 - 192.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

in the Oedipus complex is not the wish for patricide and incest, which are openly displayed in the Oedipus myth, but the ambivalence of imitative desire.

Girard's mimetic rereading of the Freudian relationship between father and son is the prime example for internal mediation. With the rise of modernity the double bind of imitated desire comes to increasingly dominate all human relations. In *Theater*, Girard claims that Shakespeare's plays document the increasing importance of internal mediation in the modern world. On *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, he writes:

Valentine and Proteus can be friends only by desiring alike and, if they do, they are enemies. [...] This Gordian knot is its own explanation, in the sense that any effort to bypass the mimetic *double bind*, short of total renunciation, must produce some kind of "monster", a false reconciliation of entities that should remain irreconcilable.<sup>10</sup>

Mimetic desire is thus not negative per se. It can lead to friendship due to shared interests. But it can turn into destructive rivalries, once the mutually imitated desires converge on the same object – as they must, unless desire is completely renounced. However, it is important to already note that for Girard mimetic desire is not a modern invention. In *Evolution* Girard identifies Augustine in the *Confessions* as the earliest thinker to define this type of mimetic rivalry. Augustine gives an example of two infants who are rivals for milk despite the abundance of milk.<sup>11</sup>

Since friendship and enmity stem from the same source in the mimetic double bind, Girardian theory can dispense with Freudian drives. As Girard puts it in *La Route Antique des Hommes Pervers* (1985), translated as *Job: The Victim of His People* (1987): "It eliminates simply and elegantly the mistaken common-sense notion that claims there must be at least two causes of such apparently contradictory effects: the duality, for example of a 'pleasure principle' and a 'death instinct'. One principle is

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<sup>10</sup> See Girard (1991), pp. 16f.

<sup>11</sup> See Girard et al. (2007), p. 61 and Saint Augustine, *Confessions* (Stillwell, 2008), p. 8: "The weakness then of infant limbs, not its will, is its innocence. Myself have seen and known even a baby envious; it could not speak, yet turned pale and looked bitterly on its foster-brother. Who knows not this? [...] Is that too innocence, when the fountain of milk is flowing in rich abundance, not to endure one to share it, though in extremest need, and whose very life as yet depends thereon?"

enough for both.”<sup>12</sup> The theoretization of mimetic desire allows Girard to get rid of “the entire bric-a-brac of psychiatric terms”, as he puts it in *Theater*<sup>13</sup>, in particular “sado-masochism” and “narcissism”.

In order to trace the origin of these latter two conditions to internal mediation, it is necessary to first understand the difference between mimesis and imitation in Girard’s use: “There is less awareness in mimesis than in imitation.”<sup>14</sup> Internal mediation is normally an unconscious process. Just as the Romantic really believes in the autonomy of his desire, so does the narcissist believe in his desire for himself, the masochist in the righteousness of his punishment and the sadist in his supremacy over the masochist. But if desire is indeed mimetic and not rooted in the desired object, narcissism and sado-masochism can be understood as different ways of dealing with the problem of the obstacle.

When internal mediation turns into mimetic rivalry, the rival is perceived as the obstacle between the fulfilment of desire in the possession of the object. But once the rival is defeated, desire is necessarily frustrated, because the object loses its desirability it only had due to the presence of the rival in the first place. Masochism evades this frustration by creating an insurmountable obstacle in the sadist, whereas the sadist in his repeated violence against the masochist recreates the moment of overcoming the obstacle in his effort to attain divinity. The Freudian myth of narcissism is unmasked by Proust, as Girard explains in *Mimesis and Theory* (2008). Whereas Freud continued to believe in the self-sufficient self-love of others, Girard through Proust sees that “Narcissism, especially intact narcissism is a projection of desire. No one can really be a self-conscious narcissist, a narcissist for himself.”<sup>15</sup> The narcissist believes himself to be self-sufficient. But this is of course an illusion, as the aura of self-sufficiency is created

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<sup>12</sup> René Girard, *Job: The Victim of his People* (London, 1987b) p. 63.

<sup>13</sup> See Girard (1991), p. 109.

<sup>14</sup> See Girard et al. (2007), p. 60.

<sup>15</sup> René Girard and Robert Doran ed., *Mimesis and Theory* (Stanford, 2008), p. 182.

by the desire of others, who, like the narcissist himself, desire the apparent self-sufficiency of the narcissist. Or as Robert Doran has expressed it in his introduction to *Mimesis and Theory*: “Narcissism is thus revealed as a strategy to attract desire, rather than as a psychological condition.”<sup>16</sup>

Underlying these various manifestations of mimetic desire is the subject’s quest for “being”. The world of internal mediation suffers from “ontological sickness”. Thus for Girard, phenomena like sadism and masochism are not sexual in the first instance but existential. In the modern world, in the absence of an external mediator, the other’s being seems superior to one’s own. But everyone feigns superiority towards all others, while at the same time knowing about one’s own absence of being. This is also Girard’s definition of hell: “Everyone thinks that he alone is condemned to hell, and that is what makes it hell.”<sup>17</sup> In *Mimesis and Theory* he writes:

The more modern the novel becomes, the more you descend down the circles of a hell which can still be defined in theological terms as it is in Dante, but can also now be defined in non-religious terms—in terms of what happens to us when our relations with others are dominated exclusively by our desires and theirs, and their relationships dominated by their desires and ours.<sup>18</sup>

Because of the modern attempts to evade the escalation of mimetic desire into open conflict, mimetic desire migrates to the underground world of psychopathological relations, as brought to light for example by the narrator of Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground*. As Girard writes in *Mimesis and Theory*: “Everything changes when the duel disappears as a social institution. Deprived of a worthy object, ambition is transformed into abstract competition, and this competition, deprived of any real consequences, perpetuates itself and becomes obsessive.”<sup>19</sup> The end state of internal mediation is the world of death: “The will to make oneself God is a will to self-

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<sup>16</sup> Robert Doran, Introduction. In René Girard and Robert Doran ed., *Mimesis and Theory* (Stanford, 2008), p. xx.

<sup>17</sup> See Girard (1965), p. 57.

<sup>18</sup> See Girard (2008), p. 264.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

destruction which is gradually realized.”<sup>20</sup> This might be confused with a Freudian death drive. But it is through the repeated disappointments of the overcoming of rival-obstacles or through the frustration of attempts at overcoming the obstacle rivals that the subject decides that “death is the meaning of life”.<sup>21</sup>

In *Je Vois Satan Tomber Comme L'éclair* (1999), translated as *I See Satan Fall like Lightning* (2001; henceforth *I See*), Girard has interpreted the Tenth Commandment against covetousness as an interdiction of and protection against mimetic rivalry. In the context of the Ten Commandments, coveting what belongs to one's neighbour can be seen as idolatry: desiring and imitating the neighbour's being instead of worshipping God. But already in *Deceit* the term “deviated transcendency” implies a spiritual cause for the malaise of modern mimetic rivalries: “Although this rivalry is the source of considerable material benefits, it also leads to even more considerable spiritual sufferings, for nothing material can appease it.”<sup>22</sup>

The latter quotation points to one way Western modernity has tried to come to terms with the problem of mimetic rivalry. As Jean-Pierre Dupuy and Paul Dumouchel argue in their Girardian study *L'Enfer des Choses* (1979), Western capitalism institutionalises a culture of mimetic rivalry. Bernard Mandeville's alternate title of the *Fable of the Bees* (1714), *Private Vices, Public Benefits*, has led to economic and technological progress on an immense scale in the past two centuries. But if Girard is right, and nothing material can appease the rivalry, then one can on the one hand understand how capitalism, particularly in its current consumerist form, is continuously fuelled: because desire is constantly frustrated, ever new products promise “being” to the consumer. The stage of consumerism can thus be labelled post-mimetic in the sense that mimetic rivalries are channelled towards the objects to be consumed. What Girard remarks on Proust's *Time Recaptured* is thus also true for consumerism:

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<sup>20</sup> See Girard (1965), p. 287.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 287.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

It is the perspective that imprisoned him in a sterile process of jumping from one frustrated desire to the next over a period of many years. Everything the narrator could not acquire, he desired; everything he acquired, he immediately ceased to desire, until he fell into a state of ennui that could be called a state of post-mimetic desire.<sup>23</sup>

One should thus expect to find evidence of these spiritual sufferings as modernity develops – making the creation of a secular utopia impossible. But before this evidence is examined in the discussed works of the present thesis, the second major branch of Girard’s theory, scapegoating and sacrifice, has to be introduced.

### *1.2.2 Violence and the Sacred*

Girard, while associate professor at Johns Hopkins University, continued to pursue his interests in the modern novel after *Deceit* by editing a book on Proust (1962) and by writing a study on Dostoevsky (1963)<sup>24</sup>, before turning his attention to cultural anthropology. This shift can be at least partly explained through the 1960s revolutionary rise of “Theory” in the realm of literary criticism.<sup>25</sup> In very simple and simplified terms all of Theory can be said to revolve around the “linguistic turn” of Saussurean linguistics and its major claim developed through structuralism and post-structuralism that everything is structured like a language.

Initially Girard welcomed the fresh breeze of Theory, liberating literary criticism from the suffocating dictates of New Criticism in the Anglo-American world and the emphasis on literary history in France. In 1966 Girard co-organised the famous conference held at Johns Hopkins university titled “The Languages of Criticism and the

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<sup>23</sup> See Girard (2008), p. 270.

<sup>24</sup> *Proust: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1962), *Dostoïevsky, du double à l'unité* (1963; translated into English and published in 1997 as *Resurrection from the Underground: Feodor Dostoevsky*).

<sup>25</sup> Valentine Cunningham, in *Reading After Theory* (Oxford, 2002, p. 17) argues that the last fifty years have seen the dominance of a very specific type of theory in literary criticism: “The scope is, of course, Structuralism and Feminism and Marxism and Reader-Response and Psychoanalysis and Deconstruction and Poststructuralism and Postmodernism and New Historicism and Postcolonialism.”

Sciences of Man”, with such future greats as Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida participating. But Girard would soon part ways with the further development of (post-)structuralist thought with its abandonment of the referent and its focus on the “ludic” – mere language games. While, as Robert Doran writes, *Violence and the Sacred* (1972; henceforth *Violence*) “was interpreted by many as being part of the “post-structuralist” movement in French thought [...], the convergence was more coincidental than essential. Girard had arrived at a similar crossroads as these other thinkers, but he had come on a different path and was travelling toward a very different destination.”<sup>26</sup>

In *Violence* Girard extends his theory of mimesis developed in *Deceit* to all culture by investigating the origins of culture in archaic religion. He thus engages with the structural anthropology of Claude-Lévi Strauss, the Cambridge myth-and-ritual school epitomized by James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* (1890) and the anthropologies of Radcliffe-Brown and Bronislaw Malinowski. Girard does not accept “the Enlightenment view for which religion is superstition and if ritual is everywhere it’s because cunning and avid priests impose their abracadabras on the good people.”<sup>27</sup> For Girard, the function of archaic religion is to keep mimetic rivalries in check and to impose order on society through rigidly defined social roles, reinforced by myths and rituals.

Girard acknowledges Lévi-Strauss’ contribution to structural anthropology by introducing the notion of binary differentiation, which allowed a systematic and comparative study of kinship systems. What Girard objects to, however, is the idea that structural differentiation is always already in place. There is no room in Lévi-Strauss for undifferentiation. With respect to the latter Girard is post-structural and follows, for example, Derrida’s discussion of the “pharmakon” in his essay “Plato’s Pharmacy”.

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<sup>26</sup> See Doran (2008), p. xii.

<sup>27</sup> See Girard et al. (2007), p. 72.

Derrida draws attention to the various possible translations of *pharmakon* as both “poison” and “remedy”. Thus the same term comprises opposite meanings rather than clearly separating them into binary opposites. For post-structuralists meaning is thus constantly deferred, as signified meaning is constituted by a chain of signifiers rather than through some external reference.

At this point, Girard also parts company with Derrida and post-structuralism. For Girard, undifferentiation itself has meaning and it is tied to the loss of differences between mimetic rivals. For Girard undifferentiation in language originates in a loss of differences in the real world of human relations. This is what Girard has labelled “the sacrificial crisis” in the context of archaic religion. During a sacrificial crisis, the rigid differences within society disappear and rituals, normally ensuring the stability of society, wear out. The recurring mythic motif of “enemy twins” signifies the loss of differences due to an intensification of mimetic rivalries. At the peak of the sacrificial crisis, when the mimetic doubles are on the verge of annihilating each other in a struggle of all against all, the violent potentials are redirected against an arbitrary victim. The victim is made responsible for the societal crisis and is killed by the unanimous mob.

The resolution of the sacrificial crisis through the expulsion of a scapegoat relies on a double misunderstanding or “*méconnaissance*” to use Girard’s preferred term. The first *méconnaissance* lies in the belief of the responsibility of the victim for the crisis, whereas in reality the mimetic conflict between all members of society is the real reason behind the crisis. The second *méconnaissance* occurs once the victim is expelled. Because peace is suddenly restored to society, the victim is in retrospect recognised as a god in disguise and becomes the first sign of the newly reborn culture. Because the victim absorbs the opposites of absolute evil and absolute beneficence – poison and remedy – the victim mediates a new ritual system of stable differences and becomes the

posthumous external mediator, thus keeping internal mediation at bay. The originary event of the founding murder is repeated in ritual sacrifice, either symbolically or through the sacrifice of a surrogate victim, either human or animal. For Girard the riddle of the pharmakon, the undifferentiation in language, is thus tied to the Greek “pharmakos” ritual: the killing of a real human victim in a sacrificial ritual.<sup>28</sup> A distorted version of the originary event is also retold in myths: distorted because the event is always described from the position affected by the double *méconnaissance* of the violent, undifferentiated crowd. This is Girard’s interpretation of the most universal myth-ritual-complex, the “dying and resurrected god” and the “eternal recurrence” identified by the Cambridge Ritualists.<sup>29</sup> In the world of archaic religion, history is cyclical. Whenever society is threatened by the destruction through mimetic escalation, a new cycle and ritual system is initiated through the expulsion of a victim. Violence is thus the secret heart and soul of the sacred.

Like the structuralists, Girard suggests that there is a single deep structure, a grammar behind the surface structure of all myths and rituals. He is not, however, only interested in the grammar of myth and ritual but also (and mostly) in the real expelled victims underlying these structures: “What I do, on the base of textual evidence, is to guess that at that origin there is a murder, and it is collective, and that the innocent victim is killed by the whole community.”<sup>30</sup> The founding murder does, however, not only function as the tool for cultural and societal renewal but forms for Girard the major step towards hominiscence itself. In *Des Choses Cachées Depuis la Fondation du Monde* (1978), translated into English as *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (1987, henceforth *Things Hidden*), Girard engages with yet another academic discipline, namely ethology. He suggests that, as hominids evolve to become humans, dominance patterns disappear and are replaced by mimesis. The first mimetic crisis is

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<sup>28</sup> See Girard (1987b), p. 71.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Eleazar Meletinsky, *The Poetics of Myth* (New York, 1998), p. 20.

<sup>30</sup> See Girard et al (2007), p. 185.

solved through the first foundational murder which gives birth to the first symbol, the killed victim.

The examination of the Girardian interdisciplinary hermeneutics, engaging with modern literature, archaic religion and evolutionary theory would not be complete, without examining its underlying worldview. Until *Violence* the latter only implicitly informed Girard's theorizing. Although his Christian stance can be discerned from his earliest writings onwards, it was still possible to miss it, especially since Girard did not discuss the role of the Bible with respect to his theory of religion in *Violence*. As Michael Kirwan notes in *Girard and Theology* (2009): "It is this neglect of the Biblical text that caused some early reviewers of *Violence* to misunderstand what they read as the first authentically atheistic theory of religion and the sacred."<sup>31</sup> It is in *Things Hidden* that Girard discusses the significance of the Bible for his theory and formulates the decisive difference between the Gospel narratives of Christ's death and resurrection and the mythic motif of the dying and resurrected god.

### 1.2.3 Girard and the Bible

With *Violence* Girard had fully formulated his hermeneutical key for deciphering archaic myths and rituals. What he refers to as the "scapegoat mechanism" consists of the following stages. Whenever the existing rituals wear out – or, in the case of the originary crisis of hominiscence, when dominance patterns are eroded – mimetic rivalry leads to a loss of differences and a potential escalation of violence of all against all. But the loss of differences already prepares the next step of the mechanism, the formation of the unanimous crowd. When the violent potentials are polarized against one arbitrary victim, the slightest difference from the mimetic doubles is enough to be chosen as

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<sup>31</sup> Michael Kirwan, *Girard and Theology* (London, 2009), p. 27.

victim. The violence is then vented against the victim. With the expulsion of the victim peace returns to society as all violent potentials are absorbed by the victim. The latter becomes the presiding deity of the sacred peace and a new ritual order.

When Girard approached the Crucifixion accounts of the canonical Gospels in *Things Hidden*, he found that the accounts fitted his paradigm only partially. The elements that did fit were the loss of differences in the formation of the violent, unanimous crowd demanding Jesus' death and the subsequent violent expulsion of Jesus on the Cross. Girard even detects traces of a restoration of peace in the Lukan passage in which Pilate and Herod become friends during Jesus' trial.<sup>32</sup> The decisive difference Girard identifies, however, is that the narrative is told not from the perspective of the persecuting crowd but from that of the innocent victim.

Whereas in world myths and rituals the victim is always found guilty by the unanimous crowd, the small minority of the dissenting Disciples – another unique feature of the Gospel accounts – proclaim Jesus as innocent after the Resurrection. What is usually repressed in myth, i.e. the violence against an innocent victim of the expelling crowd, is plainly revealed in Jesus' prayer on the Cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34). In this passage, so Girard points out in *The Scapegoat* (1986; originally published as *Le Bouc Emissaire* in 1982), "we are given the first definition of the unconscious in human history, that from which all the others originate and develop in weaker form[.]"<sup>33</sup>

The "things hidden" in Matthew 13:35 are thus the hidden foundational victims upon which all cultures are built. There are several further key Gospel passages that support Girard's reading. When Jesus proclaims the woes upon the Pharisees, scribes and lawyers in the Gospel of Luke, he uses the following words:

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<sup>32</sup> Luke 23:12. All references to and quotations from Scripture are from the Authorized Version unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>33</sup> René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore, 1986), p. 111.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them. [...] Woe unto you! For ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. [...] The blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; / From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple.<sup>34</sup>

For Girard this passage reveals that

culture always develops as a *tomb*. The tomb is nothing but the first human monument to be raised over the surrogate victim, the first most elemental and fundamental matrix of meaning. There is no culture without a tomb and no tomb without a culture; in the end the tomb is the first and only cultural symbol. The above-ground tomb does not have to be invented. It is the pile of stones in which the victim of unanimous stoning is buried. It is the first pyramid.<sup>35</sup>

Jesus thus aligns himself with all the victims of history and reveals their structural innocence through the revelation of his own innocence on the Cross. In *I See* Girard reads the passage of the woman taken in adultery of John 8 as a call to renounce unanimous scapegoat violence. This passage portrays a violent mob which is about to literally bury a victim under a pile of stones in an act of unanimous lapidation. Jesus disperses the crowd with the words: “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.”<sup>36</sup> Thus he impedes the transferral of guilt upon the victim and draws attention to each and everyone’s own responsibility for the mimetic crisis.

The revelation of the scapegoat mechanism in the Gospels has consequences for the further development of human culture. In Christ’s words “if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?”<sup>37</sup> Girard recognises both a definition of the scapegoat mechanism and the prophecy of its future failure. He equates Satan with the role that violence plays in the sacrificial crisis. Violence against one victim is used to cast out the potential violence of all against all. But because one of

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<sup>34</sup> Luke 11:44-51.

<sup>35</sup> René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford, 1987a), p. 83.

<sup>36</sup> John 8:7

<sup>37</sup> Matthew 12:26

the prerequisites of the scapegoat mechanism relies on *méconnaissance*, once the mechanism is revealed it can no longer function.

The apocalypse – in the sense of “revelation” – of the scapegoat mechanism thus also acquires its current Western meaning of “end of the world”. If a restoration of peace through expulsion becomes increasingly impossible, a potential outcome of future mimetic crises is the violence of all against all. This is how Girard reads the following Gospel passage:

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.<sup>38</sup>

The future impossibility of creating unity through displacement of violence onto scapegoats forces human beings to face the Gordian knot of personal, mimetic relationships already mentioned above.

For Girard, the revelation of the scapegoat mechanism is a gradual process that has its origins in the Judaist prophetic tradition and is completed in the Gospels. However, the scapegoat mechanism is too deeply ingrained in the evolutionary and cultural history of humanity to have been understood immediately. To Girard, the past two Christian millennia witness the permeation of history with the truth of the innocent victim. The hermeneutical key to the latter is what Girard has described as the “Johannine Logos” as found in the prologue to the Gospel of John: “And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.”<sup>39</sup> For Girard “[t]he Johannine Logos is foreign to any kind of violence; it is therefore forever expelled, an absent Logos that never has had any direct, determining influence over human cultures.” But since the full revelation of the expulsion of the Logos in the Crucifixion, “the

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<sup>38</sup> Matthew 10:34ff.

<sup>39</sup> John 1:5

misrecognition of the Logos and mankind's expulsion of it disclose one of the fundamental principles of human society.”<sup>40</sup>

Thus societies under the influence of the Gospels can still perpetrate scapegoat violence against innocent victims but the violence can neither be hidden in fully formed myths nor can peace be restored through the deification of a victim. Instead, whenever scapegoat violence occurs, the act is recorded in what Girard calls “texts of persecution”. The latter are hybrid forms between fully formed myths, hiding the truth of the victim, and realistic descriptions of scapegoat violence as found in the Gospels. Among texts of persecutions Girard lists medieval anti-semitic texts, records of the Inquisition or witch trials. These texts are still mythic in the sense that they demonize their victims in categories of the monstrous; but they no longer reach the fully mythical stage of divinization of victims.

It is from this new position of having understood the scapegoat mechanism and its demystification in the Gospels that Girard can explain the move from external to internal mediation postulated in *Deceit* – and thus the very rise of modernity. As history under the revelatory influence of the Gospels progresses, the creation of external mediators through the use of the scapegoat mechanism becomes increasingly impossible. The archaic sacred survives, however, in modern institutions such as the judicial system, which in simplified terms institutionalises revenge and prevents the endless spiral of private vendetta justice.

In *Christianity, Truth, and Weakening Faith* (2010), an edited collection of dialogues with the philosopher Gianni Vattimo, Girard makes clear that for him modern secularization is also the product of the Christian revelation of the innocence of the scapegoat. As editor Pierpaolo Antonello explains: Girard and Vattimo are

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<sup>40</sup> See Girard (1987a), p. 271.

two voices in the contemporary intellectual debate that are engaged not in separating the two camps but in *uniting* them, on the basis of an intuition already partially elaborated by Max Weber, implicitly suggested and described by Eric Auerbach in *Mimesis*, and more recently argued by Marcel Gauchet, to the effect that secularization—and hence laicism—is in substance, produced by Christianity. In other words, Christianity is *the religion of the exit from religion*, and democracy, the free market, civil rights, individual freedoms, and laicism have all been, if not precisely invented in the absolute sense, “facilitated” in their development and expression by the Christian cultures.<sup>41</sup>

While Vattimo accepts Girard’s theory, his take on the consequences of the revelation of the scapegoat mechanism is far more optimistic than Girard’s. Vattimo believes that the modern concern for the victim will eventually lead to the Joachite third age of the Holy Spirit.

To Girard, the situation at the dawn of the twenty-first century presents itself more ambiguously. As he puts it in *Evolution*: “I always use Jacques Maritain’s formula: ‘with the passing of time there is always more good and more evil in the world.’”<sup>42</sup> Thus he does not reject the benefits of secular progress. But based on his knowledge of the double bind of mimetic relations an apocalyptic dark side of conflict looms over the promised utopia of secularized progress.

For Girard the modern nation state has become a secularized version of the archaic sacred, regulating inner-societal mimetic relations. As in the case of Carrier already mentioned, the state is founded upon scapegoat expulsion of everything that cannot be aligned with its visionary purpose. In accordance with John Carey’s observation, real people are thus eliminated in favour of the ideal, utopian citizens of the republic. With the rise of the nation state mimetic conflicts are displaced from private, interpersonal rivalries to rivalries between states. In *Battling to the End* (2010; originally published as *Achever Clausewitz* in 2007), Girard extends his theory of mimesis to the relations between modern states. In his reading of Carl von Clausewitz’s unfinished *Vom Kriege* (1832; translated as *On War*) he argues that Clausewitz

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<sup>41</sup> Pierpaolo Antonello, ed., Introduction, *Christianity, Truth, and Weakening Faith* (New York, 2010), p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> See Girard et al. (2007), p. 220.

recognized that war, followed to its logical conclusion, leads to an escalation to extremes: an escalation that the twentieth century has witnessed in two World Wars and one Cold War.

Behind the escalation to global extremes of modern warfare, Girard of course detects the increasing mobilization of desire and the resulting loss of differences on a global scale. As he already wrote in *Violence*: the Western world persists in a state of a quasi-sacrificial crisis, where the use of violence only leads to more violence and not to a resolution of the conflict. This is also Girard's reading of Cold War deterrence. In the atomic age, an escalation of violence to extremes would inevitably lead to the annihilation of the human race. From a Girardian perspective the conflict between the US and the Soviet Union was a conflict between enemy twins on a global scale.<sup>43</sup>

The breakdown of the Soviet Union, leaving the US as the single global power, led to an acceleration of globalization, both in terms of the expansion of global capitalism and the attempted export of liberal democracy. For Girard the expansion of capitalism is a form of channelling mimetic conflict into economic relations and economic growth. As he puts it with a hint of dry sarcasm in *Evolution*:

The Modern Western economy is the first civilization that has learned to use mimetic rivalry positively. It is known as economic competition. It is true that it gets out of control sometimes, but normally businessmen who compete do not shoot each other (although sometimes they shoot themselves).<sup>44</sup>

Thus the current economic order can evade the problem of mimetic conflict to a certain extent. But Girard does not see it as a permanent solution. In *Battling to the End* he writes:

Money replaces the victim on whose head people used to find reconciliation. [...] We exchange goods so as not to exchange blows, but trading goods always contains the

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<sup>43</sup> Patrick O'Donnell, in *The American Novel Now* (Chichester, 2010) argues that Thomas Berger's novel *The Feud* (Boston, 1983) portrays Cold War rivalry in terms of Girardian violent reciprocity (p. 196).

<sup>44</sup> See Girard et al. (2007), p. 242.

memory of trading blows. Exchange, whether commercial or bellicose, is an institution, in other words, a form of protection, a simple means. If the institution is seen as an end, we fall back into violent reciprocity.<sup>45</sup>

And like any institution that derives from the archaic sacred, it also has its victims. It is 9/11 which has reminded the Western world that behind the expansion of global capitalism, there still lies the duel, as Jean Baudrillard has put it in *The Spirit of Terrorism* (2001). The return of religion in terms of violent Fundamentalism, as a return of the archaic sacred, is an indirect result of the dissolution of differences in Western pluralism. As Pierpaolo Antonello writes:

[F]undamentalism, recuperates all the persecutory forms typical of the sacred. It is precisely the Muslim fundamentalists who [...] oppose the West [...] for being secularized—laic, pluralist, and relativist. [...] The violence cloaked in religion that Islamic extremists perpetrate is, in fact, already symptomatic of the onset of the decomposition of the religious[.] [...] Thus in the end they take their stance against the West in terms of pure mimetic rivalry. And as far as that goes, the same is true for those in the opposing camp who fight against Islamic radicalism in a sectarian and ideologically charged manner, ultimately mimicking its very attitudes and language.<sup>46</sup>

The United States's religiously tinged war on terrorism and the terrorists' war against the global world order of Western capitalism and relativism in the clash of civilizations are thus mirror images of each other. Each side attempts to recuperate its own version of rigidly structured worlds through the use of violence and the expulsion of the other: worlds that have already been eroded by the mobilization of mimetic desire and its channelling into competitive capitalism and technological development.

In the current form of Western capitalism, desire is furthermore channelled away from the rival to the consumable product. Baudrillard and Girard are in agreement that products are consumed as signs, which means that desire is never fulfilled by the object.<sup>47</sup> While this ensures continuing economic growth, the victim of the institution of

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<sup>45</sup> See Girard (2010), p. 59.

<sup>46</sup> See Antonello (2010), p. 18f.

<sup>47</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects* (London, 2005), p. 218 and Girard et al. (2007), p. 80.

consumerism is the environment. And this returns the discussion to the Bible, particularly the Book of Revelation. As Girard writes in *Battling to the End*:

We are thus in the process of seeing that, far from making them obsolete forever, the confusion between nature and culture in the apocalyptic texts, which used to be seen as naïve, is becoming unexpectedly relevant, with the ultramodern theme of the contamination of nature by human hands.<sup>48</sup>

The theologian Stephen Finamore, in his recent study on the Book of Revelation titled *God, Order and Chaos* (2009), rereads John's apocalypse in the light of Girard's thesis. For him the "wrath of God" can be read as the effect of the revelation of the scapegoat mechanism through Christ on the Cross:

The wrath of God is God's in the sense that it is initiated by the revelation of the gospel which breaks into human culture and exposes the violence on which it is based. The violence, however, is not God's but humanity's; the responsibility for the violent effects of the process lies with humans rather than with God. However, it is God's process in that it is God who has acted in a way which generates the process and prevents its resolution. God has acted so that humans are liberated from their endless cycles of cultures founded on violence and lies. God's own action is non-violent and exposes violence and untruth in human society. However, the result of this is that human violence has the potential to be greater than ever and to be resolved only by complete self-destruction.<sup>49</sup>

It would be misleading, however, to describe the Girardian paradigm as culturally pessimistic. Girard does propose an alternative to the escalation of mimetic conflicts, an alternative he also finds in the Gospels. Since there is no alternative to imitative desire, human freedom lies in the choice of the model. For Girard, Christ is the only model which can be imitated without the danger of mimetic conflict. While Christ is an external mediator, his externality is not produced by the demonization and subsequent deification of the scapegoat mechanism. Rather, being the embodied Johannine Logos of non-violence, Christ becomes the supreme model due to his choice

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>49</sup> Stephen Finamore, *God, Order and Chaos* (Milton Keynes, 2009), p. 214.

to rather suffer violence than to commit it. Girard's solution is thus a call to the imitation of Christ, the non-violent Johannine Logos. This Christian conversion

is our discovery that we are persecutors without knowing it. All participation in the scapegoat phenomenon is the same sin of the persecution of Christ. And all human beings commit this sin. [...] Christianity suggests a political dimension. It entails an intervention in worldly matters, not in the form of sheer proselytism, as it is commonly believed, but in the form of a personal, individual conversion, by proposing Christ as a model to imitate.<sup>50</sup>

Finamore interprets the absence of a temple in the New Jerusalem of the penultimate chapter of Revelation accordingly: "The city has no temple, and therefore, by implication, no sacrificial cult. [...] God dwells among humans[.]"<sup>51</sup>

The suggestion of the imitation of Christ as a way out of the impasse of mimetic rivalries also clarifies the relation between scapegoating violence and Christian sacrifice read through the Girardian lens. Whereas in *Things Hidden* there was no room for the concept of sacrifice – conversion simply consisted in the cognitive recognition of the scapegoat mechanism, Girard has changed his position in recent years. Not least through the influence of the Innsbruck interpretation of his theory, most prominently by the Swiss theologian Raymund Schwager, Girard has accepted the necessity of Christian sacrifice. In his contribution to the 1994 "Festschrift" on the occasion of Schwager's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, Girard for the first time elucidated his understanding of Christian sacrifice in relation to archaic, cultic sacrifice and also explained his previous reluctance to refer to the death of Christ as sacrifice. He draws on the Old Testament account of the Judgment of Solomon to clarify the difference between the two types of sacrifice. In *Evolution* he summarizes his position as follows:

As you know, in this text there are two prostitutes fighting over a child. They both claim in front of Solomon that the other woman stole her child. Then Solomon brings the sword and threatens to divide the child between the two women. One of them accepts, while the other prefers to give up her child, in order to save him. This action is prophetic of Christ in the

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<sup>50</sup> See Girard et al. (2007), pp. 198, 212.

<sup>51</sup> See Finamore (2009), pp. 175f.

highest sense. [...] What the bad prostitute does is to accept the murderous type of sacrifice, while the good one refuses it. At the time, I did not want to say that she *sacrifices herself*, since I was still afraid of possible interpretations of her actions as ‘masochism’. The text keeps on emphasizing the fact that the good mother gives up her child so that ‘he will live’. She isn’t in love with death, she is in love with life, but she is willing to give up her life in order to save the child’s life. This is the true meaning of Christ’s sacrifice. [...] Since the meaning of sacrifice as immolation, as murder, is the oldest one, I decided that the word ‘sacrifice’ should apply to the first typology, the murderous sacrifice. Today I have changed my mind. There is no doubt that the distance between these two actions is the greatest possible, and it is the difference between the archaic sacrifice, which turns against a third victim the violence of those who are fighting, and the Christian sacrifice which is the renunciation of all egoistic claiming, even to life if needed, in order not to kill.<sup>52</sup>

As Michael Kirwan writes: “God has no other face than the face of the immolated victim.”<sup>53</sup> The difference between archaic and Christian sacrifice, despite its structural similarities, is thus irreducible and becomes more obvious through the course of history. As Girard writes in *Battling to the End*:

[S]o even though we are in a complete fog, we may perhaps finally become aware of all of violence’s failures. I think that we are finally *living in the moment of truth*. We have a rendezvous with reality. It is perfectly conceivable that something new will come of this. Violence’s barrenness may perhaps be a sign that conflicts will diminish, that there will be a kind of returning undertow.<sup>54</sup>

In the introduction to *Battling to the End* Girard quotes Hölderlin to express this hope: “But where danger threatens / That which saves from it also grows.”<sup>55</sup> In other words: the more the darkness does not understand the light, the brighter does that light shine in the darkness.

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<sup>52</sup> See Girard et al. (2007), pp. 214f. The Girardian theologian Robert Daly in his monograph *Sacrifice Unveiled* offers a systematic study of the Girardian intuition of the difference between archaic sacrifice and Christian sacrifice. He also offers a definition of the modern, secular meaning of the term “sacrifice”. Whereas in the ancient world the sacrifice is always offered by someone to a third party, a god, the Christian understanding of sacrifice refers to an act of self-giving. The secular meaning is related, as it denotes an act of giving up something. (cf. Robert Daly, *Sacrifice Unveiled* (London, 2009), p. 27).

<sup>53</sup> See Kirwan (2009), p. 140.

<sup>54</sup> See Girard (2010), p. 117.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

### 1.2.4 Criticism of the Girardian Paradigm

Roberto Calasso has described Girard as a “hedgehog thinker” who knows only a few big things: mimetic desire and the scapegoat.<sup>56</sup> While Girard’s theory originates in Literature, it is a paradigm that seeks to explain the whole of human behaviour across disciplines. Furthermore, Girard’s theory cannot be verified or falsified in strict Popperian terms, as Girard is precisely interested in the very genesis and deconstruction of Cartesian binaries. For example, the absence of the scapegoat theme in a particular mythic text does not falsify Girard’s hypothesis, as the very absence is interpreted as an indication of the full integrity of the myth, i.e. the successful eradication of the scapegoat. In myth, therefore, evidence for the mechanism is always going to be indirect, whereas the visibility of the scapegoat mechanism in modernity signifies its disintegration. Mimetic theory is thus a meta-theory, attempting to explain in an evolutionary model the genesis of humanity and of human culture – including scientific culture, i.e. Popperian normal science. It is thus not surprising that Michel Serres, on the dustcover-blurb of *Mimesis and Theory*, describes Girard as “the new Darwin of the human sciences.”

The following is by no means an exhaustive account of criticism of Girard’s paradigm but offers a selective array of arguments raised against mimetic theory from the disciplines Girard has engaged with: literary criticism, comparative anthropology, theology and Biblical studies.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Qtd in Girard et al. (2007), p. 1

<sup>57</sup> Stephen Finamore offers a concise yet thorough overview of the criticism of Girard in chapter 3 of *God, Order and Chaos* (2009).

#### 1.2.4.1 Voices from the Realm of Literary and Cultural Criticism

A major point of criticism is directed against Girard's postulated universality of mimetic theory. Thus, from the perspective of Lyotardian postmodernity, Girard's theory must look very much like a "grand narrative". The following arguments, not necessarily from postmodernists, have been mounted against the universality of mimetic theory.

The Marxist critic Lucien Goldmann objected to the extension of the concept of mimetic desire to non-Western cultures, as mimetic desire and rivalry, according to Goldmann are merely characteristic of the imperialist phase of Western capitalism.<sup>58</sup> Goldmann is joined by Eric Gans, a former student of Girard, who neither accepts the primacy of mimetic desire, nor the scapegoating mechanism as responsible for the originary process of hominization and the development of symbolicity. For Gans, scapegoating is tied to the later development of agriculture. In his own "Generative Anthropology", mimesis plays a role but so does the desired object. Because all desire the object, none dare to appropriate it. Symbolicity and peace in society are thus not created through scapegoat expulsion but through aborted gestures of appropriation of the desired object.<sup>59</sup>

Bruno Latour in *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993) also takes issue with Girard's claim that desire is mimetic. As he points out:

Girard does not see that he himself is thus making a more serious allegation, since he accuses objects of not really counting. [H]e prolongs the tendency of moderns to scorn objects even further – and Girard tenders that accusation whole-heartedly; he really believes it, and he sees in this hard-won scorn the highest proof of morality.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> See Girard et al. (2007), p. 33.

<sup>59</sup> Pablo Bandera offers a recent comparison between Girard's and Gans in "Love and Resentment: The Absence of Positive Mimesis in Generative Anthropology", *Contagion* 14 (2007), pp. 13-26.

<sup>60</sup> Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA, 1993). Girard has responded to Latour's argument in *Evolution* (p. 145f). It is not so much that Girard scorns the object but that the deviated transcendence of internal mediation impedes the full enjoyment of objects.

Within the movement of “Theory”, in the sense defined earlier, Girard has played a minor role. This is not surprising, as Girard’s emphasis on the expulsion of the real, referential victim, clashes with Derrida’s famous sentence, “il n’y a pas de hors-texte”<sup>61</sup>, subsequently elevated to post-structuralist dogma.<sup>62</sup> As Andrew McKenna writes in his comparative study of Girard and Derrida: “According to Derrida’s conception, it is as if there were no things before signs, as if, as he says via Peirce’s semiotics, “the thing itself is a sign.”<sup>63</sup> Because post-structuralist theory is concerned with the instability of differences, it cannot accept Girard’s postulated irreducible difference between victims and persecutors and between the Gospels and myths.

Richard Beardsworth argues along these lines, taking issue with Girard’s distinction between archaic, pagan religion and the Judaeo-Christian Scriptures:

Girard can only distinguish between religious violence and religious non-violence through a set of, in turn, *violent* decisions. These decisions are, among others, the ‘absolute’ difference between the Judeo-Christian god and the gods of primitive religions, the absolute difference between the evangelical and the historical Christ, and between the message of love of Christ and the history of Christianity.<sup>64</sup>

According to Beardsworth Girard has moved from empiricism in *Violence* to ideology with *Things Hidden*. Beardsworth’s somewhat questionable solution to this problem, however, is, in typical post-structuralist fashion, to erase the difference between violence and non-violence: “Originary violence is neither violent nor non-violent, neither originary nor non-originary.”<sup>65</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, while being favourable towards the Girardian paradigm in his epilogue to the German translation of *Je Vois Satan Tomber Comme L’Eclair*, also criticizes Girard’s favouring of the Judaeo-Christian

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<sup>61</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore, 1976), p. 158.

<sup>62</sup> This is not to say that Derrida himself has necessarily upheld this position. In *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* (ed. John Caputo, Bloomington, 1997, pp. 16f) he is quoted as (characteristically clarifying): “I never cease to be surprised by critics who see my work as a declaration that there is nothing beyond language, that we are imprisoned in language; it is, in fact, saying the exact opposite.”

<sup>63</sup> Andrew McKenna, *Violence and Difference* (Urbana and Chicago, 1992), p. 59.

<sup>64</sup> Richard Beardsworth, “Logics of Violence: Religion and the Practice of Philosophy“, *Cultural Values* 4.2 (2000), pp. 149f.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

Scriptures as the sole escape from the mimetic mechanism, by pointing towards Buddhism as an escape from mimetic rivalries at least for a few individuals.<sup>66</sup>

The universality of the Girardian paradigm is also questioned by the post-structuralist, feminist and psychoanalytic critic Julia Kristeva. She contends that Girard, like Freud, neglects the other side of the religious phenomenon: the side that is related to the mother.<sup>67</sup> Thus beyond the revelation of the founding murder lies the aporia of the feminine that Kristeva relates to the platonic “chora”, a receptacle.<sup>68</sup> That unreachable and nameless primordial “space”, as literary-minded theologian Paul Fiddes comments, has been understood by Kristeva as a “womb-like, nurturing space of origin.”<sup>69</sup> Thus Kristeva makes the point that Girard’s phenomenological theory of the scapegoat does not engage with that female space, already expelled by the Freudian focus on the murder of the father. Even if Girard is right in detecting the unveiling of the scapegoat mechanism in the Gospels, it is still possible, as the feminist theologian Daphne Hampson has put it, that “the Judaeo-Christian tradition deals with male solutions to male problems” and that “it’s time to move beyond that.”<sup>70</sup>

#### 1.2.4.2 Voices From Anthropology

Pierpaolo Antonello has pointed out that it is common to dismiss Girard’s work because he has never carried out fieldwork.<sup>71</sup> Anthropology, as Antonello continues, nowadays seems to follow E.E. Evans-Pritchard, who “dismisses any quest for the origins of religion, considering it an impossible task because of the lack of historical

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<sup>66</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, “Erwachen im Reich der Eifersucht”, in René Girard, *Ich sah den Satan vom Himmel fallen wie einen Blitz* (München / Wien: 2002), pp. 241-254.

<sup>67</sup> Julia Kristeva, *The Portable Kristeva* (New York, 1997), p. 249.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.

<sup>69</sup> Paul S. Fiddes, *The Promised End: Eschatology in Theology and Literature*. (London, 2000), p. 242.

<sup>70</sup> Daphne Hampson, in Paul Gifford, ed., *2000 Years and Beyond: Faith, Identity, and the Common Era* (London, 2003), p. 169.

<sup>71</sup> See Girard et al. (2007), p. 144.

records, and the impossibility of identifying a common primitive mentality.”<sup>72</sup> Claude

Lévi-Strauss’s response to the mimetic hypothesis has been indirect:

The simple exercise...shows that far from denying or ignoring violence, as I have often been reproached for doing, I place it at the origin of social life and ground it on deeper foundations than those who, through sacrifice or the murder of the scapegoat, would make society arise from customs which presuppose its existence.<sup>73</sup>

An extreme version of this position is taken by William Arens who claims that human sacrifice and cannibalism in primitive societies are inventions of Western imperialism.<sup>74</sup>

The anthropologist Elizabeth Traube has suggested that Girard’s framework overlooks empirical evidence. In the case of the Mambai myth of the Mau Lelu, she acknowledges the capacity of the Girardian framework to enlighten the myth. She argues, however, that a reinsertion of the myth into the actual context of Mambai culture would invalidate the Girardian reading.<sup>75</sup>

Girard’s theory is similar to Walter Burkert’s model of hominiscence formulated in *Homo Necans* (1972). Burkert and Girard, however, differ on the question of hunting. Whereas Burkert believes that sacrificial practices, understood as scapegoating violence, developed out of hunting, Girard postulates that hunting developed out of sacrificial practices.<sup>76</sup>

#### 1.2.4.3 Voices from Theology and Biblical Studies

Three main points have been raised by theologians and Bible scholars with regard to the Girardian paradigm: his definition of sacrifice, problems of Biblical exegesis resulting

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>73</sup> Qtd. in Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>74</sup> William Arens, *Man Eating Myths: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (Oxford, 1979).

<sup>75</sup> See Girard et al. (2007), p. 143.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 142f. At the 2008 meeting of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion (COV&R) at the University of California, Riverside, Girard admitted in the question time after his presentation “Scapegoating at Çatalhöyük” that “maybe Burkert was right” on the question of hunting (unpublished personal notes of the author of the present discussion).

from Girard's hermeneutic and the question how Girard's insights can actually be translated into the daily practical life of the Church.

While, as already discussed, Girard has widened his understanding of sacrifice to include positive acts, Finamore is right in claiming that "in his major works Girard's understanding of what constitutes sacrifice is quite restricted."<sup>77</sup> Robert Daly, in *Sacrifice Unveiled*, accepts the Girardian connection between the scapegoat and blood sacrifice but opens the concept of sacrifice to include the Christian meaning of "a radical self-offering of the faithful."<sup>78</sup>

While there have been attempts within Girardian circles to develop a concept of "positive mimesis"<sup>79</sup>, Girard's continuing emphasis on the scapegoat mechanism and its extension to include all of nature as a "super-sacrificial machine"<sup>80</sup> clashes with the doctrine of the "goodness of creation". Finamore draws attention to the argument of the Swiss Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar who points out that

the implication of Girard's position is that all human ideas about justice, the distinction between good and evil, and all positive ideas about family relationships do not arise from human nature, as Roman Catholic social teaching insists, but are derived from the scapegoat mechanism and are essentially social constructs.<sup>81</sup>

The Girardian understanding of Christian atonement as a revelation of scapegoat violence also clashes with traditional Christian understandings of atonement, particularly with the concept of penal substitution and the idea of atonement as a "ransom" owed to either Satan or God.<sup>82</sup> Balthasar, for example, as Michael Kirwan has pointed out, "insists upon attributing some level of complicity, therefore violence, to

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<sup>77</sup> See Finamore (2009), p. 159.

<sup>78</sup> See Daly (2009), p. 8.

<sup>79</sup> See for example Vern Neufeld Redekop *From Violence to Blessing* (Toronto: 2002).

<sup>80</sup> See Girard et al. (2007), p. 96.

<sup>81</sup> See Finamore (2009), p. 111.

<sup>82</sup> Kirwan (2009) lists the essential metaphors for atonement in Christianity: victory (over the devil, over the powers of hell, over death, etc.) in a battle or contest; forensic justification; sacrifice. It may be said that in Western Christianity at least these three are predominant (in the East there is greater emphasis on the notion of atonement as participation, in such doctrines as theopoiesis or 'divinization' (p. 68).

God in the crucifixion.”<sup>83</sup> It does not, however, mean that Girard’s position is irreconcilable with the New Testament texts. In his examination of New Testament language with regard to sacrifice, Finamore comes to the conclusion that “the New Testament does not suggest that God needed to inflict violence on humanity and that Jesus suffered that violence vicariously.”<sup>84</sup>

This reading, however, raises the question of Biblical exegesis in general. Finamore summarizes positions of critics pointing to Girard’s failure to take seriously the results of critical study of the Bible. According to Robert North, Girard takes little account of the differences between the Gospels and tends to concentrate on those parts of the Bible which can be interpreted in accordance with his theory.<sup>85</sup>

John Milbank in his seminal *Theology and Social Theory* (1990) rightly places the Girardian paradigm in the Augustinian tradition of a “two cities philosophy of history”. His main point of criticism is that “Girard does not really seem to think in terms of a positive, alternative practice, but only a negative refusal. [...] An abstract attachment to non-violence is therefore not enough – we need to practice this as a skill, and to learn its idiom.” Milbank thus suggests a return from Girard to Augustine, “who by placing the Church, and not Christ alone, at the centre of his metanarrative, pays far more attention to the concrete shape of a non-antagonistic social practice.”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> See Kirwan (2009), p. 139.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>85</sup> See Finamore (2009), p. 121.

<sup>86</sup> John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 398, 402.

### 1.3 Violence and Dystopia

The present thesis is a discussion of the representation of imitative desire, scapegoating violence and sacrifice in selected works of Anglo-American, dystopian writing of the last forty years through the lens of the Girardian paradigm. What Krishan Kumar notes for utopian writing can certainly be adapted to dystopian writing as well: “[I]t makes perfectly good sense to discuss as utopias works which are not formally so but are, as it were, in the ‘utopian mode’, products of the utopian imagination or temperament.”<sup>1</sup> A first consequence of considering works which do not necessarily strictly fulfil the genre-requirements of dystopian fiction as discussed above is that the number of possible works to be considered rises considerably. An informed selection had therefore to be made. The common denominator of the discussed texts is a criticism of the Western, increasingly globalized, post-industrial world, which is perceived as utopia achieved.

As Philip Tew has noted: “If the contemporary novel has done anything consistently since the mid-seventies it has been to radicalize traditional understandings of the late capitalist cityscape and urban environment.”<sup>2</sup> Four of the six main authors discussed in this thesis do this in the (sub)urban environment of London. J.G. Ballard, as Tew further comments, has been influential in this respect. “Ballard perceives something more fundamental than bourgeois and professional cultural mores which are disrupted by an elemental force, something atavistic and unconscious.”<sup>3</sup> “Atavism” of course opens the door to the Girardian definition of the sacred.

Iain Sinclair has been categorised as a “London Visionary” writer alongside writers such as Peter Ackroyd and Michael Moorcock. Sinclair emerged as a writer out of the 1960s counterculture and has continuously documented change in London’s East End from the mid-1970s onwards in fiction and poetry.

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<sup>1</sup> See Kumar (1985), p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Tew, *The Contemporary British Novel* (London, 2007), p. xi.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

Will Self established himself as a writer with his 1991 short story collection *The Quantity Theory of Insanity* and was included in the prestigious *Granta's* 1993 list of best young British novelists, despite not having published a novel at this point. His dirty magic realist London fiction, heavily influenced by Ballard and Martin Amis, necessarily contains a dystopian element, despite the fact that only *The Book of Dave* (2006) properly belongs to the genre of dystopian fiction. Finally Stewart Home's parodies of violent pulp fiction and his theoretical works are also firmly grounded in the reality of London and also deal with the problem of violence and apocalypse. Home's graphic writing has largely been ignored by the literary establishment and has only been brought to the public's attention through the advocacy of Iain Sinclair. Like Sinclair's fiction, Home too is a "psychogeographer" of London's East End.

One of the two discussed writers not focussing on London is David Peace. As Philip Tew argues, Peace's writing is exemplary of recent fiction that is of a traumatological rather than a postmodern bent, abjuring both the latter's abandonment of certainty and meaning, and its deconstructive dissolution of identities.<sup>4</sup> His first five novels published between 1999 and 2004, are set in Yorkshire, documenting a decade of industrial action and social unrest culminating in the Miners' Strike of 1984/5. The first four novels are formally crime novels of the hard-boiled noir genre but already prepare the ground for the apocalyptic literary fiction of *GB84* (2004).

The one non-British author completing the selection is Margaret Atwood. Atwood hardly needs any introduction, as she is *the* major exponent of Canadian literature. The two works by her discussed in detail are both properly critical dystopian narratives. *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) critically examines the Reaganite 1980s parallel to Sinclair's, Home's and Peace's criticism of Thatcherism, whereas *Oryx and*

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<sup>4</sup> See Tew (2007), p. 190.

*Crake* (2003) criticizes fully globalized corporate capitalism. There are thus transatlantic thematic ties and analogies between the authors.

The focussed narratives are organised into four main chapters. The first chapter is devoted to J.G. Ballard's *Crash* (1973) (including David Cronenberg's film adaption thereof (1996)), as it defines many of the themes of the subsequent chapters. *Crash* reveals how the individual human being is isolated by the omnipresent, hyperreal world of Baudrillardian simulation, the world of Western post-industrial society. The car crash both disrupts the simulation and seems to offer a violent entry into it. The novel's crashes are captured in terms of medieval millenarianism, Biblical apocalyptic narratives and archaic blood sacrifice. The term "*Scarifices*" – the sacrifice by car – as a title for the first chapter thus seemed appropriate. Ballard, so goes the argument, shows that the utopia of the Baudrillardian simulation cannot be reached through the use of violence in the car crash.

Iain Sinclair's prose writing rediscovers the spaces which are violently erased by the virtual world of the Baudrillardian simulation. In his psychogeographical walks, Sinclair discovers older city structures which lie buried underneath the anaesthetic non-places of modernity (as defined by Marc Augé). It is argued that Sinclair portrays these non-places as being created through the paradoxical means of the violent expulsion of a scapegoat, as postulated by Girardian theory. The city is thus revealed as the "*atrocit*", as the chapter title suggests. Psychogeography is revealed as discovering the scapegoat hidden beneath the modern erasures of space. The application of mimetic theory also allows a more nuanced evaluation of Sinclair's position towards sacrifice than suggested by current criticism of Sinclair.

The modern cityscape, dominated by tower blocks and inventions like the car brings human beings together while at the same time isolating them from one another. The thin boundaries that prevent the formation of violent crowds (hence the double v in

the title of “Crowvds”) collapse in J.G. Ballard’s *Cocaine Nights* (1996), *Super-Cannes* (2000), *Millennium People* (2003) and *Kingdom Come* (2006). The formation of crowds, as theorised by Elias Canetti in *Crowds and Power* (1960) through conflictive Girardian imitation, leads to revolutionary violence with the existing system as a scapegoat. However, in accordance with Girardian theory, the result is a dissemination of violence without end rather than a new utopian order. The same process is discussed in Stewart Home’s fictional and non-fictional work. The chapter will be completed by a discussion of David Peace’s *Red Riding Quartet* and *GB84*. In the latter, the power of the crowd is expelled as scapegoat for the creation of the utopia of the Thatcherite, liberal market economy.

Will Self’s *Book of Dave*, Iain Sinclair’s *Radon Daughters*, Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *Oryx and Crake* portray the entropic decay of post-apocalyptic societies and are representative of post-apocalyptic dystopian fiction. Although the apocalypses in the various narratives have different causes, from human-made to diseases and natural disasters, I argue that their common denominator is their emphasis on rituals of sacrifice and scapegoating. In the post-apocalyptic worlds, however, these rites have lost their power of violent renewal. This echoes Girard’s insight in *Violence* that the expulsion of a scapegoat is a very fragile process that, if it gets out of hand can lead to the total annihilation of the society in question. With this insight the causes for the apocalypses can be read as tropes for conflictive desire out of control, which leads to the post-crowd age of entropic decay. Entropy is a consequence of violence out of control, hence the title of the chapter “Violentropy”.

Across all chapters and throughout all the discussed texts, the following overarching narrative frame emerges – not chronologically, according to dates of publication, but logically, to borrow Northrop Frye’s terminology.<sup>5</sup> In short, fragile

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<sup>5</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, 1957), p. 109.

human beings are “liberated” from the isolating structures of modernity, facing the choice of either engaging in mimetic rivalry with each other that eventually leads to globalized, violent crowd formation or of renouncing mimetic conflict. The former choice leads to post-apocalyptic decay, as the crowds can no longer be dissolved through scapegoat expulsion. Thus the discussed narratives give a unanimous answer – each in its own way – to the question of the efficiency of scapegoating violence raised above. They are in accord with Girard’s hypothesis that violence has lost its restorative force, and locate the source of the creation of (post-) apocalyptic environments in the problem of escalating, conflictive mimesis.

## 2. Scarifices

### 2.1 J.G. Ballard's *Crash* – Revolutionary Millenarianism by Car

In his vision of a car crash with the actress, Vaughan was obsessed by many wounds and impacts – by the dying chromium and collapsing bulkheads of their two cars meeting head-on in complex collisions endlessly repeated in slow-motion films, by the identical wounds inflicted on their bodies, by the image of windshield glass frosting around her face as she broke its tinted surface like a death-born Aphrodite, by the compound fractures of their thighs impacted against their handbrake mountings, and above all by the wounds to their genitalia, her uterus pierced by the heraldic beak of the manufacturer's medallion, his semen emptying across the luminescent dials that registered for ever the last temperature and fuel levels of the engine.<sup>1</sup>

The above passage from *Crash* serves as an illustration of the following observation by Andrzej Gasiorek in his monograph on J.G. Ballard. Gasiorek writes that although *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970)<sup>2</sup> and *Crash* (1973) are groundbreaking texts<sup>3</sup>, they have been criticised for using the deliberately cold language of the anatomist “that has often incorrectly been seen as lacking moral engagement and emotional passion”.<sup>4</sup> The following discussion of *Crash* proposes that the moral engagement of the novel can be discovered through the lens of René Girard's theory of sacrifice and Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulation. Furthermore it will be argued that the novel can be read as portraying a peculiar version of revolutionary millenarianism as described by Norman Cohn in his seminal *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (1970).<sup>5</sup> Bringing these three theoretical contexts together, it will become clear how the novel offers a critique of the main protagonists' failed attempt at creating a utopian world of Baudrillardian simulation through turning the car crash into a quasi-sacrificial ritual – what will be referred to as the *scarifice* – the sacrifice by car.

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<sup>1</sup> J.G. Ballard, *Crash* (London, 1973), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> J.G. Ballard, *The Atrocity Exhibition* (London, 1970).

<sup>3</sup> Andrzej Gasiorek, *J.G. Ballard* (Manchester, 2005), p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>5</sup> Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (London, 1970).

*Crash*'s relation to the world of revolutionary millenarianism and the apocalyptic tradition can be established, when the apocalyptic vision in Nebuchadnezzar's dream as described in the Biblical Book of Daniel, chapter 2 is considered:

And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay.<sup>6</sup>

The vision of the mixing of iron and clay can further our understanding of *Crash* in that it can be seen as providing the driving metaphor of the narrator's and Vaughan's obsessive desire in *Crash* to constantly repeat the experience of "the collision of [...] two cars" that "had become the key to a new sexuality"<sup>7</sup> – which to them constitutes the true meaning of the car crash.<sup>8</sup> The "clay" of the Old Testament text can be taken as referring to the human body (a common Old Testament metaphor), with the iron metaphorically – and to a certain extent literally, as cars consist largely of metal – referring to the car as the symbol of that last kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, which in relation to *Crash* is the twentieth century, with the (motor) car as the major new invention setting it apart from previous centuries. From the last quotation, one can already perceive the structure of Vaughan's and the narrator's project. An act of violence, in their case the car crash, is causally linked to the utopian idea of a new sexuality.

According to Cohn, one characteristic trait of millenarianist thinking is the idea that the route to the millennium leads through massacre and terror. Cohn speaks of "human sacrifice on a vast scale" and thus introduces the economy of sacrifice into the

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel 2:41-43.

<sup>7</sup> See Ballard (1973), p. 96.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

discussion of millenarianism.<sup>9</sup> It is crucial to note, however, that in the Book of Daniel, the millennium is reached “without hands”, i.e. without human influence and thus without human violence. In medieval millenarianism as in *Crash*, violence is used to create the millennial utopia. Thus the orthodox interpretation of the Book of Daniel since Augustine, that the final kingdom is created through an act of God, can serve as an interpretative framework for criticising human attempts at creating the utopian world through violent efforts. From that perspective, the fact that the kingdom of iron and clay is both strong and weak, can be understood as pointing to the contradictory nature of this kingdom, its strength being the belief that the millennium can and will be created through human violence, its weakness exactly this human violence. Like iron and clay in the Biblical passage, car and human body do not mix in *Crash*, even if violently brought together. The analogy thus already foreshadows the instability of the violent utopian system created in *Crash*. In order to understand the workings of the utopian system which *Crash* portrays, it is necessary to read the novel alongside Jean Baudrillard’s theory of simulation.

### *2.1.1 TV-violence and Car Culture as Mediators of Reality*

In *America* (1988), Jean Baudrillard theorises the double nature of what he calls the achieved utopia of Western modernity. He writes: “[America] is a hyperreality because it is a utopia which has behaved from the very beginning as though it were already achieved.”<sup>10</sup> For Baudrillard the achieved utopia is dependent on speed. The state of hyperreality is reached through the evaporation of meaning through acceleration. A “rite of speed” initiates us into emptiness. This is the non-referential desert which “sacrifices humans to pure circulation.” Yet the crisis of an achieved utopia is confronted with the

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<sup>9</sup> See Cohn (1970), p. 67.

<sup>10</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *America* (London / New York, 1988), p. 28

problem of its duration and permanence. “The orgy of power and useless energy” has to be maintained for the continued existence of the utopia of hyperreality. If not, “the simulacrum”, Baudrillard writes, “might end in catastrophe.”<sup>11</sup>

The crucial question is what drives that utopia in the first place. In *The Spirit of Terrorism*, his short treatise on 9/11, as already mentioned in the introduction, Baudrillard realizes that everything still lies in the challenge, the duel.<sup>12</sup> Even if the utopia of simulation is achieved, personal, human conflict remains an important dimension in the simulation, despite the fact that, as Baudrillard claims in the above quotation, humans are sacrificed to pure, non-referential circulation of signs. That is why Girard’s theory of the imitation of desire can be brought into dialogue with Baudrillard’s theory of simulation.<sup>13</sup>

The invention of the car in the twentieth century is a powerful metaphor and indeed one of the principal tools of the dissemination of the Baudrillardian non-referential desert of speed. The dissemination of the car was propelled by the competitiveness of car manufactures in the early twentieth century, as portrayed in Ilya Erenburg’s factional novel *The Life of the Automobile* (1929). The latter offers an early and astonishingly exhaustive account of the impact the car has had on society<sup>14</sup> with its promise of “the delirium of speed”<sup>15</sup> as celebrated by the Italian Futurists. Erenburg, however, makes clear that the celebration of speed is based on conflictive imitation. In the chapter on André Citroën Erenburg constructs the entrepreneur as caught within the structures of mimetic rivalry: “But Ford was always ahead, his cars cost half as much. In France, Monsieur Citroën was protected by the same Chinese wall that he was

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 4, 47, 22, 77, 57.

<sup>12</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism* (London, 2002), p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> In *The System of Objects* Baudrillard formulates a similar concept of imitative desire to that of Girard’s: “No desire, even a sexual one, can endure without the mediation of an imagined collective realm. Perhaps, indeed, no desire can ever take form without this imaginary dimension: is it conceivable that a man could love a woman if he were certain that no other man in the world could possibly desire her? This is the ever-present (but for the most part hidden) underpinning of advertising.” (London / New York, 2005, p. 195)

<sup>14</sup> Ilya Erenburg, *The Life of the Automobile* (New York, 1976).

<sup>15</sup> See Gasiorek (2005), p. 80.

constantly cursing. But how could he compete with Ford in Holland or Switzerland?”<sup>16</sup>. Erenburg also connects the two moments of mimetic theory by conceptualizing Citroën in religious terms: “Monsieur André Citroën was the apostle of the new covenant.”<sup>17</sup> The new god is created through the sacrifice of the workers at the Citroën factory: “He would hire people one day and dismiss them the next: Bretons, Provençals, Arabs, Russians, women, adolescents. The giant presses banged away, and shreds of human flesh flew about everywhere” while “[o]n the screen, the sacred name flickered: Citroën, Citroën, Citroën.”<sup>18</sup>

The desirous imitation wars of the car manufacturers led to the global dissemination of cars and the concomitant spread of highways in the twentieth century. Roger Luckhurst points to Guy Debord’s observation of how the automobile has been stamped into the environment with the domination of the freeway, and the subsequent dislocation of old urban centres.<sup>19</sup> Alongside the car and its impact on urban settings, there is a parallel new defining development to be mentioned, namely cinema. A. L. Rees observes that cars and movies grew in tandem, relying on the nineteenth-century technology of intermittent motion.<sup>20</sup> The car and the moving picture can be seen as having a similar effect. In the case of films, the immobility of the body is combined with the moving film reel which projects an illusion of motion onto the immobile background of the screen. With the car the relation between immobility and mobility is reciprocal. It is the body that becomes mobile in the amalgam with the car, whereas the “film reel”, which is the landscape surrounding the moving car, remains immobile. Thus in both cases the outside world is experienced through the filter of the moving image. It

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<sup>16</sup> See Erenburg (1976), p. 45.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 37, 34.

<sup>19</sup> See Debord *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit, 1970), p. 174.

<sup>20</sup> A.L. Rees, “Moving Spaces,” *Autopia: Cars and Culture*, eds. Peter Wollen and Joe Kerr (London, 2002), p. 83.

is thus that, in Debord's terms, social relations become mediated by images – images that replace the immediate sense of touch.<sup>21</sup>

The effect that both car and the TV image have on human beings is one of isolation.<sup>22</sup> The conflictive imitation that gives rise to the dissemination of the car in the first place, isolates human beings from those conflicts, by sheltering them through the outside hull of the car or the omnipresent mediating image of the television screen. The nature of the utopian project of the West, as outlined by Baudrillard, is precisely this: the isolation of the human element in the rite of speed and the creation of a harmonious flow of elements through speed. Edward Platt writes in *Leadville*, his psychogeographical account of the London M40: “The car's motion was an integral part of a design which united man, machine and nature in a fluid, mutating composition.”<sup>23</sup>

However, Baudrillard stresses that the human element is sacrificed to the achieved utopia of speed, which then leads to the harmonious flow of elements and the virtuality of the symbolic exchange in the achieved utopia. But as long as the simulation is in flow, human beings can entertain the utopian illusion that they are actually part of this achieved utopia of speed. Yet, even at the stage of flow, it can already be observed how human beings become removed from the immediate, sensory perception of the world and from direct contact with other human beings in the referential world.

An instance of this, invading the intimate relationship between husband and wife, is given in *Crash*:

In her [Catherine's] sophisticated eyes I [James] was already becoming a kind of emotional cassette, taking my place with all those scenes of pain and violence that wars and student riots, natural disasters and police brutality which we vaguely watched on the colour TV set

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<sup>21</sup> See Debord (1970), p. 28.

<sup>22</sup> In *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (London, 2008), Slavoj Žižek comments on how Western civilisation moves in the direction of the Nietzschean Last Man. The result is isolation and the sexuality that fits this isolation is masturbation. “The Ideological stance underlying the notion of the masturbathon is marked by a conflict between its form and content: it builds a collective out of individuals who are ready to *share* with others the solipsistic egotism of their stupid pleasure.” (p. 26).

<sup>23</sup> Edward Platt, *Leadville* (London, 2000), p.173.

in our bedroom as we masturbated each other. This violence experienced at so many removes had become intimately associated with our sex acts.<sup>24</sup>

James is replaced by an emotional cassette, by images.<sup>25</sup> These are however not harmonious, utopian images but images of pain and war. Ballard follows here a standard technique of Dystopian fiction as pointed out by Darko Suvin: that of cognitive estrangement.<sup>26</sup> By welding sex and TV-mediated violence, Ballard makes the reader aware of how the moving picture normally penetrates the very intimate areas of life unawares. In his commentary in the 1993 edition of *The Atrocity Exhibition* Ballard explains how the inadvertent packaging of violence and cruelty as attractive commercial products in responsible British television can lead to the death of affect.<sup>27</sup> The process of removal from direct experience through the many layers of mediation has an effect on the sex act itself, the union between flesh and flesh. The latter is no longer possible because it is replaced by images of violence. Hence the sex act itself seems no longer real.

Peter Brigg has drawn attention to Ballard's claim that "fiction is a branch of neurology."<sup>28</sup> To come to a better understanding of how the death of affect is realised, a short excursus from a neurological point of view will be useful here. As in the above example from *Crash*, the initial phase of the death of affect is a coincidental event, in which sex and violence occur simultaneously. Since media-violence is omnipresent, the coupling of sex and violence is inevitable in the long run. What follows is a

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<sup>24</sup> See Ballard (1973), p. 26.

<sup>25</sup> Following Michael Hardin's example, throughout the discussion James refers to the narrator, whereas Ballard is used to refer to the author (cf. Michael Hardin, "Postmodernism's Desire for Simulated Death: Andy Warhol's Car Crashes, J. G. Ballard's *Crash*, and Don DeLillo's *White Noise*," *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 13. 1 (2002), p. 35, note 12.

<sup>26</sup> qtd. in Booker (London, 1994), p. 19.

<sup>27</sup> J. G. Ballard, *The Atrocity Exhibition* (London, 1993), p. 152.

<sup>28</sup> Qtd. in Peter Brigg, *J.G. Ballard* (San Bernardino, 1992), p. 63.

conditioning along the stimulus-response model, until the connection becomes stable and indeed automatic.<sup>29</sup>

The conditioning of the sexual impulse through TV-violence and the car crash not only introduces, as will be argued, a new hybrid of technology and sex but also cripples the existing sexual formats. The sexual act is the ultimate, immediate union of flesh with flesh and because of its completeness it is also the ultimate loss of distinctions. But it is exactly this union which is made utterly impossible by the coupling of the sexual impulse to mediated violence, as it alters its relation. It is thus, as expressed in *Daniel 2*, that people become a mixture and do not remain united. Because of the structural analogy of the car and the moving picture, the car comes to fulfil the same role of slipping in a disturbing element. Just as TV-violence accompanies the sexual act, so does the car. Any other sexual activity which is not mediated by the delirium of movement and speed is no longer possible. This is evident when the following passage is considered: “Strangely, our sexual acts took place only within my automobile. In the large bedroom of her rented house I was unable even to mount an erection.”<sup>30</sup>

Because of the conditioning process, unmediated sexuality and direct social relations lose their appeal and therefore seem less real. James’s experience of reality is completely mediated by the car and the concomitant world of the moving picture. He has lost direct sensory contact with the real and is removed from it by the many layers of mediation. The real becomes a spectacle, “a specially prepared or arranged display”<sup>31</sup>, that echoes the very definition of Debord’s spectacle as social relations mediated by images.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The theme of this type of conditioning is a prevalent feature of dystopian fiction with Alex’s resocialisation in Anthony Burgess’ *A Clockwork Orange* (London, 1962) being probably the most commonly known example.

<sup>30</sup> See Ballard (1973), p. 64.

<sup>31</sup> “Spectacle,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, May, 2008.

<sup>32</sup> See Debord (1970), p. 4.

### 2.1.2 *The Crash: Breaking Through the Isolation of the Car*

It's the sense of touch – in any real city you walk, you know, you brush past, people bump into you – in L.A. nobody touches you. We're always behind this metal and glass. I think we miss that touch so much that we crash into each other just so we can feel something.<sup>33</sup>

The above quotation from the film *Crash* (2004) (not to be confused with David Cronenberg's film version of Ballard's novel *Crash* (1996)) reveals the yearning of human beings for direct sensual contact with other human beings. The car crash violently interrupts the ceaseless flow of the simulation that replaces human beings by images. The novel's narrator, James Ballard, describes the experience of the crash as follows:

After the commonplaces of everyday life, with their muffled dramas, all my organic expertise for dealing with physical injury had long been blunted or forgotten. The crash was the only real experience I had been through for years.<sup>34</sup>

The crash is experienced as real because it forms a radical break with the anaesthetised world of virtuality. It also reveals that the integration of the human element into the simulation is an illusion. In the moment of the car crash, by analogy to the Last Kingdom of Daniel's prophecy, what seems strong – the achieved utopia of speed – is revealed as a weak amalgam consisting of flesh and metal, elements that will not mix.

The crash disrupts the pleasure principle of the flow of signs and re-introduces the reality principle of the expelled, referential being. It frees human beings from their isolation only to reveal the underlying cause for the modern isolation in the car. James reflects on his own full frontal collision with Helen Remington, with whom he begins an affair after the accident, and her husband: “[His] identity [...] remained an enigma to me, like an anonymous opponent killed in a pointless duel[.]”<sup>35</sup> If the crash hadn't

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<sup>33</sup> Paul Haggis, *Crash* (London, 2005), 03:01-03:32.

<sup>34</sup> See Ballard (1973), p. 28.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

occurred, Remington's husband would have remained isolated from James and James would never have become aware of his existence, let alone of his position as a rival in a duel. In the notes to the 1993 edition of *The Atrocity Exhibition* Ballard comments on Roberto Matta's reflection: "All disasters – earthquakes, plane or car crashes – seem to reveal for a brief moment the secret formulae of the world around us."<sup>36</sup> *Crash* is thus an apocalypse first and foremost in the original, religious meaning of "revelation" before it is a narrative about the end of the world. The crash reveals how modern structures of isolation thus protect human beings from engaging in violent rivalry with each other. Patrick O' Donnell, discussing Russell Banks' *The Sweet Hereafter* (1991), argues that the novel deals with "the catastrophic intrusion of the accidental into the ordinary." The novel ends with "a scene set at a destruction derby – that peculiarly American event in which junk automobiles are intentionally driven into each other until only one remains running."<sup>37</sup> The cars represent the clashing of desires, ending with the annihilation of the opponent.

The crash frees the self from the totality of the system of simulation and re-introduces the self to the reciprocal relationship with the other. Girard engages with Emmanuel Levinas' thought in *Battling to the End*: "Escaping totality means disturbing its mechanism. Totality that is no longer closed on itself, that no longer has its secret hidden, transforms into pure violence. [...]. He says that outside of totality, there is war *and* love."<sup>38</sup> Because the crash reveals the reciprocal system underlying the utopia of simulation, *Crash* also becomes a tale about the end of the world. Beyond the totality of the utopia of simulation lies the radical decision between war and love – between violence and non-violence.

James thus finds himself in the situation of the dissolution of differences in the sacrificial crisis. The car crash itself signifies the violent undifferentiation of body and

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<sup>36</sup> See Ballard (1993), p. 76.

<sup>37</sup> See O'Donnell (2010), p. 42.

<sup>38</sup> See Girard (2010), p. 101.

car: “body and technology diffracting their bewildered signs through each other”, as Baudrillard has put it.<sup>39</sup> The utopian system of simulation is in crisis and James can either try to restore the system in sacrificial fashion through more crashes or decide to renounce conflictive imitation. But before the question of sacrificial violence and imitation can be considered, Baudrillard’s reading of *Crash* must be further examined.

### 2.1.3 *The Wounds Do Not Heal: Holes in the Baudrillardian Simulation*

According to Baudrillard,<sup>40</sup> *Crash* is the first great novel in the universe of simulation.<sup>41</sup> Twice in his chapter on *Crash* Baudrillard emphasises that Ballard should not be trusted, when he reminds the reader in the introduction to the French edition of *Crash* that the novel is a cautionary tale, “a warning against that brutal, erotic, and overlit realm that beckons more and more persuasively to us from the margins of the technological landscape.”<sup>42</sup> For Baudrillard *Crash* portrays “a body confused with technology [...] under the shining sign of a sexuality without referential and without limit.” The new “sexuality of *Crash* is without precedent”, as it consists of the “non-meaning, the savagery, of this mixture of the body and of technology, [...] the immediate reversion of one to the other. [...] The accident is the sex of life. [...] Bodies and technology are combined, seduced inextricable.”<sup>43</sup> While Ballard in the introduction to the French edition of *Crash* refers to this sexuality as a new perverse logic, Baudrillard insists that one must resist the *moral* temptation of reading *Crash* as perversion: simply because, as Baudrillard explains, the accident is everywhere, no longer at the margin but at the heart of the system. Thus in a world fully immersed in simulation, there is no longer any norm, against which perversion can be defined.

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<sup>39</sup> Jean Baudrillard, “Crash”, in *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor, 1994), p.12.

<sup>40</sup> See Baudrillard (1994), p. 113.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 111ff.

Ballard is, however, aware of this and therefore relegates the question of morality to the reader. In the same introduction he writes that the only place which is still real and that could serve as a point of reference for morality is in the reader's mind.

And here it is important to point to Baudrillard's definition of sex offered in the same discussion: "Sex as we know it is nothing but a minute and specialized definition of all the symbolic and sacrificial practices to which a body can open itself, no longer through nature, but through artifice, through the simulacrum, through the accident."<sup>44</sup> In this definition, sexuality is already dehumanized and reduced to mere functionality. It is a very fitting definition for the world of *Crash*. "[T]hese unions of torn genitalia and sections of car body and instrument panel formed a series of disturbing modules, units in a new currency of pain and desire."<sup>45</sup> It is also why *Crash* is so obsessively concerned with body apertures and orifices. For Baudrillard, the human body in the accident is adapted to the new sexuality of technology through the creation of new artificial orifices: "each mark, each trace, each scar left on the body is like an artificial invagination, like the scarifications of savages, which are always a vehement response to the absence of the body."<sup>46</sup> Recalling Baudrillard's observation in *America*, that the human element is sacrificed to the simulation, it can be said that the human never enters the simulation as an entity but only fragmented, violently cut up, in the accident.

This fusion of sex and technology is further explored in Vaughan's attempt to crash his car into Elizabeth Taylor. The latter is not represented as a human being but is already conceptualized as a hyperreal, simulated image, as becomes clear from Vaughan's description of his vision to crash into her:

I saw the actress colliding with her instrument panel, the steering column buckling under the weight of her heavy-breasted thorax; her slim hands, familiar from a hundred panel games, feinting with the razor-sharp louvers of the ashtray and instrument clusters; her self-

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

immersed face, [...] striking the upper rim of the steering wheel; her nasal bridge crushed, upper incisors driven back through her gums into her soft palate. Her mutilation and death became a coronation of her image at the hands of a colliding technology, a celebration of her individual limbs and facial planes, gestures and skin tones. Each of the spectators at the accident site would carry away an image of the violent transformation of this woman, of the complex wounds that fused together her own sexuality and the hard technology of the automobile.<sup>47</sup>

Her slim hands are only familiar from panel games; Elizabeth Taylor does not exist except in the simulated image of television. Roger Luckhurst, however, has pointed out that contrary to Baudrillard's claim, there is an ironic distancing from Vaughan's attempt to achieve this new sexuality of virtual exchange of symbols:

Durham's reading finds a comic gap, an internal ironizing distance, between this operational system and Vaughan's failed attempt to join it, for the joke is that his ultimate crash misses Elizabeth Taylor and merely plunges into his fellow audience of fascinated rubberneckers. He falls outside simulation, never reaching inside the screen at all.<sup>48</sup>

There is yet more evidence in the latter of how the moment of illusory fusion of flesh and metal – the very identity of the flesh-metal hybrid – is being created and upheld, as Luckhurst goes on to explain, appropriating Baudrillard's observation:

The non-meaning, the savagery of this mixture of the body and technology [,] [...] this fusion however, this equivalence or indifference of signs, can only take place, through the mediation of a third element, Vaughan's camera.<sup>49</sup>

In a sense Vaughan's camera takes over the illusion through movement where it was left by the abrupt stopping of movement of the car in the crash. Or as Paul Youngquist puts it: "Identity is an effect of the photographic image. [...] Photography is thus the *a priori* of (re)cognition in the technological culture of *Crash*."<sup>50</sup> While Baudrillard acknowledges that "only the doubling, the unfolding of the visual medium in the second

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<sup>47</sup> See Ballard (1973), p. 156.

<sup>48</sup> Roger Luckhurst, *'the Angle between Two Walls': The Fiction of J.G. Ballard* (Liverpool, 1997), p. 127. Michael Hardin furthermore points to how Seagrave, when he dresses up as Elizabeth Taylor, exposes the simulation within the novel, making the narrator cautious not to mistake the simulation for the real (2002), p. 38.

<sup>49</sup> See Luckhurst (1997), p. 124.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Youngquist, "Ballard's Crash-Body," *Postmodern Culture: An Electronic Journal of Interdisciplinary Criticism* 11.1 (2000), par. 2.

degree can produce the fusion of technology, sex and death”, he insists that this other dimension of photograph here is not a medium nor is it of the order of representation. In other words, there is no reality prior to the image that could be mediated or represented. In accordance with Baudrillard’s claim of the precession of the simulacrum, the photograph forms already “the metallized, and corporeal layer of traffic and *flows*” (emphasis added).<sup>51</sup> Yet there are gaps in *Crash*, moments of standstill in the car crash, where the flows are halted for just an instant, the moment the narrator experiences as real. But the simulation immediately takes over with the ritualised arrival of ambulances and Vaughan’s camera.

These gaps and holes in the simulation are erased in David Cronenberg’s film adaptation of the novel. It is, as Iain Sinclair points out,<sup>52</sup> by clearing Ballard’s text of all its faecal mess that the film achieves that full immersion into simulation, where death is no longer a real event, not even for the audience. Sinclair further observes that the novel’s Elizabeth Taylor sub-plot is dropped and thus a lacuna is created at the very centre of the film’s plot.<sup>53</sup> If Vaughan’s attempt to crash into Elizabeth Taylor means that the plunge into simulation is impossible, then this also means that this impossibility is only signified by its absence in the film version. The perfect simulation of the film has at its centre the lacuna of its impossibility.

Only by ridding his film of the messy violence of the novel can Cronenberg construct the final scene between Catherine and James as a love story. The erasure of the violence opens up the possibility of experiencing the car crash as a restoration to reality and the illusion of a restoration of an unmediated relationship between husband and wife: “This newfound passion encapsulates the way the crash opens up possibilities

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<sup>51</sup> See Baudrillard (1994), p. 117)

<sup>52</sup> Iain Sinclair, *Crash: David Cronenberg’s Post-Mortem on J.G. Ballard’s ‘Trajectory of Fate’* (London, 1999c), p. 105.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

in the affectless realm that the characters inhabit, offering consolation from the wearing away of desire.”<sup>54</sup>

However, this is a restoration as simulation, a simulation that the referential, alienated human being cannot enter. The simulation is created at the expense of this referential human being, as the narrator of crash is well aware: His own small death is “[b]uried beneath this new geological layer laid down by the age of the automobile accident”, and is “as anonymous as a vitrified scar in a fossil tree”. This observation returns us to Baudrillard’s remark at the very beginning of the discussion that humans are sacrificed to pure circulation. The death of the individual becomes insignificant in the face of the overwhelming, ubiquitous world of simulation. This seems to be exactly Baudrillard’s point in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1985):

Events continue at ground level, misfortunes are even more numerous, given the global process of the contiguity and simultaneity of data. But, subtly, they no longer have any meaning, they are no longer anything but the duplex effect of simulation at the summit.<sup>55</sup>

Some of the criticism of the precession of the simulacra is thus misplaced. Take for example Michael Hardin’s point that in every postmodern work death must be confronted as real.<sup>56</sup> Baudrillard, however, would not deny that. What he is essentially pointing out is that, in a world of simulation, the death of the referential individual simply ceases to have meaning. He further notes in *America*: “you can easily imagine a TV still functioning after humanity has disappeared.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Shohini Chaudhuri, “Witnessing Death: Ballard’s and Cronenberg’s Crash”, *Strategies: A Journal of Theory, Culture, and Politics* 14. 1 (2001), p. 73.

<sup>55</sup> See Baudrillard (1994), p. 36.

<sup>56</sup> See Hardin (2002), p. 22.

<sup>57</sup> See Baudrillard (1988), p. 50.

### 2.1.4 *The Scarifice – Sacrifice by car*

In the simulation of the film version of *Crash* the small deaths of the referential protagonists are erased and human relations are restored as simulation. The Baudrillardian simulation can be therefore understood as a mythical system in the Girardian sense, as the referential, human being can be seen as a victim, comparable to the sacrificial victim of archaic sacrifice. This claim can be substantiated if one considers that, in his discussion of *Crash*, Baudrillard introduces the economy of the symbolic exchange of archaic ritual and sacrifice as functioning by analogy to the car crash and the new sexuality of the simulation. He further comments:

“—but now, precisely, it is no longer sex, it is something else, sex, itself, is nothing but the inscription of the privileged signifier and some secondary marks – nothing next to the exchange of all the signs and wounds of which the body is capable. The savages knew how to use the whole body to this end, in tattooing, torture, initiation—sexuality was only one of the possible metaphors of symbolic exchange[.]”<sup>58</sup>

Furthermore, “the scarifications of savages [...] are always a vehement response to the absence of the body.”<sup>59</sup>

The absence of the body that stimulates the symbolic exchange is the entrance to the Girardian world, in which the collective scapegoating of a real victim constitutes the symbolic exchange of the mythical and ritual system. By analogy, the Baudrillardian simulation of the film version of *Crash*, with the lacuna of the Elizabeth Taylor plot, disguises the fact that it expels the referential human being. The novel, as will be argued in the following, continues to be haunted by the expulsion of the referential human being. This is first and foremost observable through the workings of mimetic desire.

As already mentioned, the crash reveals the presence of the other behind the Baudrillardian simulation. It creates the necessary perspectival angle allowing James to

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<sup>58</sup> See Baudrillard (1994), p. 115.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

perceive how the omnipresence of the car, technology in general and the image in the late twentieth century have deep implications for mimetic desire. The triangular structure of desire between two interindividuals and the object only functions if the other's desire is accessible to imitation. But since, as discussed above, the selves are isolated and shielded by the image and technology from each other, the model's desire can no longer be imitated, as it is no longer accessible without the mediation of technology. As Gasiorek very rightly observes, the presence of the third figure, the model, is no longer felt, as his presence is mediated by the image and thus not real but spectacularised.<sup>60</sup> The presence of the third figure, as should be clear from the above argumentation, is perceived as an image, as the guarantor of the flow of movement that keeps up the illusion of simulation. Vaughan's position as model is reduced to his technological implement: his camera as creator of spectacle.

However, Gasiorek probably goes too far in claiming that desire is not mimetic in *Crash* in the Girardian sense. Desire remains mimetic, only the model of desire has been exchanged. James still desires the being of his rival Vaughan. But this being is reduced to an image of Vaughan. Because the rival is inaccessible, it is indeed the technology itself that becomes the model and object of mimetic desire and thus in a very abstract sense the rival. The new sexuality which the narrator proclaims thus becomes an exercise in "mimetizing" the mediating element, the geometry of the auto-disaster, modern architecture and the Vietnam War.<sup>61</sup> Ballard's representation of that process in *Crash* is obsessive. The following passage can serve as an example:

She watched me with a calm and affectionate gaze as I touched her body with the head of my penis, marking out the contact points of the imaginary automobile accidents which Vaughan had placed on her body.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> See Gasiorek (2005), p. 94.

<sup>61</sup> See Ballard (1970), p. 27.

<sup>62</sup> See Ballard (1973), p. 137.

The depersonalization and exclusive colonizing of the sexual partner along the lines of a geography of car crashes is a totalizing one. It is the formula for the death of affect, the ceasing of seeing the other as other, as the latter is violently conceptualized into the parameters of technology. This is a world of altered mimesis that turns into mimesis as Baudrillardian semiosis – a mere imitation of signs. As Baudrillard writes in *The System of Objects* (1968):

Human beings and objects are indeed bound together in a collusion in which the object takes on a certain density, an emotional value - what might be called 'a presence'. In their anthropomorphism the objects that furnish it become household gods, spatial incarnations of the emotional bonds and the permanence of the family group.<sup>63</sup>

The object absorbs human conflictivity, as Baudrillard recognizes: “What is more, you can look at an object without it looking back at you.” The system of objects facilitates the avoidance of the gaze of the other, the double bind of imitated desires. Yet it also absorbs the desire for the being of the other: “In order to be consumable, the object must become a sign.”<sup>64</sup>

The car crash as the extreme end of the simulation reveals that technology and mass-media are made of separate elements that, through the illusion of harmonious flow, appear to create a whole. The enticing world of technology and images becomes the model to be imitated. Aidan Day draws attention to Will Self’s observation in his *Junk Mail* (1995) interview with J.G. Ballard that “People of [his] own generation are afflicted with this as if it were a virus; they are not aware of the extent to which their view of their own identity has been compromised by film and the car windscreen.”<sup>65</sup> Thus as Elizabeth Taylor in *Crash* is enhanced to a hyperreal, pornographic and composite image, so the imitation of contemporary celebrities is an imitation of the functionality of the spectacularized image of the celebrity.

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<sup>63</sup> See Baudrillard (2005), p. 14.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., pp. 95, 218.

<sup>65</sup> Aidan Day, “Ballard and Baudrillard: Close Reading *Crash*” 49.3 (2000), p. 284.

Claudia Springer has argued that *Crash* “pulls the reader in two directions, laterally across surfaces and vertically into depths.”<sup>66</sup> This tension is portrayed, as has been discussed, in the attempt of the physical, referential human being to join the surface world of the simulation. But it can also be understood as the desire of the self for psychological depth through the imitation of the model’s desire. But since the creation of psychological depth of the self through the interindividual process of imitation is reduced to the imitation of surface, psychological depth itself is reduced to surface. Thus in addition to the seductive utopia of the Baudrillardian simulation and the futile human attempt to join it, there is a transformation of psychological depth to surface through the imitation of the surface of the simulation itself that leaves the self yearning for depth and deeply troubled.

But, as has been argued, the world of pure functionality and exchange of signs that is imitated by the human and which the human is desperate to enter, is a product of conflictive imitation itself: and so is the stratified bourgeois world of psychological depth that precedes the functionality of objects.

The crash, revealing the secret foundation of the simulation on the expelled referential human body offers a choice to James and Vaughan. It potentially breaks the hyperreal omnipresence of the simulation and opens the path to the other – fraught as it is with the potential of conflictive rivalry. The alternative is to interpret the crash as a necessary element on the road to utopian simulation. James’s and Vaughan’s project of a “marriage of sex and technology”<sup>67</sup> points to their choice. They want to reinstitute and become part of the system of simulation through the enactment of violent car crashes. This is the moment when the crash itself is turned from an event that reveals the fragility of the system of simulation into a fertile event. It is also the moment where the Freudian interpretation of *Crash* as the literalization of the death drive is revealed as

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<sup>66</sup> Claudia Springer, “The Seduction of the Surface: From *Alice* to *Crash*” 1.2 (2001), p. 208.

<sup>67</sup> See Ballard (1973), p. 116.

being insufficient. Ballard himself, in an interview with Will Self, clarifies: “I don’t think that there is such a thing as a death-wish wired into our brains [...] I don’t believe that there is a death instinct.”<sup>68</sup> Gasiorek, still thinking within a Freudian paradigm, reads Vaughan’s and James’ desire to repeat the destructive experience of the car crash as a return of the repressed:

Isolated from human contact with others, the subject now exists in some derealised, depersonalised space. Yet the result of this attempted reduction of the subject to a programmed bio-robot is a return of the repressed, which transforms it into a raging solipsistic entity that is identified with the self-asserting id, that which Freud evocatively described as a chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations. [...] All that is then left are solitary id-driven wills proclaiming their right to assert themselves through acts of motiveless violence in which any notion of ethical truth or programmatic social change has long since been obliterated.<sup>69</sup>

Yet, while for Gasiorek there is no notion of ethical truth or programmatic social change in the crash, he realizes that Ballard does not share this view: “Ballard has suggested that our talent for the perverse, the violent, and the obscene, may be a good thing and that we may have to go through this phase to reach something on the other side.”<sup>70</sup> James and Vaughan are employing the logic of violence and the sacred, which is also the logic of revolutionary millenarianism.

This explains Vaughan’s role in the plot of *Crash*. His obsession is to re-enact crashes in order to re-experience and eternalize that moment of the transformative truth of the car crash. Besides the fact that at the heart of this project lies the unsolvable paradox of a planned contingency, which renders the achieving of this goal impossible, Vaughan’s obsession of re-experiencing the transformative moment of the crash and creating the new utopia of sexuality blinds him to the violence of the car crash. According to John Gray, this is the type of logic that is found in millenarianist thinking: “Millenarian beliefs are symptoms of a type of cognitive dissonance in which normal

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<sup>68</sup> Qtd. in Will Self, *Junk Mail* (1995), p. 346.

<sup>69</sup> See Gasiorek (2005), p. 210.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23; See also Sinclair (1999c), p. 42.

links between perception and reality have broken down.”<sup>71</sup> James and Vaughan, fascinated by the apparently transcendent experience of the car crash, no longer perceive the violent fragmentation resulting from the crash. The car crash functions by analogy with the conditioning of the sex act through violent images. The only difference is that the violence is no longer experienced at many removes but directly – and that is why it is experienced as real. It is significant that the crash takes place after James left his secretary Renata with whom he was having an affair. At the moment of the crash it is therefore highly likely that his thoughts are still dwelling on their affair. The commingling of the account of the crash with the narration of their affair in the same paragraph suggests that that is indeed the case.<sup>72</sup>

James, because of his accidental conditioning, interprets his own description of car crashes in erotic terms, whereas the realist portrayal allows the reader to recognize the horrific aftermath of the crash. The loss of differences in the crash is still interpreted by James as the harmonious flow of the simulation and not as violent fragmentation. The following example documents the very fragmentation of the human body by the violence of the crash:

At this moment the injured woman was probably dying, her blood pressure falling, organs heavy with uncirculated fluid, a thousand stagnant arterial deltas forming an ocean bar that blocked the rivers of her bloodstream. I visualized her lying on a metal bed in the emergency ward, her bloodied face and shattered nasal bridge like the mask worn at an obscene halloween, the initiation rite into one’s own death. I visualized the graphs that recorded the falling temperatures of her rectum and vagina, the steepening gradients of nerve function, the last curtains of her dying brain.<sup>73</sup>

Not perceiving the violence of the crash, Vaughan and James try to multiply the crashes that are supposed to transform the existing world order: “In his mind Vaughan saw the

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<sup>71</sup> John Gray, *Black Mass* (London, 2008), p. 8.

<sup>72</sup> See Ballard (1973), pp. 11-12.

<sup>73</sup> See Ballard (1973), p. 155.

whole world dying in a simultaneous automobile disaster, millions of vehicles hurled together in a terminal congress of spurting loins and engine coolant.”<sup>74</sup>

Commenting on the straightforward critique of capitalism in Godard’s film *Week-End* (1967) Ballard describes his motivation for writing *Crash* thus:

That’s the wrong approach. He’s missed the point. He doesn’t see that the car is, in fact, a powerful force for good in its perverse way. And even the *car crash* can be conceived of – in imaginative terms – as a powerful link in the nexus of sex, love, eroticism and death that lies at the basis of our own sexual imagination. With its heart wired into the central nervous system of all human beings.<sup>75</sup>

It seems that the experience of the fertility of disaster in general is deeply rooted in Ballard’s own personal life experience. In his commentary in the 1993 edition of *The Atrocity Exhibition* he writes:

It was from the island of Tinian, in the Marianas, that the atom bombs were launched against Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which ended the war unexpectedly and almost certainly saved the lives of myself and my fellow internees in Shanghai, where the huge Japanese armies had intended to make a last stand against the expected American landings.<sup>76</sup>

In the “Crash!” chapter of *The Atrocity Exhibition* Ballard writes in anticipation of *Crash*:

It is clear that the car crash is seen as a fertilizing rather than a destructive experience, a liberation of sexual and machine libido, mediating the sexuality of those who have died with an erotic intensity impossible in any other form.<sup>77</sup>

In another cryptic comment in *The Atrocity Exhibition* Ballard, appropriating the words from Joseph Conrad’s *Lord Jim* (1900),<sup>78</sup> remarks: “I feel we should immerse ourselves in the most destructive element, ourselves, and swim. I take it that the final destination

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>75</sup> Qtd. in Sinclair (1999c), p. 80.

<sup>76</sup> See Ballard (1993), p. 52.

<sup>77</sup> See Ballard (1970), p. 157, cf. also p. 27.

<sup>78</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim* (London, 1900), p. 200.

of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the best we can hope for in the circumstances, is the attainment of a moral and just psychopathology.”<sup>79</sup>

The twentieth-century car culture portrayed in *Crash*, shows an awareness of the violent process of cultural renewal. As Gasiorek explains:

*Crash* also exhibits a counter-narrative that tries to conceive the wound as the source of redemption, tries to imagine how, out of this disaster, the world might be recreated, and nowhere is the text more ambivalent than here.<sup>80</sup>

In *Crash*, the car crash victims are explicitly conceptualized in the sacrificial roles of the dying and resurrected god of archaic myth, as for example in the following passage:

Her face leaned emptily against the arm of a fireman raising her from the bloody basin of the driving seat like some insane cultist in the American South baptized in a font of lamb’s blood.<sup>81</sup>

The very language used in connection with car crashes is that of myth, religion and the occult. Instances of this are for example when James refers to “the bloody altar of Seagrave’s car”, or to stitched vinyl as a “saintly relic”<sup>82</sup>, or when he describes Elizabeth Taylor: “She sat in the damaged car like a deity occupying a shrine readied for her in the blood of a minor member of her congregation.”<sup>83</sup> The narrator himself in another instance refers to “his messianic obsessions”.<sup>84</sup> As the spectators of a car crash return to their cars they are likened to “a congregation leaving after a sermon urging [them] to imitate the bloody eucharist [they] had observed.”<sup>85</sup> Vaughan’s semen marks “a cryptic diagram: some astrological sign or road intersection.”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> See Ballard (1970), p. 37.

<sup>80</sup> See Gasiorek (2005), p. 91.

<sup>81</sup> See Ballard (1973), p. 167.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

From what has been discussed so far, there are two possibilities as to what this recreated world made out of violence refers to. First off all, the crash, while revealing the impossibility of the human referent joining the simulation, can also be understood as a necessary means for the continuation of the achieved utopia of simulation. Elizabeth Taylor, the prime symbol of the simulated world, depends on the sacrificed blood of a minor member of the congregation. Just as the Aztecs believed that human sacrifice would keep the sun going, there is a similar belief in *Crash* that the violent death of referential human beings will maintain the flow of the simulation.<sup>87</sup> Both beliefs rest on an illusion. In the former case, the illusion is, of course, that the course of the sun can be manipulated by an act of violence. In the second case, the illusion is more complex. It is the illusion that the utopia of speed, as Baudrillard observes, is already achieved. *Crash* unmasks this illusion in that it is revealed that the utopia can only be maintained through endless, useless energy that sacrifices the human and the rest of the world outside of simulation to the simulation. The crash is therefore a metaphor for the exclusion of the human being from the simulation.

The second possibility of how to read the attempt at transformation through violence in *Crash* is the millenarianist one, relying on the logic of the archaic sacred. It is useful to return to the Biblical analogy of Daniel 2. In this second reading, James and Vaughan become aware of the two sides of the simulation through the crash: they realize that the flesh-metal amalgam, like the clay-iron kingdom in Daniel is both strong and weak: it is strong at the stage of speed and simulates flow and it is weak in the crash, where the non-mixing of flesh and metal is revealed. In this reading, they find themselves in a similar situation to medieval millenarianists.

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<sup>87</sup> Roger Griffin, in *Modernism and Fascism* (London, 2007), places the Aztecs and modernity on a continuum: "In this respect there is a fundamental kinship and unbroken historical continuity between the era of rituals and symbols that celebrated the divinity of the pharaohs or guaranteed the continued revolutions of the sun for the Aztecs and the theatrically cultic politics deliberately employed by the Fascist and Nazi regimes to create their new order." (p. 73). Vaughan's and James' vision follows the same pattern.

Among the reasons for the rise of revolutionary millenarianism in the Middle Ages, Norman Cohn finds the breaking down of traditional life.<sup>88</sup> By analogy, the car and the image disrupt immediate, established social relations in *Crash*. The breaking down of the social structures in medieval society, which for Cohn is a result of uncontrolled capitalism, produces a “surplus population” of the poor.<sup>89</sup> These newly created masses become receptive to the message of a “propheta figure”, “a messianic leader, who is a stranger, the man from the periphery.”<sup>90</sup>

In *Crash* there is no equivalent to the creation of the poor. However the depersonalization due to the imitation of the surface of the simulation, creates an undifferentiated mass of car drivers which is willing to follow a propheta. This figure is of course Vaughan, who, as already noted, has “messianic obsessions” and mysteriously appears from nowhere and as mysteriously disappears again after his failed crash into Elizabeth Taylor.

The propheta draws, according to Cohn, on the fountain-head of the apocalyptic tradition, the Book of Daniel.<sup>91</sup> The Biblical source is usually supplemented by non-Biblical sources including Sybilline Oracles, the Joachite idea of the three stages of history and the Heresy of the free spirit.<sup>92</sup> The combination of all these sources leads to the propheta’s message that the Kingdom of God which follows the last Kingdom in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream can be reached “through a final apocalyptic massacre”, a redemptive sacrifice.<sup>93</sup>

Cohn’s account of the last medieval millenarianist Propheta, Jan Bockelson, also known as John of Leiden, and the setting up of a millenarianist, Utopian community in Münster, offers valuable parallels to Vaughan’s role as propheta. The militant

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<sup>88</sup> See Cohn (1970), p. 52

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 238.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., pp. 20, 108f, 148.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., pp. 14, 148.

Anabaptist Bockelson arrived in Münster in 1533, after Jan Matthys, a fellow Anabaptist preacher had become the principal leader of Münster. Matthys and Bockelson instituted a polygamous theocracy – a model of what they thought the millenarian reign of Christ would look like. After the death of Matthys on Easter Sunday 1534 in battle against the regular army of the Prince Bishop of Waldeck, Bockelson declared himself John I, King of Leyden and lost any sense of reality. He instituted a royal court of great magnificence within the besieged city, while the majority of the city's population was starving to death.

What Bockelson's utopia has in common with Baudrillardian simulation, is that it too behaves as if it were already achieved. While Bockelson and his court continued to live in affluence as if there were no siege, the regular population had to kill every animal – dog, cat, mouse, rat, hedgehog – and began to consume grass and moss, old shoes and whitewash off wall, even the bodies of the dead.<sup>94</sup> As the chasm between rich and poor grew, Bockelson appeased the population with his millenarianist promises. The great killing was necessary, and only when it was accomplished would Christ return, to hold judgment and to proclaim glory for all Saints. "Bockelson promised them that, when the town was relieved and the millennium dawned, they should all be real dukes, ruling over vast areas of the Empire, which he had already specified."<sup>95</sup>

Similarly, before Vaughan becomes the propagator of car crashes, it is noteworthy that he himself had once been in control of traffic flow: "[T]his was Dr. Robert Vaughan, a one-time computer specialist [...] with a [...] conviction in his subject matter, the application of computerized techniques to the control of all international traffic systems."<sup>96</sup> It is only when the failure to create the utopia of the simulated flow of car culture is revealed in the car crash that the car crash itself becomes a strategy for reaching that same utopia.

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 278.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>96</sup> See Ballard (1973), p. 49.

By analogy with medieval flagellants,<sup>97</sup> James' and Vaughan crash cars to end the existing cultural crisis and reach the millennium. James recognizes this possibility when he comments: "Vaughan's presence [...] convinced me that some kind of key could be found to this coming autogeddon."<sup>98</sup> And even earlier he is "determined to spot the first signs of this end of the world by automobile. [...] When we've all rehearsed our separate parts the real thing will begin."<sup>99</sup>

While the single victim mechanism thus escalates into violence without end, the aim is nevertheless initially to expel one victim to resolve the crisis. In his role as messiah of car culture, Vaughan is the obvious sacrificial victim of the millennium to come. The rhetorical question which Michel Foucault raises with respect to the panopticon prison in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) is helpful in understanding why this should be so:

And, in any case, enclosed as he is in the middle of this architectural mechanism, is not the director's own fate entirely bound up with it? The incompetent physician who has allowed contagion to spread, the incompetent prison governor or workshop manager will be the first victim of an epidemic or a revolt.<sup>100</sup>

Just as car culture and car traffic can be seen as creating a new, mobile panopticon prison,<sup>101</sup> incarcerating human beings in their cars, so Vaughan's previous position as being in control of traffic can be read as that of "the incompetent prison governor". It is in the very contingency of the car crash that his incompetence is manifested. So with "every rehearsal for the real thing", with every crash Vaughan's position at the centre of the panopticon is weakened and the danger of becoming that first victim of a revolt of car culture becomes evermore imminent.

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<sup>97</sup> See Cohn (1970), p. 120

<sup>98</sup> See Ballard (1973), p. 85.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>100</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (London, 1977), p. 204.

<sup>101</sup> Foucault himself refers to a mobile panopticon: "But what, in June 1837, was adopted to replace the chain-gang was not the simple covered cart, which had been suggested at one time, but a machine that had been very meticulously designed: a carriage conceived as a moving prison, a mobile equivalent of the Panopticon" (*Ibid.*, p. 264).

Vaughan simply reverses the goal of preventing accidents into its opposite of provoking accidents to retain control of the situation. Vaughan himself states: “The technology of accident simulation at the R.R.L. is remarkably advanced. Using this set-up they could duplicate the Mansfield and Camus crashes – even Kennedy’s – indefinitely.” When he is reminded that the technology is actually there to reduce the number of accidents, Vaughan replies: “I suppose that’s a point of view.”<sup>102</sup> Vaughan actually aims at a multiplication of car crashes for the creation of the utopia. Car crashes are turned into an immense sacrificial ritual: “In his mind Vaughan saw the whole world dying in a simultaneous automobile disaster, millions of vehicles hurled together in a terminal congress of spurting loins and engine coolant.”<sup>103</sup> His vision is the ultimate “*scarifice*” – the sacrificial renewal by car.

At this point it is important to note that in the Girardian reading of the Book of Revelation, the Apocalypse is a result of the growing inefficacy of the scapegoat mechanism. As the millenarianist violence of Bockelson does not result in immediately creating the utopian social order, the millenarianist conclusion is that an even greater sacrifice, even more violence, is necessary. Society is in a state of sacrificial crisis. The established rituals are worn out. The analogy to Aztec human sacrifice is again helpful. In the state of crisis even more blood has to be shed in order to keep the sun going. It is a demented type of thinking but it follows the rigid logic of sacrificial renewal.

This is why the car crash does not occur often enough in Vaughan’s view. It is also one reason why there is no sacrificial resolution at the end of *Crash*. Girardian theory offers another angle for making sense of Vaughan’s failed attempt at crashing into Elizabeth Taylor. His sacrifice is not accepted. It lacks the desired effect of producing a new cultural order. The symbolic order is neither restored nor transformed. Because of his failure it is left hanging in its indeterminate, fragmented state. As there is

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<sup>102</sup> Ballard (1973), p. 100.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

no new ritual installed that would keep violence outside of society, the car crash multiplies in violent mimetic contagion, until the state of totality is reached, which leads Baudrillard to remark that the accident is everywhere. Vaughan's view is a deception: violence simply has lost its effect of cultural renewal.

While neither a cultural renewal nor the creation of a utopia of simulation in which the referential human being could participate seems possible through the crash, the mechanism of violent restitution can be nevertheless simulated in *Crash*. Vaughan's small and insignificant real death is turned into semiotic death in the simulated world of the image. For Paul Youngquist this is the difference between the Crucifixion and Vaughan's death. He points out how Vaughan's body is semiotic, whereas Christ's body is organic.<sup>104</sup> Vaughan can only "be reborn as a semiotic function".<sup>105</sup> And that is only possible if his death is already semiotic. The Baudrillardian simulation thus casts a mythic veil over Vaughan's real death that is already reproduced as image in the omnipresence of the simulation. This is a truly mythic move in the Girardian sense. Myth too reduces the real death of the victim to a trace in order to resurrect the god of the new sacrificial system.

However, *Crash* ironically undermines Vaughan's simulated resurrection, by being concerned with the apocalypse of the real world surrounding the simulation. Just as Bockelson can continue to pretend that the millennium is already here, while death and disaster spread around him, so does *Crash* continue to portray the suffering of the real organic body in its pathetic attempts to enter simulation. When Seagrave, disguised as Elizabeth Taylor, dies in his crash it is only through the death of his organic body that he is "at last escaping out of this uneasy set of dimensions into a more beautiful

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., par. 17.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., par. 23.

universe.” But that universe is only beautiful, if one neglects that “Seagrave’s slim and exhausted face was covered with shattered safety glass.”<sup>106</sup>

While Youngquist argues for a real death of Christ’s crucified body, it is interesting to note that Hardin suspects the Christian conception of death to be a simulacrum, as it apparently posits that death is not real and that one is merely passing from one life to the next.<sup>107</sup> But of course he can only do so by overlooking Christ’s suffering on the Cross. The Gospels do not claim that death is not real but insist obsessively on the real, violent death of Christ and on the necessity of Christ’s followers to be part of his death. Death loses its sting not because it is denied but because Christ fully suffers it. The problem with Hardin’s reading of Christianity is that if Christ did not die “then is not Christ raised“.<sup>108</sup>

The same realism that reveals the violent structure of society in Christ’s suffering on the cross, discloses the violence of simulation in *Crash*. The difference between Vaughan and Christ is that the only way that Vaughan can be resurrected is by entering into the semiotic system. That, however, is only possible because he is already dead. By analogy with the mythic belief in the guilt of the victim in the scapegoating process, the belief of simulation that there is no organic body blinds it to the violence against that same organic body. The illusion of simulation is fed with the organic bodies of every traffic fatality.<sup>109</sup> At the same time “the automobile accident reveals the way that system works. [...] *Crash* is about catastrophe, a sudden violent shock to the system that interrupts and illuminates its function.”<sup>110</sup> It illuminates the failing attempt to create a symbolic order that because of its failure continually feeds on the deaths of organic bodies which have been objectified and de-personalized through mimesis as semiosis and are therefore perceived as unreal, as simulated.

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<sup>106</sup> See Ballard (1973), p. 152.

<sup>107</sup> See Hardin (2002), p.47.

<sup>108</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:16.

<sup>109</sup> See Youngquist (2000), par. 27.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., par. 15

Christ's death on the other hand is not an attempt at creating a symbolic order as a result of the sacrificial process. From a Girardian perspective, it makes the creation of new symbolic orders on the basis of a dying body impossible: "Christ crucified transcendentalizes representation."<sup>111</sup> Thus the Resurrection is not a restoration or creation of a signifying system based on the expulsion of the body as found in the description of Girard's scapegoat mechanism. That is why the Gospels insist on the reality of the death of Christ as well as on the reality of the bodily resurrection of Christ.<sup>112</sup> It is the difference discussed by Auerbach in *Mimesis* (1946) between Biblical realism and the Homeric heroes.<sup>113</sup> It is also, in the Girardian paradigm, the difference between the motive of the dying and resurrected God in mythology and the realistic description of the death and the Resurrection of Christ. After emphasizing the bodily death of Christ, a resurrection in terms of the symbolic is barred to the Gospels, as it would only be possible through the veiling of death as simulation. They consequently have to insist on bodily resurrection. And that is also why the Resurrection remains truly miraculous and inexplicable. In *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (2003) the New Testament scholar and former Bishop of Durham, N.T. Wright, has coined the term "transphysicality" to come to terms with the strange phenomenon of the descriptions of Christ's Resurrection in the New Testament.<sup>114</sup> What distinguishes the Crucifixion from *Crash* is thus the inability of the latter to claim a bodily resurrection.

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., par. 17.

<sup>112</sup> The death and resurrection of Christ are highly contentious issues in Biblical studies. N.T. Wright, in *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (London, 2003) however, makes a compelling case that the early Christians actually believed in the bodily resurrection of Christ. This belief is also reflected in early Christian texts including the Gospels.

<sup>113</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis* (Berne, 1946), p. 19.

<sup>114</sup> Wright explains defines "transphysicality" thus: "It [...] puts a label on the demonstrable fact that the early Christians envisaged a body which was still robustly physical but also significantly different from the present one. If anything – since the main difference they seem to have envisaged is that the new body will not be corruptible – we might say not that it will be *less* physical, as though it were some kind of ghost or apparition, but more. 'Not unclothed, but more fully clothed.' As historians we may have difficulty imagining such a thing. But, equally as historians, we should not hold back from affirming that that is what the early Christians were talking about. They were not talking about a non-bodily, 'spiritual' survival. Had they wanted to do so, they had plenty of other language available to them, as indeed we do today. We should not project on to others the limitations of our own imagination. (2003, p. 477f.).

Hardin as an atheist,<sup>115</sup> of course, cannot conceive of bodily resurrection. The only way he can make sense of the Resurrection is as simulation. In consequence he has to construct Christ's death as simulated, despite the evidence to the contrary in the Gospels.

To Hardin's credit, though, he can make sense of death as real.

Even postmodernists die. We believe that in repetition, death loses its sting. Warhol, Ballard, and DeLillo have shown that for the most part, repetition and simulation do make us immune. But unfortunately, they have shown as well that postmodern ideology and culture only keep us immune until we are personally confronted with a bullet, AIDS, or a car hurtling at us. One can only be incredulous so long.<sup>116</sup>

From the point of view of the persisting sacrificial crisis, repetition occurs, since, because of the revelation of violence against the victim, the creation of a stable new cultural order is no longer possible. The death of the victim in the car crash is repeated endlessly without effect. That is why the accident is everywhere, creating a totality. Repetition immunizes but at the same time reveals the violent foundation of the simulation, every time the accident occurs. It is strong and broken.

While Baudrillard is right in pointing out that no moral position emerges within the text of *Crash*, one is nevertheless structurally represented by the alienating device of descriptions of graphic violence. Morality assumes the form of a negative aesthetics of violence, as Bradley Butterfield points out: "Aestheticism thus gains its power to challenge the universe of simulation by remaining unapologetic to its norms and moral standards."<sup>117</sup> The author, despite leaving the text deliberately ambiguous, hands the responsibility for a moral construction of the text to the reader, counting on the reader's sensitivity to detect the textual markers of irony in Vaughan's attempt at a sacrificial restoration of culture and to react to the presented shock of the violent amalgam of flesh

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<sup>115</sup> See Hardin (2002), p. 21.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>117</sup> Bradley Butterfield, "Ethical Value and Negative Aesthetics: Reconsidering the Baudrillard-Ballard Connection", *PLMA* 114.1 (1999), p. 74.

and technology with a moral response. Ballard explains this in his 1995 introduction to *Crash*:

“I feel that, in a sense, the writer knows nothing any longer. He has no moral stance. He offers the reader the contents of his own head, a set of options and imaginary alternatives. All he can do is to devise various hypotheses and test them against the facts.”<sup>118</sup>

At the same time Ballard insists that “the function of the writer is no longer the addition of fiction in the world, but rather to seek its abstraction, to direct an enquiry aimed at recovering elements of reality from this debauch of fiction.”<sup>119</sup>

The reality is that *Crash* persists at the stage of the description of clay and iron in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and cannot break through to the final stage of the dream when “a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces.”<sup>120</sup> As Robert Daly writes on the term “made with hands” in *Sacrifice Unveiled* (2009):

The term ‘made with hands – *cheiropoieitos*’ was a term normally used by Jews to describe the idols of wood and stone that were so abhorrent to Jewish religious sensitivity. [...] In his speech, just before getting stoned, he [Stephen, the first martyr] implies that idolatry is at the very root of Jewish sacrificial practices, He commits the (to traditional ears) blasphemy of calling the temple (as Jesus also provocatively did at his trial) ‘*cheiropoieitos* - made with hands’.<sup>121</sup>

Likewise, the system of Baudrillardian simulation can be considered idolatrous because it rests on the expulsion of the referential human being and the perpetuation of violence.

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<sup>118</sup> J.G. Ballard, introduction (1995), no pagination.

<sup>119</sup> Qtd. in Brigg (1992), p. 59.

<sup>120</sup> Daniel 2:34.

<sup>121</sup> See Daly (2009), pp. 52, 58.

### 3. Atrocity

In *Crash* Vaughan remarks: “I’m not interested in pedestrians.”<sup>1</sup> It is only by never leaving the simulated bubble of his car that Vaughan can remain blind to the victimization occurring in the car crash. Vaughan’s world is the world of the “non-place” as defined by Marc Augé:

If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place.<sup>2</sup>

For Augé, the motorway is such a place, as “the traveller is absolved of the need to stop or even look.”<sup>3</sup> It is only through a slowing down that the non-places, seemingly void of history through the speed of the car, yield their secret history of victimization. Iain Sinclair, walking the city in his role as pedestrian and psychogeographer, precisely rediscovers these spaces erased through speed. As will be seen in the following, what the psychogeographer uncovers, is a world of violence that is the paradoxical foundation of the simulated non-place according to the laws of Girard’s single-victim mechanism. In short, he uncovers the *Atrocity*.

#### 3.1. Iain Sinclair

##### 3.1.1 Structuring the Unstructurable

First of all it is worth noticing Sinclair’s original position of being at the fringe if not outside of the exchange relations of cultural production. This position is at least partly based on Sinclair’s idiosyncratic attitude towards publication. It can be traced to a very

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<sup>1</sup> See Ballard (1973), p. 122.

<sup>2</sup> Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995), p. 77.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

early stage, as Sinclair himself explains in *The Verbals*, a book-length interview conducted by journalist Kevin Jackson:

You do it yourself, you don't attempt to persuade them that this thing you're writing must go in their magazine, you form your own magazine. I don't want to do their plays, I'll do my own, make my own films... that was my attitude, and I operated as an independent society within this greater whole.<sup>4</sup>

It is therefore no surprise that Sinclair's collections of poems of his early career are self-published. Sinclair employs the term *samizdat*, a loanword from Russian that immediately evokes connotations of the context of underground resistance against Stalinist Russia in which it was coined. The act of self-publishing in itself thus becomes an act of resistance against the capitalist exchange relations that are perceived as totalitarian. At times the published editions of Sinclair's works consisted literally of only a handful of printed copies. Similarly to Walter Benjamin who in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935) draws attention to the attempt of fascism to appropriate the newly created masses through an aesthetization of politics, Sinclair attempts to prevent the abuse of his work by capitalism through mass production.<sup>5</sup> Pierre Bourdieu observes concerning the art trader "that the more consecrated he personally is, the more strongly he consecrates the work."<sup>6</sup> Robert Bond argues that Sinclair's aim is to launch self-promotion and not commodity production. Thus Sinclair's small scale publishing potentially restores the aura of the artist and the work of art. Yet, it will be seen that even the aura of the artist can be turned into commodity value.

In the 1970s Sinclair founded "The Albion Village Press" and published in small-scale editions besides his own work several underground poets that were being ignored by the contemporary literary scene. This will be particularly important in the

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<sup>4</sup> Kevin Jackson and Iain Sinclair. *The Verbals: Iain Sinclair in Conversation with Kevin Jackson* (Kent, 2003), p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproduction" (1935), epilogue.

<sup>6</sup> Qtd. In Robert Bond (2005), p. 32.

later discussion of Sinclair's novel *Downriver* (1991) and his characterisation of his "heroes" which are based on the real-life characters of some of the poets.

In a discussion on Jacques Derrida, theologian John Milbank draws attention to the poet as playing a leading role in the foundation of the city.<sup>7</sup> Sinclair describes the role of the writer in general in a similar way in his non-fictional account of several walks around London:

Writers, wishing to rescue dead ground, will have to wrest it from the grip of developers, clerks, clerics, eco freaks, and ward bosses. We are all welcome to divide London according to our own anthologies.<sup>8</sup>

The writer, once central for the very foundation of the city, is driven to the margins, left to wrestle for the ground that was taken away from him by the assembled forces of late capitalism. This double role of the poet/writer as both founder of the city and later victim of the developing city makes it possible to relate the poet/writer to the double role of writing in Derrida's "Plato's Pharmacy" and to the double role as king and scapegoat in Girard's theory.

Sinclair's position and those of his heroes is unclassifiable within a structuralist paradigm of categories: it is post-structural, deconstructed into its double origin. Schizophrenia in Sinclair's writing thus functions as the vantage point for his criticism of the capitalist system. Sinclair's characters perceive the city through the double lens of their schizophrenia that allows them to unveil the violent and composite nature of apparently stable, unified and easily categorisable city structures.

Sinclair employs this post-structural narrative strategy that resists the easy consumption of his texts in various ways. On a semantic level this is reflected in, for example the initial question on the first page of *Downriver*: "And what [...] is the

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<sup>7</sup> John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford, 1997), p. 64.

<sup>8</sup> Iain Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory: 9 Excursions in the Secret History of London* (London, 1997), p. 150.

opposite of the Dog?”<sup>9</sup> This seemingly simple and syntactically correct question is dismissed after five hundred pages of text, in the last sentence of the penultimate paragraph of the novel: “an unprompted description came into my head. A set of alien words. The opposite of a dog. I have not the slightest idea what that means.”<sup>10</sup> An answer could of course not be expected. The answer to that question, however, is *Downriver* itself, the point being that the unanswerable question produces a surplus of text. The implication of the unanswerable question is a criticism of the problematic nature of binary opposition, of clear-cut boundaries. This post-structuralist stance is the basis of the critique of Thatcherism in *Downriver*.

Furthermore Sinclair’s post-structuralist narrative technique is grounded in his work as a filmmaker. As Robert Bond points out: “Sinclair would use hand-held, dashing around grabbing images in a kaleidoscopic attack. And of course it’s exactly the same in his writing.”<sup>11</sup> Kevin Jackson observes how Sinclair’s filmic technique is translated into his writing and becomes one of his trademark effects: “a combination of abrupt groups of one, two or three words, with jagged syntactical fragments and a kind of sprightly running that doesn’t always call on verbs.”<sup>12</sup> Thus at times even the coherence of syntax is deliberately jeopardised, through a paratactical use of language that according to Brian Baker gives the text a rather spatial than linear structure.<sup>13</sup> This results, according to Peter Barry, in the lack of narrative propulsion and forward drive of the texts, which increases their unreadability.<sup>14</sup> Baker interprets the re-establishment of spatial relations over temporal relations, as counter-capitalist.<sup>15</sup> The narrator of

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<sup>9</sup> Iain Sinclair, *Downriver, or, the Vessels of Wrath: A Narrative in Twelve Tales* (London, 1991), p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 530. That is not to say that there is no meaning to *Downriver* but only that this meaning is not a simple meaning in the structuralist sense of binary opposites.

<sup>11</sup> See Bond (2005), p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Jackson and Sinclair (2003), p. 123.

<sup>13</sup> Brian Baker. *Iain Sinclair* (Manchester, 2007), p. 42.

<sup>14</sup> Qtd. in Baker (2007), p. 43. See also Peter Barry, “You Can Get It From The Street”: The Prose Style of Iain Sinclair”, in *City Visions*, eds. Robert Bond & Jenny Bavidge (Cambridge, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

*Downriver* makes a similar argument when he observes how the unreadable is in the process of becoming the unsaleable.<sup>16</sup>

The technique of the kaleidoscopic parataxis paves the way for what Sinclair refers to as “compulsive associationism”.<sup>17</sup> In Sinclair’s understanding of the term the process of association is revealed as not to be leading to a coherent framework of knowledge in a Lockean Empiricist sense but to the observation of contradictions in the processing of sensory experience. As the narrator of *Lud Heat* (1975) puts it: “The point is that the objective is non-sense & the scientific approach a bitter farce unless it is shot through with high occulting fear & need & awe of mysteries & does not demean or explain in scholarly babytalk[.]”<sup>18</sup> In *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings* (1987; henceforth *White Chappell*), his novel on the Ripper murders, this enables him to form the initials of the victims into “some kind of dyslexic curse” as they spell out the cryptic “MANAC ES CEM JK”, which almost seems to make sense but escapes a rational understanding.<sup>19</sup>

The dyslexic curse hints already at what will be argued later is the organising principle behind Sinclair’s contradictory perception, namely the contradictory terms of sacrifice. Alex Murray has observed that by focussing on the Ripper murders, Sinclair reveals the obscene underside of Victorian culture.<sup>20</sup> Yet for Sinclair, through compulsive associationism, the Ripper murders assume a much wider scope. In *White Chappell* the narrator’s contemplation of the last two initials of the last Ripper victim Mary Jeannette Kelly, JK, leads him to connect these to “victims and variants” and how “the names have escaped. They tremble and manifest in the dawn air, lifted, a shield raised, not in protection, but to strike, the blue signature of a guillotine.” On the very

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<sup>16</sup> See Sinclair (1991), p. 17.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

<sup>18</sup> Iain Sinclair, *Lud Heat* (London, 1975), p. 89.

<sup>19</sup> See Jackson and Sinclair (2003), p. 115.

<sup>20</sup> Alex Murray, *Recalling London* (London, 2007), p. 54.

next page those names are grouped around the big letters JK.<sup>21</sup> They include John Kennedy, John Knox, Jack Kerouac, the K in Philip Dick, Joseph K, Mistah Kurtz and and an amalgam of Judas and Jesus, JUDAS KRISTUS! Furthermore, in *Slow Chocolate Autopsy* (1998) the letter K is referred to as “the devil’s letter.”<sup>22</sup> In the Girardian reading of the devil as the orchestrator of the scapegoat mechanism, those two meanings for the letter K – referring to the victim and the devil – can be reconciled. The meaning is extended from referring to the expulsion of the victim with the initial “K” to include the process of scapegoating.

Compulsive associationism can explain Sinclair’s preoccupation with “the occult”, first and foremost in the original Latin sense of “the hidden”. Sinclair’s assumption is that behind the apparent rationality there is a hidden irrationality that drives capitalism, as the following example from *Downriver* on the privatisation of the railway system in Britain makes clear: “The slower and more complicated the service, the better for business.”<sup>23</sup> Another example of this is given in *Hackney* (2009), in the discussion of the pastoral idylls of Edward Calvert, contemporary and disciple of William Blake. Sinclair suggests that his

paradise visions [...] become [...] a tribute to what his adopted home has given away: to foul-smelling industries, dank canals, railways, theoretical progress. [...] The wood engravings, their ripe apples and honeymoon bedchambers, sheep and cider presses, are a graphic record of loss. [...] The solitary shepherd, staff in hand, journeys after an absence of sheep.”<sup>24</sup>

Sinclair connects the theoretical progress and absence of sheep to Lamb Lane as a slaughter track: “Markets require the death of everything they market. The hunger is insatiable.”<sup>25</sup> Market forces nourish their insatiable hunger with victims such as the

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<sup>21</sup> See Sinclair (1987), p. 172.

<sup>22</sup> Iain Sinclair, *Slow Chocolate Autopsy* (London, 1998), p. 81.

<sup>23</sup> See Sinclair (1991), p. 205.

<sup>24</sup> Iain Sinclair, *Hackney*, (London, 2009), pp. 217/18.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

Compendium bookshop in Camden.<sup>26</sup> Sinclair thus suggests that capitalism itself is occult in that it follows a contradictory logic for reaching its aims, producing effects that are not taken into account by the system itself. He further observes with respect to Calvert that it was “[h]is wife, Mary” who “took the burden of Hackney Life, the children, the dirt, the horror of having to deal on a daily basis, *with what is actually there.*”<sup>27</sup> Just as Calvert paints a youth, an idyll he no longer possesses, while his wife’s contemplation of the length of ground in which she will be laid are occulted, capitalism constructs itself as a utopian force for good and excludes its inconvenient other.

In *London Orbital* (2002), Sinclair’s account of his walk around London’s M25, his description of the Siebel building is revealing<sup>28</sup>: “Siebel, I recognised at once, was the future. Intelligent buildings for soberly dressed, quiet, indecently healthy people. Health is the only valid currency. Credit rich vampires from the old capitalist empires buy new faces, fresh blood.”<sup>29</sup> Sinclair’s perception is already infused with the idea that there is a vampiric other to the building, yet the building itself offers no sensory evidence of this. It partakes willingly in the erasure of history and memory, as Brian Baker has pointed out.<sup>30</sup> When Sinclair and Renchi Bicknell, his companion on the walk, enter the building, they themselves become subject to this erasure. “Road-ragged pedestrians, such as Renchi and I, are welcome because *we do not register*. As far as the women at the desk are concerned, we do not appear on the screen. We come from another universe and very soon we’ll go back to it.”<sup>31</sup>

The Siebel Building is the world of Ballard. Comparing Ballard’s and Sinclair’s fiction, David Cunningham has argued that Ballard’s writing, set in the non-places of postmodernity, lacks the tension of place. The creation of the world of Baudrillardian

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 256.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 218.

<sup>28</sup> Siebel is a software company owned by Oracle.

<sup>29</sup> Sinclair, Iain. *London Orbital: A Walk around the M25*. (London, 2002), p. 259.

<sup>30</sup> See Baker (2007), p. 42.

<sup>31</sup> See Sinclair (2002), p. 261

simulation in Ballard is an attempt, not only to hide the victim mechanism, but in fact to rid itself of the whole paradoxical process of violent restitution and present itself as a utopia without a violent history: “Ballard’s fictional world, [offers] only a rigorously non-nostalgic vision of a coming desert in which all ‘cultural accretions’ are finally erased.”<sup>32</sup>

In *The Transparency of Evil* (1990) Jean Baudrillard suggests that “whatever fails to achieve orbital power is left in a state of abandonment which is permanent, since there is no way out via some kind of transcendence.”<sup>33</sup> Sinclair and Renchi do not belong to this orbital, self-referential world. This world of big financial capital has been hyperrealized – and is now in orbit above our heads on courses which escape from reality itself. However, by becoming satellites in an inaccessible space, loan, finance, the technosphere, communications – and this certainly includes Siebel – left everything else to go to rack and ruin.<sup>34</sup> This is the world that they will return to: the ruins of the past that are erased in the Siebel world.

This mode of perception that records traces of the past in the erasures of modernity is grounded in Sinclair’s use of the concept of “psychogeography”. Although the term itself was originally coined by Guy Debord, Merlin Coverley has drawn attention to the fact that Sinclair’s usage of psychogeography “completely bypasses the work of Debord and the situationists.”<sup>35</sup> It rather follows Alfred Watkins’ concept of “ley lines”. While Debord’s understanding of psychogeography can be summarized as “the study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals”<sup>36</sup>, Watkins suggests that a landscape is covered by a prehistoric network of straight tracks, “aligned through

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<sup>32</sup> David Cunningham, “Replacing the Novel: Sinclair, Ballard and the Spaces of Literature”, in Robert Bond and Jenny Bavidge, eds., *City Visions: The Work of Iain Sinclair*. (Newcastle, 2007), p. 145.

<sup>33</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil*. (London, 1993), p. 31.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>35</sup> Merlin Coverley, *Psychogeography* (2006), p. 53.

<sup>36</sup> Guy Debord, “Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography”, In eds. Harald Bauder and Salvatore Engel-Di Mauro. *Critical Geographies: A Collection of Readings* (Kelowna, 2008), p. 23.

the hills, mounds and other landmarks.”<sup>37</sup> His ideas were, however, not at all tied to the occult but, proposed as a serious suggestion for archaeology, to be explored with regard to artefactual evidence.

Sinclair takes up this idea of a prehistoric organisation of space along ley lines but reconfigures it as to still having an effect on space in later periods. They thus become lines of force. Sinclair draws upon Rupert Sheldrake’s concept of morphic resonance to explain how what happened in a place permanently affects it.<sup>38</sup> Sheldrake’s concept, that has been marginalised in science on account of its unfalsifiability, is redeemed by the imagination of the writer. Sinclair’s imaginative perception is precise enough to record the most minute change in detail in the configuration of a place, due to the actions having occurred there. In the “Horse Spittle (Eros of Maps)” chapter of *Downriver* there is a particularly telling use of morphic resonance that even affects the quality of light. Discussing the story of Edith Cadiz, Victorian nurse and prostitute, the narrator perceives how “Edith’s actions, the magick she had practiced, had been translated into an indefinable quality of light.”<sup>39</sup>

The narrator of Sinclair’s *Dining on Stones* (2004) uses the convex lens as a metaphor to describe the effect of his vision: “The convex lens, distorting reality, took me into a zone of ghosts and phantoms. The middle ground.”<sup>40</sup> In contrast to the concave lens which disperses light rays, the convex lens focuses dispersed rays onto one focal point. In this metaphor the irrational rationality of late capitalism and the post-structural, double position of the schizophrenic stalker refer to the dispersed rays of light, whereas the focussed light on the other side of the lens refers to the ghosts and phantoms that are released by the contradictory nature of late capitalism. Although this focussing can potentially give meaning to the ghosts and phantoms, it is crucial to

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<sup>37</sup> See Coverley (2006), p. 52.

<sup>38</sup> See Jackson and Sinclair (2003), p. 100.

<sup>39</sup> See Sinclair (1991), p. 101.

<sup>40</sup> Iain Sinclair, *Dining on Stones* (London, 2004), p. 56.

observe that this meaning remains trapped in the middle ground, the post-structural double nature of meaning. There is of course no magic or occult practice involved in the appearance of ghosts and phantoms that are revealed to the narrators of Sinclair's fiction. Sinclair is able to maintain this imaginative use of morphic resonance with an encyclopaedic knowledge of the local histories of the places to which he summons his narrators. The only obscure thing about this is the way that these local histories of place are jumbled together. Compulsive associationism extends itself to Sinclair himself as he states: "I was reading about paleontology, stone circles, economic currents – reading widely and crazily."<sup>41</sup>

Equipped with a schizophrenic mind attuned to the morphic resonances underneath the erased space of modernity, the narrators of Sinclair's fiction and non-fiction stalk London, recording their perception in kaleidoscopic, compulsive associationism. Sinclair's conception of the person walking the city differs markedly from previous constructions, as for example "the flâneur" of Baudelairean modernity. Also, the walkers do not simply "dérive" in the Debordian way of the Situationists as Sinclair makes clear in *Lights Out for the Territory*:

The concept of "strolling", aimless urban wandering, the *flâneur*, had been superceded. We had moved into the age of the stalker; journeys made with intent – sharp-eyed and unsponsored. [...] This was walking with a thesis. With a prey. The stalker is a stroller who sweats, a stroller who knows where he is going, but not why or how.<sup>42</sup>

This type of walking produces the mindset for compulsive associationism, as Sinclair writes in *Liquid City* (1999): "walks that release delirious chemicals in the brain as they link random sites [...]"<sup>43</sup> Not knowing why he's going, the city stalker's task seems to be primarily to witness what he perceives from within his strangely attuned vision. The narrator of *Downriver* describes this as the "oft-stated policy of witnessing anything and

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<sup>41</sup> See Jackson and Sinclair (2003), p. 46.

<sup>42</sup> See Sinclair (1997), p. 75.

<sup>43</sup> See Sinclair (1999a), p. 11.

everything, taking whatever was put in front of me.”<sup>44</sup> He also emphasises, when pondering the result of one of his walks, that it is not his role to make sense of what he presents: “My circuit was complete. I was back where I had started: in Homerton High Street. I had discovered nothing.”<sup>45</sup> This inability to make sense of the observed events even enhances his capacity of observation: “If we had come so far it was because our report had no external significance.”<sup>46</sup> If the narrator leaves the middle ground of his post-structural witnessing too early by making sense of what he sees, he would no longer be able to act as this type of witness.

This does not, however, mean that there is no meaning in Sinclair’s writing. One should not succumb too quickly to Julian Wolfreys’ conclusion, who happily acknowledges that no critical language is adequate to Sinclair’s excessive texts, and as a consequence does not want to propose anything amounting to a reading.<sup>47</sup> It shall be demonstrated that the Girardian framework is perfectly adequate to accommodate Sinclair’s work without reducing it to its own terms. On the contrary, it will be argued that a rather neglected ethical dimension can be recovered from Sinclair’s work through a Girardian reading.

### 3.1.2 *Downriver I*

You’ll be forced to dream all the nightmares that have ever flowed down the river, all the plagues and executions.<sup>48</sup>

The river is a fitting metaphor for the post-structural middle ground as it gathers all the expelled elements from the Baudrillardian simulations created upstream into an undefined whole: “Upstream for Comedy, Downstream for...whatever it was we were

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<sup>44</sup> See Sinclair (1991), p. 382.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 377.

<sup>47</sup> Qtd. in Richard Bradford, *The Novel Now: Contemporary British Fiction* (Oxford, 2007), p. 70.

<sup>48</sup> See Sinclair (1991), p. 131

involved with. We had wantonly chosen the wrong direction.”<sup>49</sup> The comic resolution of the upstream world into stable categories is achieved through the expulsion of the nightmares downstream. The narrator struggles to categorize the experience because, as Jean Baudrillard has noticed, there is no opposite of the remainder.<sup>50</sup> The uncategorisable remainder flows downstream. While Robert Bond is right in pointing out that “[t]he central role played by the river in the text is illustrated by its function as a pilgrimage route”<sup>51</sup> and therefore a path towards hope, his quotation from *Downriver* that the river “is beyond the pain”<sup>52</sup> is only half the truth, as the river is also “guilty as ever.”<sup>53</sup> Before the river can become a pilgrimage route to hope, the narrator is “buffeted through a book that had turned to water. [...] a tightening roll of mad calligraphy, scribbled wavelets, erasures, periods of gold.”<sup>54</sup> The mad calligraphy that is *Downriver* itself, unveils all the victims that are at the basis of the simulated world of modernity. “The Thames was like a sarcophagus” – literally “consumer of flesh.”

Patrick Parrinder draws attention to Lewis Mumford’s observation in “Utopia, the City and the Machine”, that the idea of utopia, from Plato’s Republic onwards, is derived from the spiritual and material origins of the city.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore,

the city according to Mumford is a structure specially equipped to store and transmit the goods of civilization” – home of such institutions as the written record, the archive, the library and the academy. But these secular institutions grew out of the earlier sacred function of the city, which was at first a “ceremonial meeting place” and later the home of the God. [...] In its simplest form it is a double-walled structure with an inner fortification protecting a sacred enclosure containing palaces and a temple, surrounded by an outer wall containing the subservient population.

Mumford further comments on the city’s destiny:

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 433.

<sup>50</sup> See Baudrillard (1994), p. 143.

<sup>51</sup> See Bond (2005), p. 140.

<sup>52</sup> See Sinclair (1991), p. 7.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 440.

<sup>55</sup> Patrick Parrinder, “Visions of Ruined London from Spenser to Ballard”, in, Susana Onega and John A. Stotesbury eds., *London in Literature: Visionary Mappings of the Metropolis* (Heidelberg, 2002), p. 21.

Each historic civilization [...] begins with a living urban core, the polis, and ends in a common graveyard of dust and bones, a Necropolis, or city of the dead: fire-scorched ruins, shattered buildings, empty workshops, heaps of meaningless refuse, the population massacred or driven into slavery.<sup>56</sup>

The Thames as sarcophagus in *Downriver* reveals London as a city of the dead.<sup>57</sup>

From a Girardian perspective, Mumford's claim that the sacred is the origin of the city can be understood in terms of an origin in scapegoating, which, as will be shown, is also Sinclair's position. As already pointed out in the introductory chapter, for Girard "culture always develops as a tomb."<sup>58</sup> This mechanism of cultural foundation is, however, hidden from the respective cultures. As Girard further writes: "Tombs exist to honour the dead, but also to hide them in so far as they are dead, to conceal the corpse and ensure that death as such is no longer visible."<sup>59</sup> But not only the founding murder and the dead are concealed. Girard draws attention to the double-concealment found in another passage from Luke: "'Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which men walk over without knowing it.'" The tomb conceals the dead in the religious rituals, whereas the "underground" tomb is subsequently concealed in the replacement of ritual institutions by "post-ritual" institutions. For Girard, modern judicial and political systems are the products of this double-concealment.

Thus at the origin of the upstream comedy and of modernity Sinclair finds as Girard the expelled and entombed victims. The river and the car as emblems of modernity are brought together through their function as tombs if the following passages from *Slow Chocolate Autopsy* are considered. Norton, Sinclair's alter ego, describes "traffic", as the "most dead-alive business man has ever devised", whereas

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<sup>56</sup> Qtd. in *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>57</sup> M. Hunter Hayes in *Understanding Will Self* (Columbia, 2007) observes that several novels in recent years have explored the effects of death on the human body. These include Jim Crace's *Being Dead* (London, 1999), Graham Swift's *Last Orders* (London, 1996) and Will Self's *How the Dead Live* (London, 2000). Hayes comments further: "This pervasive thread in contemporary literature of depicting corpses in unidealistic terms, a practical agnostic response to corporeal anxieties, lends the impression of a post-mortem era rising from the shade of postmodern experimentation." (p. 146). Sinclair also goes beyond the postmodern and reveals the dead bodies underneath the postmodern obsession with signs. In the present context the uncovering of the dead reveals of course the mechanics of scapegoating.

<sup>58</sup> See Girard (1987a), p. 83.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

“crossing water is a kind of death.”<sup>60</sup> The preoccupation with entombment and the dead of the city is already present in Sinclair’s early, self published *Lud Heat*, a psychogeographic investigation in poetry and prose on the East London Hawksmoor Churches. Investigating the grave of John Williams, the Ratcliffe Highway murderer, so famously captured in Thomas De Quincey’s “Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts”, the narrator observes how “over him drives for ever the uproar of unresting London.”<sup>61</sup> Because at the centre of the uproar of the city is a corpse, the city is regarded “not as a place for the living but as a necropolis for the dead.”<sup>62</sup> The centrality of the corpse for culture goes beyond the city for Sinclair, when the following remark is considered: “It is not mere supposition that Hawksmoor and Herodotus were linked.”<sup>63</sup> This implies that at the foundation of Western history, as Herodotus is considered the first historian in Western culture and thus regarded as the father of history, there is a corpse, an entombed victim. Girard supports Sinclair’s suspicion in a footnote, when he speculates in *Violence* that Herodotus’ reticence on the supposed sacrifice of two Persians to Dionysus at the eve of the battle of Salamis may be deliberate.<sup>64</sup>

Thus the awareness of the foundation of culture on the tomb is lost. According to Sinclair, “[t]hese facts fade. The big traffics slam by. A work ethic buries ancient descriptions.”<sup>65</sup> But for Sinclair “nothing is lost forever. It slips further out, abdicates the strident exhibitionism of the present tense: lurks like a stray dog, somewhere beyond the circle of firelight.”<sup>66</sup> From Sinclair’s middle-ground perspective the river “disgorges its dead.”<sup>67</sup> In one of the pictures taken by Marc Atkins in *Liquid City*, an illustrated book with essays by Sinclair, there is an immense graveyard, separated by a fence from

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<sup>60</sup> See Sinclair (1998), pp. 54, 78.

<sup>61</sup> See Sinclair (1975), p. 15.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>64</sup> See Girard (1977), p. 294.

<sup>65</sup> See Sinclair (1975), p. 16.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 446. Here again the use of the simile of the dog elicits the question of the opposite of a dog, i.e. how can an alternate reality be constructed that is oppositional to the entombing of victims, without being oppositional in the sense of being dependent on its opposite.

<sup>67</sup> See Sinclair (1991), p. 528.

an overground tube line with a passing train. In the background there are two tower blocks visible.<sup>68</sup> The fact that the two symbols of modernity, the tube train and the tower blocks are dominated by the graves, can be interpreted as a threat to modernity. Once one is aware of the entombment of victims as the foundation of modernity, the dead victims multiply. Modernity is revealed to be a myth in the Girardian sense, as it can only function as long as the foundational victims and their tombs are erased from consciousness.

Those victims are gathered downriver and since they are already expelled, reduced to a remainder, they cannot be further expelled through categorisation – because again, there is no opposite of the remainder. The river carries the narrator along a sightseeing tour of the places where its disgorged dead are situated. In *Slow Chocolate Autopsy*, Norton is encouraged to “treat London like an autopsy catalogue.”<sup>69</sup> In *Lud Heat*, Sinclair draws attention to the fact that in the dictionary definition of “autopsy” the first entry is “seeing with one’s own eyes, being an eye-witness”, whereas only the second entry is concerned “with the dissection of a dead body.”<sup>70</sup> Sinclair is interested in both meanings of autopsy, as he wants the reader to see what he sees with his own eyes but also, as London is regarded as a city of the dead, in the second sense of the word “to find out the cause or seat of disease.”

One of those places is visited in the second chapter of *Downriver*: London’s Rotherhithe tunnel. The constructed role of the outsider that has been described previously, is enhanced in this instance by the penetration of the pedestrian into a space not created for him. The reader is presented with the perspective that is excluded and erased in the simulated world of *Crash*:

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<sup>68</sup> Iain Sinclair and Marc Atkins, *Liquid City* (1999a), pp. 170f. The picture appears in a section called “Stumbling Blocks: London Stone”, echoing the highly relevant Biblical passage of “the stone which the builders rejected” (cf. for example Matthew 21:42).

<sup>69</sup> See Sinclair (1998), p. 7.

<sup>70</sup> See Sinclair (1975), p. 40 and *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, “autopsy”, 15 February 2011.

If you want to sample the worst London can offer, follow me down that slow incline. The tunnel drips with warnings: DO NOT STOP. Seal your windows. Hold your breath. This is not reassuring to the pedestrian, who wobbles along a thin strip of paving, fearing to let go of the tiled wall: working the grime into his icy hand. [...] Why are there no other walkers? [...] Read the scars and striations, and wonder if some juggernaut will spread you into them. [...] It's the wrong tunnel. I must be halfway to France.<sup>71</sup>

The fragility of the walker reveals the violence committed against the human element by the structure of the tunnel that remains hidden, if driven through. It is the fragility that is only revealed in the moment of the crash in *Crash*. “To walk here”, as the narrator observes, “is to blaspheme.”<sup>72</sup> The act of walking forms a blasphemy against the system of simulation that tries to hide its violence committed against the fragility of the human body.

Walking the tunnel also changes the experiencing of time, as the time taken to traverse the tunnel seems too long to the pedestrian. The altered dimension of time leads to the narrator's insight that “[t]he tunnel covertly opens a vein between two distinct systems, two descriptions of time. The outfall of the city is bled into drained marshlands. Electrical faults animate the rotting convict hulks[.]”<sup>73</sup> The vein is covertly opened, visible only to the eye of the vulnerable pedestrian.<sup>74</sup> Underground experiences like these, which reveal an undercurrent of violence, instil in the narrator a desire to penetrate the source of this violence.

Observations like those of the Rotherhithe tunnel as a connecting element between the city and its outside violence, lead the narrator to construct the psychogeographic ambience of the places he visits in the contradictory terms of sacrifice. The investigation into the source of the violence begins with the role of the victim. In an instance of compulsive associationism the establishment of zero longitude

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<sup>71</sup> See Sinclair (1991) p. 63f.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 64

<sup>74</sup> The allusion to the Dickensian prison hulks suggests an origin of the city akin to Giorgio Agamben's suggestion in *Homo Sacer*: “When our age tried to grant the unlocalizable a permanent and visible localization, the result was the concentration camp. The camp – and not the prison – is the space that corresponds to this originary structure of the nomos.” (Stanford, 1998), p. 20.

at Greenwich, an important step towards a unified world time and thus a precondition for global capitalism is paired with the choice of a victim, when one of the characters, Arthur Singleton is involved in a cricket match at Greenwich: “When does a victim realize that he is the chosen one? When does a ‘fall guy’ receive the first intimations of vertigo?”<sup>75</sup> The relation between global capitalism and the victim is further elaborated on, by a discussion of the death of King Cole, an aboriginal cricketer.

King Cole came to England in 1868 as a member of the first Australian aboriginal cricket team to tour England. He died of pneumonia during the tour and was buried in Tower Hamlets’ Victoria Park. Recalling Cole, the narrator is convinced that “[t]he memory of King Cole would stay forever sharp in Tower Hamlets.”<sup>76</sup> This memory will, however, only last in the middle ground of the narrator’s perception. S.L. Joblard, a character based on the sculptor and Oxford lecturer Brian Catling, observes in the final moments of the novel with regard to the eucalyptus tree planted in memory of Cole:

It was the first anniversary of the planting of the eucalyptus tree in memory of the Aboriginal cricketer, King Cole. [...] The tree would be uprooted, torn to ribbons, scattered to the winds. This did not matter to him. Once he [Sinclair] had adopted (written in) a site, he was bound, in honour, to revisit it: that site had become a repository of meaning, a place of consultation. A blood relative.<sup>77</sup>

Outside the schizophrenic perspective of the narrator Sinclair, the memory of the cricketer is erased as he is well aware, when reflecting on the fears of Sonny Jacques, another character in the novel: “He was now quite certain that if we ever should re-emerge into the real world, there would be nothing left. The flats would be a cliff of termites, and the wasteland a robot-controlled industrial estate.”<sup>78</sup> Outside the middle ground the memory of Cole is retained only as a display in the spectacle of late

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<sup>75</sup> See Sinclair (1991), p. 24.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 107

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 511

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 317.

capitalism, when a second burial of Cole is used as a promotional event for the Qantas-sponsored aboriginal cricket tour, on which the narrator sarcastically comments: “A nice conceit. Qantas Aboriginals, presumably living in burnt-out fuselages, and hunting by jet.”<sup>79</sup>

The awareness of the death of the victim that is beneficial for culture is erased from the perspective of modernity. However, Sinclair’s compulsive associationism lets him construct an influence of the sacrificial victim on the mechanics of modernity. For the spirits of the victims in *Downriver* are according to the schizophrenic logic of the narrator not erased but, as in the case of Edith Cadiz, “trapped, blocked in by the flats and the railway.”<sup>80</sup> The influence of the trapped victims is felt in the narration of a train accident:

Let the train jump its brook; let it tumble down the perilous chasm between the banked windows of the hospital, with all its revenging monsters, and the eternally poisoned site of the first sacrificial murder.<sup>81</sup>

Thus the accident is not governed by mere coincidence – although in the literal meaning of “coincidence” it is precisely coincidence, as the accident and the place of the sacrifice coincide, “fall together” – but a collision of the spirit of place with the forces of modernity. Thus a trace of the relation to the sacrificial victim is retained in the accident. Paul Virilio has drawn attention to this coincidence of the technological inventions of modernity with the accident, when he observes:

According to Aristotle, *there is no science of the accident*. But the ship defines another power, in the face of what might arise: the power of the unexplored side of the failure of technical knowledge, a poetics of wandering, of the unexpected, the shipwreck which did not exist before the ship did;<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 107

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 112

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 279

<sup>82</sup> Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine* (Bloomington, 1994), p. 28.

The accident is the expelled other that is there at the very foundation of technological modernity and every now and again shows itself as a trace. However, as Baudrillard has commented with respect to *Crash*, the accident has become the norm and resurfaces everywhere. It is also the norm for the perspective of the middle ground. Since the narrator's perspective is post-structural, he sees both sacrifice and the accident everywhere and connects the two, as they fulfil the same function with respect to the foundation of the system. As the narrator of *Lud Heat* puts it: "Seasonal rhythms – death, sacrifice, inhumation, re-birth – are understood & coded into the system."<sup>83</sup> Both are foundational for the system and both only survive as a trace in that system. The narrator reflects on this perception thus: "Anything I touch transforms itself into a fresh metaphor for pain and anguish."<sup>84</sup>

Thus for the narrator the foundational violence of technological modernity is the norm. It is thus not surprising that in the "Eisenbahnangst" chapter of *Downriver* the narrator expects the first railway murder of the new system to be imminent. The narrator is led to recall the early days of the development of the railway by reflecting on the privatization of the railways under Thatcherism. The implication is, of course, that the new utopian system of the Thatcher era functions according to the same mechanism of violent foundation as the one that it is about to replace. Thus while it could be argued that Sinclair's writing evinces a certain nostalgia for the older city structures that are threatened with destruction by late capitalism, he is well aware that these structures are produced by the paradoxical principles of violence. Nowhere is this more observable than in Sinclair's obsession with "Rodinsky's Room."

### 3.2.3 Rodinsky's Room

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<sup>83</sup> See Sinclair (1975), p. 63.

<sup>84</sup> See Sinclair (1991), p. 489.

David Rodinsky's story is tied to the history of the Princelet Street Synagogue in East London. The synagogue is an emblem of the cultural change occurring in London's East End and of the decline of Jewish culture in the area. David Rodinsky and his mother lived in an upper room of the Synagogue from the early 1930s onwards. After the death of his mother, Rodinsky continued to live in the synagogue's upper room, even after the synagogue was closed down. He led the life of a hermit and recluse and disappeared in the late sixties apparently without a trace.

With Rodinsky also disappeared the memory of the upper room and it was only in the early 1980's that it was re-opened again. The room presented itself exactly as Rodinsky had left it at the moment of his disappearance.<sup>85</sup> Besides the fact that articles of daily life were "frozen" in a state that indicated that Rodinsky could return at any moment, the room was stuffed with cryptic documents of Rodinsky's studies of ancient languages and Jewish mysticism. It is not surprising that the discovery of the room lent itself to mythical constructions about Rodinsky's disappearance and in a wider context to the construction of a mythical London East End of the Sixties, threatened by the late capitalism of Thatcherism.

Valentine Cunningham has observed that "it is the exemplary emptying out, the ruination of these East End pasts which obsesses Sinclair."<sup>86</sup> Rodinsky is the key to how Sinclair constructs these East End pasts, for, as Cunningham further points out: "This brand and branch of anarchism survives now only as an absence, and a fiction merely of presence. It exists, survives, now, only as fiction. And perhaps, the implication is, it

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<sup>85</sup> However, in the wake of the publication of *Rodinsky's Room*, Rachel Liechtenstein was approached by Mike Pattison who was the first to enter the room. His picture shows the room "unaltered, unpretified. It is clear from this image", Liechtenstein writes in her afterword to the paperback edition, "that later photographers could not resist arranging the objects slightly to make a more conventional still life composition." (Rachel Liechtenstein and Iain Sinclair, *Rodinsky's Room* (London, 1999), p. 325). Thus from the very point of discovery of the room, a process of mythification is initiated that allows for the romanticized and mystified construction of David Rodinsky's fate.

<sup>86</sup> Valentine Cunningham, "Litvinoff's Room: East End Anarchism" in Gustav Klaus, H., and Stephen Thomas Knight, Eds. "to Hell with Culture": *Anarchism in Twentieth Century British Literature* (Cardiff, 2005), p. 156.

only ever was.”<sup>87</sup> Sinclair’s interest in writers and poets ignored by the canon includes East-End anarchist writers like Alexander Baron, Emmanuel Litvinoff or Robin Cook, writing as Derek Raymond. The mythification of these writers follows the Rodinsky model: “David Rodinsky, a ghost defined by his possessions. Rooms turn into men, men are absorbed into damp plaster and peeling wallpaper.”<sup>88</sup> Place is turned into myth, by absorbing the substance of Rodinsky. But it is, of course, only as long as Rodinsky’s disappearance itself remains mysterious that the mythic construction of the East End can be upheld. The absence of Rodinsky and of mythical East End anarchism survive as a trace and haunt the places that are threatened by the erasure of late capitalism.

In the light of the above argumentation, Sinclair’s co-authorship of Rachel Lichtenstein’s *Rodinsky’s Room* (1999) seems to conflict with his mythification of Rodinsky. Sinclair relies on Rodinsky remaining a mythical figure which exerts the power of absence that is necessary for Sinclair’s writing. Thus for Sinclair “the idea of Rodinsky had become a dybbuk. The soul of a dead person who enters the body of a living human and directs their conduct.”<sup>89</sup> He suspects that “he had reached a point in his cabbalistic studies where he had begun to achieve the Great Work, a kind of invisibility or moving into another dimension, and he disappeared that way.”<sup>90</sup> Lichtenstein, however, treats the mystery in a way that threatens the myth of Rodinsky, as Sinclair observes: “Rachel was the first person to treat Rodinsky as a human being, a man with a biography and a finite lifespan.”<sup>91</sup> Because Lichtenstein does not treat Rodinsky as a “mystery man” but constructs him as a human presence, she is able to solve the mystery of his disappearance but thereby also destroys the aura of his mythical absence. Brian Baker’s comments on *Rodinsky’s Room* are informative in this matter:

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>88</sup> See Sinclair (1997), p. 246.

<sup>89</sup> See Lichtenstein and Sinclair, (1999), p. 83.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>91</sup> See Sinclair (2002), p. 339.

Where Lichtenstein's chapters are presence-full, Sinclair evacuates from his own essays. [...] In a sense the book is about failure, the inability to successfully marry two very different projects, two different "readings" of the room: presence and absence, identity and Rodinsky.<sup>92</sup>

Although Lichtenstein's presence of Rodinsky is as much a construct as Sinclair's absence, as Baker continues to point out,<sup>93</sup> she manages to track down Rodinsky's death certificate and eventually discovers that he died in a mental institution outside London.

Because Sinclair and others treat Rodinsky as a mythical figure, they cannot solve the mystery, as Sinclair acknowledges: "We had discovered nothing because we didn't want to know, didn't want to destroy the comforting mystifications, our gothic anthology pieces."<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, "The more the mystery of Rodinsky was discussed and debated, the dimmer became the outline of the human presence. [...] Rodinsky was a gothic thrill or he was nothing."<sup>95</sup> This insight leads Sinclair to further recognise how through the mythical construction of Rodinsky, he himself has committed violence against the human being Rodinsky: "And, as much the vampire, I was hot to audition the Vanishing Jew for the cast of my novel *Downriver*."<sup>96</sup> Lichtenstein's treatment of Rodinsky as a human being that reveals the truth of violence against a real, human victim behind the mythical constructions is analogous to Girard's claim that all myths are based on the expulsion of a victim. To substantiate this claim a short summary of Girard's category of texts of persecution in *The Scapegoat* is necessary.

In the opening chapter of *The Scapegoat* Girard discusses the work of Guillaume de Machaut, a French mid-fourteenth-century poet, in order to demonstrate that the "difference between the historical and the mythological is arbitrary."<sup>97</sup> Machaut's poem *Judgment of the King of Navarre* portrays an apocalyptic scenario in which "[m]en die

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<sup>92</sup> See Baker (2007), p. 114.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>94</sup> See Lichtenstein and Sinclair (1999), p. 86.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 262.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>97</sup> See Girard (1986), p. 47.

in great numbers.”<sup>98</sup> Even though some of the events he describes are totally improbable, Girard claims that something must actually have happened. Girard then explains how the Black Death ravaged the north of France and how the Jews were made responsible for the disease.<sup>99</sup>

In Machaut’s text the accusations against the Jews are truly mythological: parricide, incest, the moral or physical poisoning of the community.<sup>100</sup> The representation of the Jews as monstrous in Machaut’s text strangely resembles the monstrous crimes Girard identifies in myths, for example the Oedipus myth. Whereas in the latter case, ethnology treats the myth as having no basis in reality, it is clear that in the former, there are real victims hidden behind the masks of the mythological monsters.

As both types of texts represent mythological monsters in a similar way, the difference in treatment of texts is more a result of initial assumptions rather than an actual difference in the texts. It is the external casing of the texts that decides the interpretation.<sup>101</sup> In the case of de Machaut, as the text is considered to be one of historical persecution, there are real victims behind the mask of the monsters. In the myths on the other hand, because they are by definition untrue and lack any basis in reality, there can be no real victims. Both interpretations are circular and self-fulfilling as the initial assumption determines the outcome of the interpretative process. As Girard goes on to explain: “The moral attitude of the two disciplines, history and ethnology makes all the difference.”<sup>102</sup>

For Girard, the mythical texts and what he calls the “texts of persecution” of history are structurally too similar to be treated in such different ways. He constructs a continuum of demystification between myths and texts of persecution that revolves

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 26

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

around the victim: “The face of the victim shows through the mask in the texts of historical persecutions. There are chinks and cracks. In mythology the mask is still intact.”<sup>103</sup> The intact mask of mythology eliminates any representation of violence against a victim.<sup>104</sup> What thus remains to be explained is the ambiguous nature of the gods, for example in Greek mythology, as both criminals and gods. Because these two traits cannot be reconciled, the crimes of the gods are minimized in the Aristotelian notion of “hamartia”.<sup>105</sup> This leads to the theology of *divine caprice*.<sup>106</sup>

Girard’s theory of a demonization and subsequent divinization of a victim can explain both the criminal and god-like traits of the gods. As in the texts of persecution, treating the myths as real, in the sense of their being structured on the expulsion of a victim, is the only possible way to demystify them. This means, however, that the victim, the scapegoat is never represented as scapegoat: Girard distinguishes between the scapegoat of the text and scapegoats in the text. In de Machaut, the Jews are not presented as scapegoats but as truly responsible for the Plague. It is only through the modern day reader’s assumption that the Jews are the scapegoats of the texts that their role in the text can be understood. The scapegoat “cannot become the theme of that text he *shapes*. This is not a theme but a mechanism for giving *structure*.”<sup>107</sup>

Girard thus verifies his claim of the structural dependence of mythology on the victim through the absence of the theme of collective murder. One should always be suspicious of this type of indirect proof, in which the absence of something is taken as evidence for its being there. If this type of argument is used for just one myth, one can indeed make anything mean anything. For this type of proof to be convincing the absence must be a regular occurrence, in fact it must be absolute, as Girard makes clear: “If we look closer we shall see that there is actually always one missing, and it is always

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., pp. 76/94

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

the same one, the representation of collective murder.”<sup>108</sup> Girard extends his argument to include Lévi-Straussian structuralism and explains why the latter has not detected the structuring violence of collective murder. Because structuralism rests on the single principle of differentiated binary opposition, it does not allow for the identification of the all against one of collective violence.<sup>109</sup>

Girard’s reasoning, even if stringent, will have to remain suggestive, as proof can only be gathered indirectly. Furthermore it cannot escape circularity as the discovery of the victim behind every myth relies on the initial assumption that every myth is built on an expelled victim. However, the aim of this digression is not to prove or disprove Girard’s claim for world myths but to demonstrate the applicability of his model to *Rodinsky’s Room*. In the following it should become clear that *Rodinsky’s Room* is a text that represents the whole continuum postulated by Girard, from the victim, over the texts of persecution to fully constructed myths that erase their basis on the victim.

In order to penetrate the secret behind the Rodinsky myth, Lichtenstein has recourse to the one set of referents whose existence cannot be denied: the Holocaust in particular and persecutions of Jews in European history in general. These are the same referents that Girard uses to defend his claim that myths are constructed on the expulsion of a victim. He writes:

The pernicious idea that there is no truth anywhere, and especially not in the texts we interpret, is triumphant everywhere. Against this notion we must brandish the truth we have all extracted unhesitatingly from Guillaume de Machaut and the witch trials. We must ask the nihilists whether they renounce this truth, too, and whether they see all the accounts as the same, whether from the perspective of the persecutors or the victim.<sup>110</sup>

When she visits Poland to investigate her own Jewish ancestry, Lichtenstein is stunned by the extraordinarily beautiful cemeteries set on hillsides and in forests. Yet “this

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

romantic vision would often be shattered as we learned we were standing on a mass grave.”<sup>111</sup> Through her visit to Poland Lichtenstein trains her perception to discover the absent victim in the Rodinsky myth just as Girard trains his perception to discover the victim in world myths through his study of “texts of persecution”, in which the victim’s presence cannot be denied. Lichtenstein connects her guided tour in the Polish Tarnów with her own activity as a tourguide in Whitechapel: “I now experience the surreal nature of being on a guided tour, much like the ones I conduct myself in East London.”<sup>112</sup> Lichtenstein learns to see behind an abandoned parking lot in Whitechapel the same river of blood that once flowed through the streets of Tarnów. This also has consequences for how she perceives Rodinsky’s room: “The significance of his room suddenly became clear. It was [...] his *flesh and blood*.”

When she visits a Rabbi in Israel, he tells her that she is “connected to *olam hasod*, the secrets of the earth, you are the one that peels back the layers of the earth, like an onion, to find the meaning. This man, Rodinsky, his *neshama*, his soul, is connected to yours[.]”<sup>113</sup> The onion is one of the prime vehicles visualising postmodernity’s claim that there is no essence at the core of culturally constructed meanings. For Lichtenstein, as for Girard, however, at the core of the peeled onion of culture is the human victim.

Commenting on the only picture taken of the room by a woman Lichtenstein uses the metaphor of the tomb: “I was deeply moved by her image of Rodinsky’s bed and thought it interesting that this was the only photograph of the room taken by a woman, focusing on his bed like a tomb.”<sup>114</sup> This remark returns us to Girard’s discussion of tombs as a metaphor for the violent foundation of culture. Rodinsky’s

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<sup>111</sup> See Lichtenstein and Sinclair (1999), p. 233.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 333.

body has been erased from the room and it is only the minority report of a woman photographer that establishes this connection.

Lichtenstein not only finds the death certificate of Rodinsky but is also able to trace his final abode before his death: Longrove psychiatric hospital in Epsom. She also discovers why he was transferred from the room in Princelet Street to a mental institution. Again, she chooses to disbelieve those who construct the room as a variation of the “locked room” mystery<sup>115</sup> and adopts a position from which the disappearance of a human being must have an explanation: “Sinclair had told me the room was a ‘trap’. Maybe, but I felt Rodinsky had chosen me to tell his story, and I wanted to ensure it was told as accurately as possible.”<sup>116</sup> She discovers that

Rodinsky had been forced to see a doctor as his health had deteriorated so much. The doctor had probably sent him for a stay in St Clement’s Hospital, and social services must have been informed.

It seems they inspected his flat at Princelet Street, decided it was unfit for human habitation and sent him on to the Jewish shelter, telling him, as their letter said, that his flat would be cleaned and redecorated.<sup>117</sup>

Lichtenstein speculates that Rodinsky the recluse had been declared mad because he had been greatly misunderstood. This argumentation is only open to her through her own displacement into the Polish Jewish culture and the replacement of Rodinsky into this original context: “In London, Rodinsky appeared eccentric and poverty stricken, here he would have been considered pious and holy.”<sup>118</sup>

Rodinsky is thus seen as a victim of a cultural misunderstanding. Yet Lichtenstein does not generously overlook this misunderstanding as a simple lapse but strikes an accusatory note when she asks: “Could he have been sectioned, and taken away to the Longrove psychiatric asylum because of the way he lived? [...] What did they know of observing the eleven months of Hasidic traditions, of charity to the poor,

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 286.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 312.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 232.

of the pursuit of cabbalistic magic?”<sup>119</sup> Rodinsky is not the only victim but one in a long line of victims, as the Longrove is considered as an epitome of the Victorian mental asylum.<sup>120</sup> The implication is that there are many such stories, many Rodinskys who have fallen victim to the constructions of normality that excludes them as mad. Sinclair, investigating the subterranea of the city, discovers south of Fieldgate Street what he calls poverty barracks for “a small remnant of hardened drinkers and outcasts with diseases too contagious or obscurely medieval to be housed in the London Hospital. [...] These charity cases, tolerated vagrants, were waiting to be found out. [...] Twenty or thirty Rodinskys, retired from the sea, or expelled from their pits by the tide of development.”<sup>121</sup>

The forces that expel Rodinsky and others are once more seen as related to the Holocaust whose existence cannot be denied. Lichtenstein discovers that Rodinsky had scrawled over the letter from social services “in angry red letters, DIABOLICAL CONCENTRATION CAMP, A. MORTE.”<sup>122</sup> The human life of Rodinsky as an irreducible, expelled referent is thus established. This is not to say that the contradictions between the various accounts of Rodinsky by contemporaries who claim to have known him simply vanish, nor to deny the linguistic construction of Lichtenstein’s “Rodinsky”, as she is well aware: “And so the different Rodinskys lived on in memory. [...] We each see people in a different light.”<sup>123</sup> The various accounts that construct different Rodinskys can be deconstructed against each other *ad infinitum*. What cannot be deconstructed is Rodinsky’s role as victim. This is what consists the irreducibility of his reference that goes beyond linguistic signification.

It is the denial of Rodinsky’s irreducible humanness that allows for the construction of Rodinsky as myth. If myth, as Roland Barthes claims, is a type of

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 220.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 314.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 257.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 312.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 326/27.

speech, a second order signification, then this second order signification is constructed from the contradictory first order significations of the linguistic sign. In the case of Rodinsky this means that his construction as “Golem of Princelet Street” as both “protector and destroyer” is based on the contradictions that Rodinsky through his absence generates: “The death certificate stated he died aged forty-four. But Bill Fishman remembered seeing him in his attic in the late Thirties. He described him as an old man bent over his books by candlelight.”<sup>124</sup>

“The evolution of mythology”, Girard observes, “is governed by the determination to eliminate any representation of violence.”<sup>125</sup> This holds also true for Rodinsky. The expulsion from the synagogue to the mental hospital is forgotten in favour of the creation of the mythical Golem. Like Girard, Lichtenstein is aware of this, when she comments on the Golem of Prague:

This fantastical tale developed in the middle of the seventeenth century, a dark time of massacres and pogroms for the Jews of Europe. I don't believe there is such a thing as an accidental folk legend. These stories are not just fanciful fictions; rather, they are mirror images of the complex historical and cultural experiences of a people.<sup>126</sup>

The construction of the Golem is related to the persecution of the Jews and thus like the poem of Guillaume de Machaut based on the expulsion of a scapegoat. Sinclair, convinced by Lichtenstein's meticulous recovery of Rodinsky's humanity, summarizes the process of Rodinsky's mythification in Girardian terms: “Rodinsky's life has been sacrificed to construct a myth, mortality ensuring immortality.”<sup>127</sup> His immortality is a linguistic immortality, the construction of a myth in the Barthesian sense that relies on sacrificing his life. Henceforth Sinclair follows Lichtenstein's example of demythification, as in his discussion of the “Mole Man” William Lyttle, a person with quasi mythical status” in *Hackney*:

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>125</sup> See Girard (1986), p. 76.

<sup>126</sup> See Lichtenstein and Sinclair (1999), p. 224.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

They collected newspaper reports and rumours, constructing a mythology around the burrower's fictive status. I was sensitive to the fact that, in recording an interview, I might spoil their fun: by disinterring some sorry human fact like the pauper's death of David Rodinsky, revealed by Rachel Lichtenstein's remorseless detective work.<sup>128</sup>

Rodinsky functions as a Derridean supplement who is expelled, driven to the margins, yet at the same time through his mythification becomes central to the system that expels him. Sinclair's recognition of his mythification of the violent roots of Rodinsky's disappearance also lets him reconsider his treatment of Rodinsky in relation to property development in East London: "Those with a vested interest in defining Spitalfields as a zone of peculiar and privileged resonance needed a mythology to underwrite property values. Rodinsky, one erased life, one blank biography among so many, was elected."<sup>129</sup> Capitalism relies on mythologies such as Rodinsky's to define the non-material component of property-values that augments the aura of a place and thus also the desirability and value of properties. The artist is complicit in this process by producing the necessary mythology based on the expulsion of a victim. Capitalism parasitically employs these myths to conquer new territory. While using the myths, it erases their violent origin at the same time, as Sinclair observes with reference to Rodinsky in *London Orbital*: "Goodman Price Demolition Ltd. have taken over the hospital where Rodinsky died."<sup>130</sup> The structure of the double erasure of the tomb again applies. Not only is the myth built on Rodinsky's death but that death is also erased through the demolition of the hospital.

Even if Sinclair, due to his mythification, cannot solve Rodinsky's disappearance in *Downriver*, there is already an awareness in the novel of how the Rodinsky myth and artists in general are preparing the way for the capitalist erasure they are opposing.

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<sup>128</sup> See Sinclair, (2009), p. 405.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>130</sup> See Sinclair (2002), p. 343.

### 3.2.4 Downriver II

When artists walk through a wilderness in epiphanous bliss-out, fiddling with polaroids, grim estate agents dog their footsteps. The visionary reclaims the ground of his nightmares only to present it, framed in Perspex, to the Docklands Development Board.<sup>131</sup>

The (ab)use of the artist by capitalism is necessarily tied to an absence of independent desire on the side of the capitalists. The latter perceive the desire of the artist as independent and therefore authentic. The aura of the artist that has been restored by Sinclair through the refusal of participating in commodity exchange, defines the places of interest that in turn generate the rising value of properties that capitalism turns into profit. Capitalism exploits the aura of the artist, by imitating his desire for the derelict places and translates them into monetary value that is ridden of the nightmarish violence that the artist uncovers. One such mechanism is the turning of history into “heritage”. The narrator’s previous unveiling of the connection between the hulks and the non-place of the Rotherhithe tunnel is absorbed by market forces. He himself becomes a witness of this process in which a piece of violent history is turned into heritage:

Now the hulks were occupied once more, under the co-sponsorship of English-Heritage, who had lovingly restored them to the last detail of authenticated squalor. This daringly simple solution had been unveiled by the Widow in her keynote Marshalsea Speech (subsequently recognized by commentators as the moment when the perceived identity of Britain changed from Orwell’s colonial airstrip on the fringes of the civilized world to a land which had, successfully, made a reservation of its own history).<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> See Sinclair (1991), p. 21.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 438. In Julian Barnes’ *England, England* (London, 1998) history is literally turned into a reservation on the Isle of Wight. Corporate capitalists erect a miniature version of England which is reduced to the most popular tourist sites. Something similar happens in Geoff Nicholson’s *Bleeding London* (1997). London is transformed into a wholly materialistic Japanese-tourist version in a place called Hakkaido in which “all the tourist attractions will be there on one manageable site.” (p. 332). Susana Onega completely misses the point of Nicholson’s parody of the “heritage culture” when she writes in her introduction to *London in Literature* (2002): “In sum the publication of a novel like Geoff Nicholson’s with its comic and parodic vision of visionary London is proof that, for all the negativity and bleakness attributed by Malcolm Bradbury to contemporary London writing, the English novel still keeps intact the capacity to heal and regenerate itself through laughter.” The opposite is of course the case. The laughter points to the bleakness left behind by the simulation of “heritage”. Sarcasm is the last resort of the critic of “heritage”. Nicholson’s novel is thus in line with the bleakness of Sinclair’s vision. Sinclair himself makes this point in *Dark Lanthorns* (Uppingham, 1999b) and reads the leaving behind of bleak London in *Bleeding London* in terms of cultic sacrifice (p. 9).

Brian Baker comments on the process of history being transformed into heritage: “History becomes a spectacle and a commodity, one with an ideological function: to mask the conflicts of material history and replace it with a dehistoricised space of consumption.”<sup>133</sup>

The widow, an avatar for Lady Margaret Thatcher, is perceived as being the source of the vampiric market forces that transform everything into seemingly non-violent commodities. The narrator’s aim becomes thus to exorcise the “demonic entity”. Davy Locke, one of Sinclair’s characters expresses this in terms of vampirism:

I’m convinced,” said Davy, we are confronted by a demonic entity, a blue-rinse succubus draining the good will of the people. That woman can’t be stopped without a stake through the heart, burial where four roads meet, a fist of garlic up the rectum.<sup>134</sup>

*The Vessels of Wrath*, of *Downriver*’s alternative title, are therefore directed against the widow. Sinclair explains in *The Verbals*:

Thatcher introduced occultism into British political life [...]. Her take, if you look at it, verges on the demonic. She wanted to physically remake, she wanted to destroy the power of London [...].I can’t look at it in any other way but as actual demonic possession. [...] The whole notion of *Downriver* was an anti-demonic project as it stands<sup>135</sup>

The notion of the “occult” is again to be taken literally in this instance, as, according to Sinclair, Thatcherism hides its unwanted other. The narrator of *Downriver* points to exactly this process in the heritage example given above: “Vagrants were driven in (by the container load) from their cardboard camps. They should no longer give the lie to the Widow’s rhetoric of achievement.”<sup>136</sup>

However, the term “exorcism” itself does sound occult and irrational and seems akin to the violent expulsion of the victim in the scapegoat mechanism. The question is

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<sup>133</sup>See Baker (2007), p. 91.

<sup>134</sup> See Sinclair (1991), p. 348.

<sup>135</sup> See Jackson and Sinclair (2003), p. 135.

<sup>136</sup> See Sinclair (1991), p. 439.

if one is to understand Sinclair's exorcism as a kind of reactionary revolutionary act bringing down the demon of market forces by an act of violence. If so, then, from a Girardian perspective, Sinclair succumbs to the same forces of satanic expulsion that he opposes. In the following, it will be argued that this is actually not the case. Sinclair's exorcism is first of all based on the passive witnessing of the demonic forces in action.

In order to uncover the occult logic of market forces, the narrator, accompanied by Imar O' Hagan, a character modelled upon the real-life Gavin Jones, and Davy Locke, starts out on a journey to the Isle of Dogs. This journey returns the reader to the initial question of *Downriver*, of what the opposite of a dog is. The Isle of Dogs is perceived as the centre of the Thatcherite Docklands development and thus as the focal point of the occult logic of market forces. The question of the opposite of a dog can thus be rephrased as what the opposite of market forces is. The exorcism of the widow is thus centred around the question of how to establish a logic that is not subsumed to market forces and returns the reader to Sinclair's imaginary claim of being outside exchange relations.

The subheading of the "Isle of Dogs" chapter, "(Vat City plc)", in which this journey is reported, opens a connection to other forces that have been perceived as occult. The Vat for value added tax is punningly elided with the Vatican. By deliberately pairing the occult logic of market forces with a religious institution such as the Vatican, Sinclair awards the market forces a quasi sacred status that escapes rational analysis and is best understood from his post-structural middle ground perspective. The quasi sacred status points to the formation of the LDDC, the London Docklands Development Corporation, that was given power by the government to acquire and sell land in the Docklands. Brian Baker points to how the Docklands development can be read as some kind of colonialism and continues: "The blank spaces themselves legitimate colonisation, for they rest upon the assumption that there are no aboriginals

inhabiting the space, only empty resource-fields to exploit.”<sup>137</sup> He furthermore draws attention to the fact that *Heart of Darkness* is a major intertext to *Downriver*. The blank spaces are produced by the abstraction of the map, which Sinclair addresses in “The Eros of Maps” chapter of *Downriver*.

The narrator and his companions have to be seen as exactly the aboriginals who are not taken into account by the Development Corporation. They are the collective single victim that is sacrificed through the development of the Docklands. This is how the narrator constructs their role for the journey to the Isle of Dogs. One of them has to be the stand-in for the expulsion of “the aboriginals” that makes the Dockland Development possible and be sacrificed: “One victim only, but which of us should be the lucky man? It might prove interesting to find out.”<sup>138</sup> As it turns out it is “Davy [who] was the goat among the sheep: the necessary sacrifice by which the faithful obtained grace.”<sup>139</sup>

However, before Davy is sacrificed, Sinclair constructs the journey of the travellers as a journey into “the heart of darkness” of market forces, on which they witness strange rituals and festivals. On their travels, they also discover the reasons for the main sacrificial ritual that is about to take place and of which Davy is the victim. There is an impending market crisis in the utopia of property development and as in the sacrificial crisis described by Girard, it demands for its restoration the expulsion of a scapegoat. As the rise in property values on the Docklands is based on the imitated desire of the artists and does not have a material basis, it is only a question of time until the spiral of imitated desires will escalate and will reveal the illusory nature of the added value. Sinclair quotes an estate agent, Alan Selby, alongside Shakespeare’s

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<sup>137</sup> See Baker (2007), p. 93.

<sup>138</sup> See Sinclair (1991), p. 390.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 350.

Shylock at the beginning of the chapter: “I am not sure the bubble has burst, I would prefer to say there has been a realignment.”<sup>140</sup>

This bubble is sustained through a complex system of mortgages. Accumulating debt is encouraged, as through the escalation of imitative desire, there is the utopian hope that property prices will rise continuously, which would allow the owners to sell with a profit, which in turn would allow them to pay the mortgage back. Chris Petit, interviewed by Sinclair in *Hackney*, notes that “*the whole thing about debt became the legacy of the Thatcher era.*”<sup>141</sup> Sinclair is suspicious of this model: “I knew nothing about mortgages but didn’t like the smack of death in that word: an inherited puritan ethic, buy only what you can pay in cash.”<sup>142</sup> Sinclair seems to suggest that the mortgage would have a claim on his life through some kind of Faustian deal.

Thus it is not too far fetched that this system does indeed require victims. If the creation of the utopia of Docklands already relies on the expulsion of “aboriginals”, it does even more so in the crisis. The ideal of the new, utopian Docklands must be held on to, whatever the cost. The intensity and necessity of the expulsion of a scapegoat to save the threatened utopian Docklands increases. The intensity is captured by the introduction of the rituals in “Vat City”. The Isle of Dogs is turned into the “Isle of Doges”, relating it to quattrocento Venice: “This deregulated isthmus of Enterprise was a new Venice, slimy with canals, barnacled palazzi, pillaged art, lagoons, leper hulks; a Venice overwhelmed by Gotham City, a raked grid of canyons and stuttering aerial railways.”<sup>143</sup> Again, the narrator, perceives the scenery as a post-structural double made up of the utopia of a 15<sup>th</sup>-century Venice and a dystopian Gotham City. The worshippers

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p. 343.

<sup>141</sup> See Sinclair (2009), p. 388.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p. 153. Sinclair’s allusion to death is supported by the etymology of the word. *The Oxford English Dictionary Online* (15 February 2011) refers to a seventeenth-century source to account for the French root “mort” in the term: “It seemeth that the cause why it is called mortgage is, for that it is doubtful whether the Feoffor will pay at the day limited such summe or not, & if he doth not pay, then the Land which is put in pledge vpon condition for the payment of the money, is taken from him for euer, and so dead to him vpon condition, &c. And if he doth pay the money, then the pledge is dead as to the Tenant, &c.”

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 346.

of late capitalism are gathered on the Isle of Dogs and turned into a frenzied mob in their seeking of advice from their god, “the widow” in this situation of crisis: “Gold-card boatpeople stammer aphasically as they trundle their suddenly ridiculous rowing machines, their Pierre Cardin business suits in zipped bags, down to the water’s edge.”<sup>144</sup>

As the ceremonies are about to begin, the description of the scenery becomes increasingly bizarre. The Isle of Dogs is perceived as an apocalyptic landscape of which the *Hackney Gazette* keeps an official record and thus becomes a fiercer equivalent of The Book of Revelation.<sup>145</sup> Just as in the latter, mythical creatures attend the rituals: speed-freaks incubating sawn-off shotguns, blood descendants of river vampires and cannibal buccaneers, dwarfs, swine demons and Anubis, jackal-headed gods of Egyptian myths, to name a few. From the parallel time of quattrocento Venice colonies of rats are multiplied.<sup>146</sup>

The first ceremony to take place is something called “the sexing of the pope” and it is officiated over by the eighteenth-century astronomer Pierre-Simon Laplace. The latter can be seen as a guarantor of the stability of the ceremony, as one of his research interest included the attempt to prove the stability of the solar system. Iddo Okkoli, one of the scavengers and outcasts of the Isle of Dogs, is to be crowned pope. In Okkoli again, the double role of king and victim is captured. Historically, Laplace’s thesis of the stability of the solar system was replaced by the view of a chaotic system. Likewise, the order of the crowning ritual is threatened by chaos. During the ritual, one of the two sacred dwarfs at Okkoli’s side dares to handle “the stones of potency” of pope Okkoli and is subsequently butchered and offered to Okkoli who drinks his blood.

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<sup>144</sup>Ibid., p. 347.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid., p. 346.

<sup>146</sup>Anubis already makes an appearance in Sinclair’s early work *Lud Heat* and is strongly tied to the Isle of Dogs as the jackal-headed Anubis is dog-like. The reference to Egyptian myth is also evokes the Egyptian Book of the Dead and thus reminds the reader that London is a city of the dead. The swine demons are taken from William Hope Hodgson’s *House on the Borderland* (London, 1908).

With the death of the dwarf, however, the ritual seems accomplished and the angriness of the “red wind”, which stands for “falling markets, collapse, disaster”, seems appeased.

The utopian vision of the market that is to be reinstated in the crisis is reinforced by the appearance of the celebrity astrophysicist Stephen Hawking. To the ecstatic monster-worshippers he proclaims: “Space-time has no beginning, no end. There was no moment of Creation. The boundary condition of the universe is that it has no boundary.”<sup>147</sup> As for space-time, there are no boundaries for the accelerating spiral of the market forces. The narrator sarcastically comments: “It all sounded so perfectly reasonable.” Hawking’s distorted voice asserts through the blaring speakers, “Imag mag magi nary time is sss real ti ti time.”<sup>148</sup> What the worshippers of market forces have to realize is that by analogy to imaginary time, the market forces should no longer be tied to some “real” world:

Selling was too important, too rarified a skill, to be tied any longer to mere products. It was an autonomous artform, practised for its own sake, creating insatiable hungers even among the most resistant of all targets, the other salesmen.<sup>149</sup>

This observation by the narrator leads back to the added values of properties through the imitation of desire of artists. To meet the expectations of exponential growth of a liberal market economy it seems expedient to completely get rid of the material basis of value and cultivate the spiral of imitated desires. The limitless, expanding universe is the perfect metaphor for the escalation of imitated desire. One of the models of the flat universe actually suggests that there is an acceleration in the expansion of the universe.

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 375.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 375.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 371f.

So is there an acceleration of desire. The worshippers are so moved by this insight that they fall on their “knees, muttering about sins of omission and emission.”<sup>150</sup>

But, of course, as with general relativity that does not suspend the laws of Newtonian physics but incorporates them as a special case, the condition of the expanding universe cannot simply be taken as to apply to earthly realms. The narrator is, therefore, more sceptical about the effectiveness of this solution to solve the crisis of the market. Reacting to the suggestion of constructing selling as an independent art form, He remarks: “But something in nature has been affronted.”<sup>151</sup> He recognises that the repentant worshippers “were ready to wipe the slate clean and to dive, with renewed vigour, into the same old quagmire.”<sup>152</sup> For an understanding of where the cultivation of this imitation of desires could lead, the narrator has recourse to a cosmology radically different from the one introduced by Hawking. By introducing the swine demons, he implicitly refers to William Hope Hodgson’s *The House on the Borderland* (1908), a frequently invoked reference in Sinclair’s writing. Unlike the infinite universe of Hawking, the *House on the Borderland* is concluded with the end of the universe.

As Hawking’s universe can be related to the introduction of an unbound desire to the market system, so can Hodgson’s idea of the end of the universe be related to the nature and end of imitated desire. In *Deceit* Girard points out how the desire for another’s being eventually leads to a desire for self-annihilation. Paired with the cosmology of Hodgson, the imitation of desire can be seen as leading to the destruction of the whole system, as the narrator recognises: “The Isle of Doges had nothing more to say. It had served its purpose. It was deleted.”<sup>153</sup> In *Violence* Girard has drawn attention to sacrificial crises that can lead to a social suicide.<sup>154</sup> The latter is paralleled on a cosmological level by a quasi nuclear explosion that ends with “the vaporous glow of

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 348.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p. 372.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p. 348.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., p. 382.

<sup>154</sup> See Girard (1977), p. 54.

Radon daughters, fluorescent waste products with a half-life of a thousand years.”<sup>155</sup>

This passage prefigures Sinclair’s post-apocalyptic novel *Radon Daughters* which will be discussed in the *Violentropy*-chapter on post-apocalyptic dystopias. For current purposes it is sufficient to note the connection between the collapse of the system and imitative desire.

Even if the resolution of the crisis were successful, the above quotation about “diving into the same old quagmire” makes clear that the narrator recognises the cyclical repetition of violent expulsion and systemic renewal. The narrator begins to understand that the apocalyptic scenery, the Docklands project itself and even the widow are created by imitative desire run wild. It is Davy from his perspective as victim who is able to penetrate the relation between desire and the Dockland apocalypse, when he comments on “the widow”:

She’s a force of nature. But she’s not self-created. As Jane Harrison says, “the gods are our needs made manifest”. They describe the thing we most desire. The Widow is the focus of our own lack of imagination; the robot of our greed and ignorance. Therefore, she is indestructible.<sup>156</sup>

Exorcising the widow has thus to begin at the level of desire, as the scapegoating of an avatar of greed would only be a symptomatic exorcism – the widow would be in time replaced by another “robot of greed and ignorance.”

Having located the root of the demonic forces in the nature of desire, the reader can go back to previous chapters such as “Art of the state (The Silvertown Memorial)” and reread them as evidence for the presence of an imitative, conflictive and void desire that leads to the Dockland apocalypse. When the steering committee for the development of the docklands votes over the installation of the Silvertown war

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<sup>155</sup> See Sinclair (1991), p. 349.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 348. This reflects Harrison’s view of myth as the verbal equivalent (legomenon) of a cultural act (dromenon), cf. Meletinsky (1998), p. 21. Harrison is thus very close to a Girardian view of myth.

memorial, “[a] show of hands; no dissenters, no couchy abstainers”<sup>157</sup> is the outcome. Conflict is evaded through the dedication “to the more complex and rewarding decisions demanded by an eight-course luncheon.”<sup>158</sup> In a sense this example reveals the utopian vision of the liberal market economy. The latter is supposed to guarantee that there are enough goods produced for everyone to evade conflict. The allure of the eight-course luncheon isolates the conflictive desires of the committee members and transform them into an anaemic conformity. However, “the warring egos” of conflictive imitation are still there but they tire, and blanch towards the compromised satisfaction of having survived, intact, a potential trauma. Their egos mellow “through all the layers of port, stilton, champagne, strawberries, boredom, claret, gin and terror.”<sup>159</sup> The end of history in terms of liberal market economy is thus an anaesthetic against conflictive desire. Yet imitative, conflictive desire remains buried beneath this layer of affluence, as the narrator observes: “We re-experience the primal energies of conflict – so cruelly denied to many of us in this comfortable world, where all our enemies have been defeated.”<sup>160</sup>

This is the basis of the “Living in Restaurants” culture of the fourth chapter, in which the BBC is parodied. Like “Vat City” the “Corporation” is compared to the Vatican. In a manifesto of sorts of the corporation, it is made clear that the programmes, by analogy to the property values of the “Vat City” possess no intrinsic value: “Yesterday’s dross, if repeated often enough, is today’s classic.”<sup>161</sup> During the negotiations of a film project, the narrator recognizes that the corporation is a self-absorbed organisation that revolves around nothing: “Nothing is agreed, nothing is

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p. 290.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p. 290.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p. 318f.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 304.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

made clear. [...] Nobody has actually said anything about the film. *What film?* [...] We talk to agents who talk to agents (and charge us for the privilege);”<sup>162</sup>

The self-absorption of this “stagnant bureaucracy” is again perceived as “desperate occultism.” This system of nothingness that hides its absence of substance through its complicated structure, is sustained by the violence against victims. Actor Roland Bowman is expelled by market forces. The narrator comments: “But that was the nature of the place. The human element was optional.”<sup>163</sup> Thus whoever does not imitate this ideal of “nothingness” is expelled by the system.

That is also why there are no abstainers during the vote on the Silvertown memorial – that is with one exception. Curiously, Joblard, in his real-life identity as Brian Catling, has also made it onto the committee. The reasons for his election as committee member are revelatory for the present investigation of desire:

His work was so obscure and recondite that it could not remotely come under consideration for the project-in-hand: it was years since anybody had set eyes on it. (No whispers of a fix.) But, most importantly, he had a pan-European reputation as a trencherman. He’d be far too busy licking the grease from his fingers to question any realpolitik decisions with nitpicking aesthetic quibbles.<sup>164</sup>

In other words, he poses no threat to the other committee members at any level. He is not involved in the struggle for recognition of the other “warring egos.” His art, because of its obscurity, is not shaped by the desire to be included in the exchange relations of the market forces. His desire is presented as being free of the taint of conflictive mimesis. While for the other members the eight-course luncheon is an escape from the war of egos that soothingly reaffirms their desired importance, Catling is portrayed as being genuinely interested in the food: He raises “the tablecloth, fearful he had missed out on some notable side dish.”<sup>165</sup> As the narrator points out: “All feeding is a search

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p. 291.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., p. 296.

for essence. Food is never more than a disguise.”<sup>166</sup> Catling’s desire is genuinely non-mimetic, as it is the basic desire for food. This return to a basic, non-mimetic desire, allows him, not only to evade the war of conflicting desires but also grounds him in a solid, material reality that is no longer perceived in the virtual world of mimetic conflict.

The construction of Catling as a being not infected by the contagiousness of the conflictive mimetic desires of the surrounding culture is important to the narrator, as he is gradually becoming aware of the implications of his role as narrator and of the need to pass on the narrative mantle. This need is caused by the events on the Isle of Dogs and returns the discussion to the Book of Daniel: “We were nothing. Unseen, we rose through the vertebrae of the Tower like the three Jews in Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace.”<sup>167</sup> Like Daniel in the fiery furnace the narrator is safe, cannot be harmed by the forces surrounding him, because, as he tells the story, he has to survive. In order to understand the process of handing over the narrative mantle, an examination of *Downriver*’s metafictionality is necessary.

The narrator reflects on his power: “I can stick the Tenniel postcard, with a stub of sugar-free gum, on to the window of the phoney carriage – and walk out, be somewhere else. That is the power of the narrator.” Alex Murray has pointed to how Sinclair’s fictions are “anti-narratives” in that there is no orderly narrative thread that would hold them together. Murray argues that Sinclair’s narrative are explicitly opposing the narrative order of the Victorian novel. The latter renders the narrator invisible and thus disguises its fictionality. By deliberately disrupting an orderly narrative thread Sinclair draws attention to the omnipotence of the narrator. This is why, as Murray has argued that Sinclair’s fictions have no beginning or end, as he can enter and leave the narrative at any point. It is in his position as narrator, that he is outside

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p. 381.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p. 377.

exchange relations, in some kind of ivory tower. As narrator he is detached from the universe he is describing and criticizing. If he wants to install an alternative model of exchange relations, he has to leave his safe position as narrator-god and enter into his own fiction, into his own creation to redeem it.

This act of giving up the narrator's position can be compared to the model of the Trinitarian God of Christianity. God comes down to earth and gives his life for his friends as Son. Likewise the narrator gives up his privileged position as narrator-god and becomes a vulnerable character in his own story. This is how he manages to construct his disinterestedness, as Robert Bond points out.<sup>168</sup> If he wants to set up an alternative model of exchange relations, he has to become, in Girardian terms, an external mediator, who avoids the mimetic conflicts between the internal mediator and his disciples. He thus becomes the model for Joblard, who although he has escaped the contagious, conflictive mimesis of Thatcherism, through the focus on the non-mimetic, basic desire of food, still needs a mediator for his "higher desires." The narrator gives up his life as narrator, so he can become the disinterested model for his future disciples. This giving of his life is different from simply becoming a scapegoat, as Girard has admitted in his contribution to the "Festschrift for Raymund Schwager's 65<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The need to write himself out of his own story is also connected to the recognition that if he will not do it himself, it will happen anyway. One of *Downriver's* self-reflexive themes is the attempt to publish *Downriver*. The narrator recognizes that the editorial process of either *Downriver* as a novel or as the film *Vessels of Wrath*, will ruin his project, as it will adapt it to the market forces and make it saleable, exchangeable:

I was then bullied by Butts Green into cutting and cutting again; line-editing, clarifying, glossing, paraphrasing and – finally – casting to the winds. The film existed before the

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<sup>168</sup> See Bond (2005), p. 134.

book could be completed. The book had therefore been declared redundant by all interested parties.<sup>169</sup>

He therefore decides to leave the completion of the book to someone he can trust. In a letter he leaves his “testament” to Joblard and writes: “Either *you* (S.L. Joblard) become ‘I’, or the story ends here. In petulant recrimination. I & I can only wish you luck.”<sup>170</sup>

Joblard faces a complex task. Because within the fictional realm of *Downriver* Sinclair is writing as Joblard, he is exchanging the narratorial “I”s. In Joblard’s account, however, the narrator is identified as Sinclair. Fiction and metafiction merge in the person of the narrator and Sinclair. Joblard, therefore, writes his version of Sinclair writing as Joblard.<sup>171</sup> The reader can, of course, never be sure, whether the real Brian Catling is writing as Joblard writing as Sinclair, writing as Joblard and therefore whether “this dreary postmodernist fraud”<sup>172</sup> of narrators could be doubled *ad infinitum*. However, whether or not this is Catling writing, the taking over of Joblard as narrator offers a critical reflection on the Sinclair/narrator complex.<sup>173</sup>

“Is Sinclair completely gonzo?” is Joblard’s first reaction to Sinclair’s request of taking over the position of narrator. Joblard’s first reflection is on how Sinclair caricatures himself, when he comments: “*Bollocks!* I wasn’t going to play the Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green to satisfy anybody’s mythology.”<sup>174</sup> He, however, pastiches Sinclair’s style and conforms to his role of writing as Sinclair constructing Joblard. Yet the reader is made aware of the process: “I licked the platter with bestial relish. (is *that* close to the way he would see it?)”<sup>175</sup> The pastiche extends itself to Sinclair, who in

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p. 461.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., p. 494.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., p. 495.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 495.

<sup>173</sup> In a personal conversation with the author of the present discussion, Brian Catling dismissed the question of a potential role as co-author of *Downriver* with a guffaw: “No, no. This is of course all Sinclair’s work.”

<sup>174</sup> See Sinclair (1991), p. 497.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p. 499.

Sinclairian fashion is likened “to a fire-bombed sofa.”<sup>176</sup> Joblard’s description of Sinclair includes a reflection on his compulsive associationism: “His deep-set eyes, bloody with concentration, roll alarmingly, in contrary directions, as he tries to relate anything to everything.”<sup>177</sup> But “he is simply, at this time, unable to speak”<sup>178</sup> as he has surrendered his role of narrator.

However, Joblard soon recognizes the disinterestedness behind Sinclair’s act of narratorial retreat: “He told me once that his solitary walks were a rehearsal for eternity. He’s practising, getting warmed up, finding his rhythm.”<sup>179</sup> He also realises that Sinclair wants him to imitate him in his disinterested decision of surrendering the role of the narrator: “He wants me to share his madness, to refuse my comfortable graph of success: to fail. Or am I taking my duties as storyteller too seriously?”<sup>180</sup> Joblard’s first reaction to this request is one of rebellion: “Fictional puppets have all the freedom of action. They can deny their creator. They can refuse his manipulations. They can abandon him.”<sup>181</sup> Eventually, however, Joblard imitates Sinclair’s act, cuts the cord of the narrative and also, in the manner of the Christian disciple, follows his master out of the world of conflictive mimesis and concludes with the words: “I am without desire, and outside time.” The opposite of a dog then, the opposite of market forces and of the entombment of victims, is in a very non-trivial sense and anagrammatically God, or more precisely the imitation of God.

Robert Bond has argued that Sinclair “retains the Christian idea that the pilgrim seeks to be cured – of the fever and insanity symptomatic of that capitalism – and will travel, beyond and outside, in order to gain the cure.”<sup>182</sup> This cure, as has been argued is tied to the renunciation of conflictive mimesis. It is a cure of desire. Bond furthermore

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p. 500.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p. 500.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p. 501.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 501

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., p. 521.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., p. 521.

<sup>182</sup> See Bond (2005), p. 138.

argues that through Sinclair's pilgrimage-like walks he installs an ethos of vagrancy to which is tied the ascetic ideal and the old tradition of the virtue of poverty.<sup>183</sup> Bond continues:

For Joblard in the final chapter, just as for the classic Christian pilgrim, the process of pilgrimage is set in direct opposition to the fulfilment of financial, functional requirements. For Joblard here, the prospect of transcendental gain, measured in a currency of epiphanies, replaces the very need for mundane economic remuneration.<sup>184</sup>

Yet Joblard only succeeds in this exercise through the imitation of Sinclair's example. Joblard's imitation is purged of conflictivity as Sinclair disappears from the narrative. Sinclair thus installs an anti-economic economy of the avant-garde to which Bond refers to as "sacred". From the perspective of Girardian theory, this term is, of course, not precise. Bond points out that Sinclair "does not claim [...] that the pilgrim will necessarily arrive at a specific place, or shrine, where the sacred is clearly identifiable."<sup>185</sup> This observation is crucial from the point of view of the discussion above. Because, as has been demonstrated, the sacredness of Sinclair's east London that falls victim to the forces of modernity, is itself constituted by violence. Bond does not distinguish between the sacred as understood in Girardian terms "as an indirect representation of human violence" and the sacred as that which "is ontologically wholly other, which culture and theology call the holy or the divinity."<sup>186</sup> The "sacred" that Bond points to is Sinclair's construction of himself as a transcendent, disinterested model for Joblard's desire.

However, since Bond lacks an epistemological framework that would reveal the absolute difference of the two types of the sacred, he interprets Sinclair's attitude towards the sacralization of place as "ambivalent".<sup>187</sup> Brian Baker comes closer in

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>186</sup> See McKenna (1992), pp. 155, 144.

<sup>187</sup> See Bond (2005), p. 53.

recognising the difference between the two types of the sacred when he comments on *White Chappell*: “In this sense, Gull and Hinton’s messianic and apocalyptic project is a critical parody of mythologies which place bodily sacrifice at the centre of a narrative of rebirth. That, as Sinclair indicated in *Suicide Bridge*, leads to ‘FASCISM’.”<sup>188</sup> From a Girardian perspective, fascism is a marker of the loss of differences in the sacrificial crisis and an indication of the inefficiency of the scapegoat mechanism. Baker recognizes that “[i]n *Suicide Bridge*, it is willed self-destruction, however, rather than the sacrifice of others that results in rebirth”<sup>189</sup>, thus perceiving the difference between pagan blood sacrifice of others and voluntary self-sacrifice. However, as to the effect of the sacrifice, his interpretation remains mythical. He amalgamates the two categories and concludes that “hanging and sacrifice are bound up with renewal or rebirth”.<sup>190</sup> As will become clear in the later discussion of *Radon Daughters*, the death of the victim has lost its force to renew society. The voluntary sacrifice is rather connected to the renunciation of conflictive mimesis. Sacrifice and rebirth consist of the abdication of conflictive mimesis and the becoming of a disinterested model without an economic calculation of the effects of one’s own sacrifice.

Bond registers the fragility and indeed the pitfalls of this alternative, disinterested model of desire:

The very contemporaneity and autobiographical basis of the pilgrimages inevitably contribute, of course, to the degradation of the traditional Christian model, stations of the cross having been superseded by a morbid checklist of roadside halts and breakfast bars.<sup>191</sup>

Bond interprets Sinclair’s degradation of the traditional Christian model, as hinting to his “understanding of the indivisibility of the process of pilgrimage from economic

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<sup>188</sup> See Baker (2007), p. 75.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

motives.”<sup>192</sup> The question is, however, if this actually is a degradation of the Christian model. The balancing of the material and the spiritual is already addressed in Christ’s call to put the Kingdom of God first:

So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.<sup>193</sup>

A neglect of the material might lead to a withdrawal from the world and to similar disasters as related by Norman Cohn in *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, in which revolutionary millenarianism was often initiated by an ascetic *propheta*. Sinclair is careful to construct a balanced middle ground perspective also in this respect: “That’s us. The third force, the mediators between spiritual heaven and material hell.”<sup>194</sup> The bleakness and material solidity of the breakfast bars ensures that Sinclair the pilgrim does not take off to a spiritual sphere that would neglect the materiality of the city. And yet, as in the Biblical passage Sinclair’s discovery of “breakfast bars” can be seen as appearing as miraculously from the city sprawl to meet the bodily needs of the modern city pilgrim. Sinclair’s economy is an anti-economy in the sense that the focus is not on the economic transaction but on the spiritual component of imitation. If Joblard imitates Sinclair’s self-giving act, all the things he will need will be given to him as well. The installation of an imitative framework that does not focus on economic exchange but includes material needs rather in the form of giving constitutes “the happy ending” of *Downriver*.

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., p. 142

<sup>193</sup> Matthew 6:31-33.

<sup>194</sup> See Sinclair (1991), p. 309.

### 3.1.5 Sinclair's Aura

Beyond Sinclair's fiction the principle of imitation extends to his role as a literary figure. One of Sinclair's concerns is to redeem the marginalised poets who have been excluded by the literary scene that, according to Sinclair, is more and more concerned with economic motives. Being himself at the margins throughout the 1970s and 80s Sinclair has gradually moved more to the centre of attention of literary circles through having been awarded the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for *Downriver* and through the commercial success of *Lights Out for the Territory* (1997; henceforth *Lights Out*) and *London Orbital*. Thus as Brian Baker has argued, the counter-cultural artistic or poetic practice is brought into tension with the possibility of intervening in a wider social or cultural matrix through reaching a broader audience.<sup>195</sup> In that sense his claim of non-exchangeability is illusory because as Robert Bond has pointed out, Sinclair "at once bolsters and refutes this claim."<sup>196</sup>

From the publication of *Lights Out* onwards, Sinclair finds himself in the position to dispense his "cultural capital", his aura as a celebrated writer to the "re-forgotten". Because an art without an audience ultimately proves self-negating, as the example of the re-forgotten poet Nicholas Moore in *Downriver* shows, Sinclair steers a difficult course between non-exchangeability and exchangeability – again, mediating between a spiritual heaven and material hell. While Sinclair thinks that these poets merit attention for the intrinsic worth of their work, it is of course ironic that they are redeemed not because of the latter but because of Sinclair's aura as a model to be imitated.

Sinclair is aware of this process and elucidates how it works in *The Verbals*:

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<sup>195</sup> See Baker (2007), p. 88.

<sup>196</sup> See Bond (2005), p. 24.

Reviews are always a weird reflection of what books actually are. Somebody generally sets a key note, and then everyone else grabs it and reflects it. Positive or negative, they don't very often connect up with how the books actually are.<sup>197</sup>

One of the ironies of this process of imitative appreciation is, as Brian Baker points out, “that it involves a parallel process to the literary judgment that had excluded them from critical attention in the first place.”<sup>198</sup> Another irony is that the critics potentially appreciate *Downriver* for the wrong reasons. In relation to the above quotation about the imitative nature of reviews, Kevin Jackson is irritated by the blurbs on the dust jacket of *Downriver*, which form a stark contrast to the Iain Sinclair Jackson knows. As he puts it to Sinclair: “They make you out to be, well, a savage nutter.”<sup>199</sup> As Alex Murray has pointed out, there is a body of academic work which reduces Sinclair's writing to the dramatic and challenging aesthetic innovations and therefore runs the risks of failing to engage with the politics and ethics at the centre of these modes of representation.<sup>200</sup> The Girardian theoretical framework, however, recovers an ethical dimension behind Sinclair's post-structural, dissociative writing style, precisely because it postulates the failure of the scapegoat mechanism as the cause for the collapse of stable differences in language. In a Girardian reading, Sinclair's narratives are much more than aesthetically innovative tales told by an idiot (or savage nutter) signifying nothing, as behind the sound and fury they too recover the truth of the victim.

While Sinclair thus becomes an ethical model to be imitated and works towards “setting up an alternative canon”<sup>201</sup>, Baker's claim “that his own writing becomes an authoritative guide to an other London”, which implies the exclusion of “other forgotten Londons” probably goes a bit too far. Sinclair is not so much imposing his reading of London, as he is encouraging his readers to discover their own spaces of exclusion and

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<sup>197</sup> See Jackson and Sinclair (2003), p. 122.

<sup>198</sup> See Baker (2007), p. 105.

<sup>199</sup> See Jackson and Sinclair (2003), p. 122.

<sup>200</sup> See Murray (2007), p. 52.

<sup>201</sup> See Baker (2007), p. 105.

violence in *London Orbital*: “Don’t take my word for it, don’t bother with my list of alternative attractions - ... discover your own. In the finding is the experience.”<sup>202</sup>

Sinclair advocates the becoming of “internal exiles”. The exorcism of *Downriver* begins by setting up a model of voluntary Christ-like suffering for the sickness of contemporary Britain. This suffering is introduced through seeing Sinclair’s portrayed artists as “Shamans” who are neglected and marginalised. Internal exile, “a form of life-in-death, a condition of marginalization and suffering” – essentially, as has been demonstrated, non-violence – forms the exorcism of the widow.

### 3.1.6 Scapegoating *The Widow*

There is, however, looming over *Downriver* an alternative understanding of exorcism – which Sinclair through the laying down of the narrator’s role avoids, which is more akin to scapegoating. In his letter to Joblard, Sinclair writes about the widow:

We made her in our own image. She is the worst of us. But once the masses sense they’ve been conned into worshipping nothing better than the synthesis of their defects, it’s over. They’ll tear her to pieces like a rag doll.<sup>203</sup>

Thus for Sinclair, the end of the Thatcherite 80s does not form a break with the Blairite 90s. Put in Sinclair’s fictive terms, the “Blair *Which*”<sup>204</sup> (an allusion to the film *Blair Witch Project*) seamlessly succeeds the widow.

Like the expulsion of Davy Locke on the Isle of Dogs, the widow is brought down by a frenzied mob that historically refers to the poll tax riots that ended the Thatcher era. Out of the darkness of the violent expulsion rises, after the twilight of the John Major interregnum, the apparent light of the Blairite years. That light is created

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<sup>202</sup> See Sinclair (2002), p. 318.

<sup>203</sup> See Sinclair (1991), p. 493.

<sup>204</sup> See Sinclair (2002), p. 191.

through the violence of the Thatcherite expulsion and thus follows the logic of violent reconstitution of peace of the Girardian model. Sinclair's suspicion towards revolutionary processes is based on his experiences in the 1960s when "the more extreme people went into violent action." Sinclair recoils from violence because he sees that the "people spouting this rhetoric [...] quite clearly in a few years were going to be merchant bankers."<sup>205</sup>

Sinclair deliberately turns away from this form of exorcism and recedes into the isolation of the middle ground, as he is aware that despite the expulsion of the widow, the defects will remain. That is why, as Brian Baker argues "Sinclair instead retreats to an artificial and fantasised image of London where the crowd, the mob, is absent, and cannot trouble the journey of the psychogeographer." For Baker, however, "the reason for this evacuation of the streets is unclear."<sup>206</sup> Although he recognizes that Sinclair depoliticizes the violence by presenting it "as ritual, as a dance [...] and a spectacle for the crowd and for the cameras", this does not mean that Sinclair dismisses it as "non-serious". The latter comment from Baker is elicited by the following sentence from *London Orbital*: "Let the city burn for the cameras. This is nothing. There is worse to come."<sup>207</sup> Baker fails to take into account that for Sinclair "the worst has already happened."<sup>208</sup> Because Sinclair is outside time, he can imagine a post-apocalyptic age devoid of crowds. As he observes in *Hackney*: "The street is so quiet I begin to think it has been closed off for one of Danny Boyle's post-apocalyptic fantasies."<sup>209</sup>

Depoliticizing the crowd means not to fall for the illusion that political crowd violence can lead to a fundamental change in the political system in the sense of the violent expulsion of sacrifice. Baker recognizes the link between the violent expulsion of a victim and cultural renewal by rightly pointing to *Heart of Darkness* (1899) as an

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<sup>205</sup> See Jackson and Sinclair (2003), p. 57f.

<sup>206</sup> See Baker (2007), p. 142f.

<sup>207</sup> See Sinclair (2002), p. 298.

<sup>208</sup> See Sinclair (1991), p. 361.

<sup>209</sup> See Sinclair (2009), p. 243.

intertext to *Downriver*. He writes: “Crucially, Marlowe ends the passage with a reference to sacrifice in the name of the ‘civilising’ idea that informs the reality of colonial dispossession and destruction.”<sup>210</sup> He continues, again correctly, to describe how “*Downriver* consistently refers to sacrifice and suicide, associated with the river” and how they “symbolise the elimination of the lived everyday space of the Docklands dwellers in the name of development, just as the victims of the 1888 Whitechapel murder in *White Chappell* are sacrificed to the occult forces that deform the fabric of London.”<sup>211</sup> Baker is aware how self-destruction and sacrifice of others result in rebirth. However, maybe due to the introductory purposes of his book, he does not further discuss how in *Downriver* sacrifices actually are depicted as going wrong, thus not fulfilling their function to generate rebirth.

For example, when a Grundig TV-set is skinning Arthur Singleton alive, it is referred to as an “ill-directed sacrifice”.<sup>212</sup> On the Isle of Dogs, the narrator and his companions are “unworthy sacrifices” for the jackal-headed gods.<sup>213</sup> Or when describing the sinking of the Alice, the narrator observes that “grander sacrifices are required”.<sup>214</sup> This seems to suggest that the regular, cathartic doses of mayhem that are necessary for the health and security of a society,<sup>215</sup> as the narrator puts it, are no longer sufficient. Health and security in society can no longer be established through the expulsion of one victim.

This also means that the crowd can no longer be dispelled. Sinclair’s schizophrenic entrapment, that also functions as a safeguard against the violence of the mob, thus remains haunted by the crowd. This becomes clear, if the following comment of Elias Canetti on schizophrenia is taken into account:

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<sup>210</sup> See Baker (2007), pp. 94.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>212</sup> See Sinclair (1991), p.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., p. 372.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., p. 442.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., p. 442.

A schizophrenic in a state of extreme suggestibility behaves as a member of a crowd would. He is just as impressionable and yields just as much to every impulse reaching him from outside. But we cannot think of him as one because he is *alone*. Since no crowd can be seen around him it does not occur to anyone that he, from his point of view, may feel as though he were in one. He is a fragment broken from a crowd.<sup>216</sup>

What is worse than the violence of the crowd against one victim is the social suicide in the violence of all against all that is always a potential outcome of violent expulsions by crowds. Again, this is the world of *Radon Daughters*, the post-crowd age that for Sinclair – because he is outside time – has already happened and is yet to come. The real world is a world of violent crowds that eventually annihilate themselves. That “there would be nothing left” is the lesson *Downriver*’s pilgrims learn, when they think about emerging into the real world.<sup>217</sup> Before the discussion thus turns to the post-crowd stage of *Radon Daughters*, narratives concerned with the self-destructiveness of violent crowds in the absence of a functioning scapegoat mechanism shall be examined.

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<sup>216</sup> p. 323; in the original German “a fragment broken from a crowd“ is italicized.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 317.

## 4. Crowvds

We live inside our discomfort. In Dartford, poring over the fiction of the map, we were impressed by the scale and structure of a hospital (the Joyce Green) that should be there, acting as a marker. A double V pivoting on the inevitable water tower: isolation wards for the worst contagions of the East End. A secure colony-estate with a rail link to the Thames, its own jetty.<sup>1</sup>

According to Girard, crowd formation is the result of the loss of differences among individuals through conflictive imitation. The two v letters replacing the “w” in the title of the present chapter represent this mechanism at the core of “Crowvds”. They are violently mirroring each other until the crowd is formed. In the above quotation from *London Orbital* the double v of the hospital with its isolation wards prevents the spread of the worst contagions of the East End.

The isolation of the individual in the car, as discussed in chapter two, is similar to the isolation in the mental hospital. As has been shown, conflictive imitation survives the isolation and seeps through the Baudrillardian simulation only to end in “auto-jousting” and the futile attempt to renew order through the *scarifice*. Sinclair liberates the human being from her “rage pods” through his pedestrianism, only to find in *Hackney* that “cycling had reached the critical stage in its inevitable progress towards being as much of an urban pestilence as the motor car. Road rage has trickled down to the recycling classes. There will be knife fights in the street over blue bins with the wrong category of potato peel.”<sup>2</sup>

While he absorbs the formation of these conflictual crowds into his stance of a post-apocalyptic schizophrenia, the following discussion will reveal that in works by J.G. Ballard, Stewart Home and David Peace, the formation of violent crowds and the initiation of the scapegoat mechanism is fully represented and leads in all narratives to a

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<sup>1</sup> See Sinclair (2002), p. 452.

<sup>2</sup> See Sinclair (2009), p. 542.

sacrificial crisis that potentially culminates in the creation of a post-apocalyptic universe rather than the foundation of a new order.

## 4.1 J. G. Ballard

### 4.1.1 *High Rise*

The first chapter of *High-Rise* (1975) is titled “Critical Mass”. It could also have been titled “Critical Crowd” when one considers that the original German title of Elias Canetti’s *Crowds and Power* is *Masse und Macht*. The German word “Masse” unites in itself both the meaning of “mass” and “crowd”.

The modern high-rise building creates what Canetti calls a “closed crowd”.<sup>3</sup> The main feature of the closed crowd is that it has a boundary. The space that the mass can fill is limited. This space is of course the eponymous high-rise of the novel itself. There is an “immense volume of open space that separated the building from the neighbouring high-rise a quarter mile away.”<sup>4</sup> Canetti compares the closed mass that fills the limited space to a vessel that is filled with liquid. The point of the analogy is that the amount of liquid that the vessel can take is known and cannot be exceeded.

The liquid analogy is appropriate with respect to *High-Rise* as at the outset of the novel, the two thousand tenants moving into the building form “a homogeneous collection of well-to-do professional people.”<sup>5</sup> There is a party celebrating the reaching of critical mass<sup>6</sup>, i.e. the moment when the last tenant moved in or, in Canetti’s terms, the moment when the vessel is full. However, the architectural goal of the *High-Rise* is to prevent the creation of a homogeneous crowd without differences. The idea is to create “the individual resident in isolation” who doesn’t care about tenants more than

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<sup>3</sup> Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power* (London, 1962), p. 16. All references to Canetti in this paragraph are on p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> J.G. Ballard, *High-Rise* (London, 1975), p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

two floors below<sup>7</sup>, or even more ideally about no other tenant at all. “A new social type was being created by the apartment building, a cool, unemotional personality impervious to the psychological pressures of high-rise life, who thrived like an advanced species of machine in the neutral atmosphere.”<sup>8</sup>

The high-rise, according to Ballard, like the car in *Crash*, depersonalizes human beings and isolates them from each other. One of the main protagonists, Dr Robert Laing, a dentist and lecturer at a medical school, can be taken as an example for this claim: “He had come to the high-rise to get away from all relationships.”<sup>9</sup> In that sense the high-rise fulfils the function of prison and mental hospital. Richard Wilder, television producer and high-rise tenant, comments on his bedroom: “Uncannily it reminded Wilder of a cell he had filmed two days earlier in the psychiatric wing of the prison.”<sup>10</sup> The anonymous third-person narrator observes how, “[I]iving in high-rises required a special type of behaviour, one that was acquiescent, restrained, even perhaps slightly mad.”<sup>11</sup>

The high-rise as a social structure is part of the utopian project of modernity. Like the world of Baudrillardian simulation, the human being cannot participate in this utopia: “this was an environment built, not for man, but for man’s absence.”<sup>12</sup> Gasiorek connects the high-rises built in the 1960s and 1970s to the Brutalist movement in architecture, evolving from the austere architecture of Le Corbusier, based on rigid lines, and the geometrisation of living space.<sup>13</sup> It is only to be expected that the human element, trapped in this prison/mental hospital, rebels against its confinement. This is why the high-rise manifests “an architecture designed for war, on the unconscious level

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> See Gasiorek (2005), p. 122.

if no other.”<sup>14</sup> The inevitable outcome of a bringing together of a critical mass of people is violence, if one considers the following insight of Canetti on the crowd: “The destructiveness of the crowd is often mentioned as its most conspicuous quality [.]”<sup>15</sup>

The individual in the high-rise suffers from what Canetti calls “burdens of distance”. Canetti further explains that the fear of touch is a fundamental trait of human beings. The high-rise too is a structure that expresses that fear. In the crowd alone can the human being be freed from this fear.<sup>16</sup> The initial destruction occurring in the high-rise is nothing but a “lifting of the burdens of distance”<sup>17</sup>, the tearing down of boundaries separating the tenants from each other.

It all begins with inexplicable electrical failures, noise, defects which the architects were supposed specifically to have designed out of these over-priced apartments.<sup>18</sup> According to Gasiorek there were two main lines of arguments in high-rise criticism in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>19</sup> The more moderate position pointed to the practical insufficiencies of tower blocks: they were often badly built and started to fall apart as soon as tenants had moved in. There is no objection to the high-rise on *a priori* theoretical grounds. The implied assumption is that constructing high-rises properly would solve the issue. The second position is more radical and objects to the high-rise as a space for living as such. In *High-Rise* Ballard conflates both critiques.

But Ballard deliberately constructs the falling apart of the high-rise to coincide with the reaching of critical mass. Thus the defectiveness of the building is but a catalyst for the destructiveness of the crowd. Canetti writes: “[P]eople tend to think that it is the fragility of these objects which stimulates the destructiveness of the crowd.” But there is more to it. “The destruction of representational images is the destruction of a

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<sup>14</sup> See Ballard (1975), p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> See Canetti (1962), p. 18.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>18</sup> See Ballard (1975), p. 18.

<sup>19</sup> See Gasiorek (2005), p. 123.

hierarchy which is no longer recognized.”<sup>20</sup> The fragility of the high-rise is thus not the issue – the people rebel against the system of social organisation itself that the high-rise represents. In the case of the high-rise it is the absence of hierarchy that they rebel against. The high-rise represents the egalitarianism of technological modernity that reduces human beings to mere functionality.

Thus in a first phase of the tenants’ rebellion against the high-rise, there is an attempt to reinstitute the English class system. “The old social subdivisions, based on power, capital and self-interest, had reasserted themselves here as anywhere else.”<sup>21</sup> The building is a model of the world in which the central mass of apartments formed a buffer state.<sup>22</sup> Philip Tew draws attention to Ballard’s remark in his conversation with Will Self in *Junk Mail*: “a resurgence of class interests and divisions began to separate the 1970s from the preceding consensus, indicating regressive elements in the culture. ‘When the class system began to...well, it didn't disintegrate but it seemed irrelevant in the sixties, I thought, [h]ow wonderful, this country is about to join the twentieth century.’”<sup>23</sup>

It thus seems that a society without hierarchy is not possible. In *Violence* Girard writes that “[d]egree’ or *gradus*, is the underlying principle of all order, natural and cultural. It permits individuals to find a place for themselves in society.”<sup>24</sup> In *High-Rise* the reinstitution of the class systems begins with the very act of the tenants moving into the high-rise. A certain class of well-to-do professionals separates themselves from the rest of society. The irony is, however, that once the high-rise dwellers form their own independent system, they repeat the act of social stratification by reinstituting a class

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<sup>20</sup> See Canetti, (1962), p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> See Ballard (1975), p. 53.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 147, 23.

<sup>23</sup> Qtd. in Tew (2007), p. 67.

<sup>24</sup> See Girard (1977), p. 50.

system within the high-rise. In the high-rise some of the former upper-middle class people become the proletariat of the future<sup>25</sup>:

In principle the mutiny of these well-to-do professional people against the building they had collectively purchased was no different from the dozens of well-documented revolts by working-class tenants against municipal tower-blocks that had taken place at frequent intervals during the post-war years.<sup>26</sup>

Above the buffer state of the new middle classes hovers the architect of the high-rise, Anthony Royal, representing the new nobility with his obviously telling name.

The resurgence of the class system and the construction of class identity is dependent on scapegoating. “The failure of the elevators was blamed on people from the upper and lower floors, not on the architects or the inefficient services designed into the block.”<sup>27</sup> The upper class of the high-rise shuts out the beginning troubles of the lower classes: “Conceivably the residents here were unaware of what was going on beneath their feet. The carpets in the silent corridors were thick enough to insulate them from hell itself.”<sup>28</sup> Each class uses the other classes as a scapegoat for their own social cohesion. “In the future violence would clearly become a valuable form of social cement.”<sup>29</sup> This “renascent barbarism” is a kind of tribalism, not so much of a “noble savage type” but rather of a post-Freudian kind that unites the selves in clans.<sup>30</sup>

The clan structure regulates “the infantile aggressions”<sup>31</sup> of the tenants. The infantilisation of the modern subject leads to a compulsive repetition of oedipal scenarios<sup>32</sup>. These “most petty impulses” bring the discussion back onto the Girardian terrain of conflictive imitation. Thoughts of petty envy, revenge and rivalry haunt the

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<sup>25</sup> See Ballard (1975), p. 81.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79, 109.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>32</sup> See Gasiorek (2005), p. 203.

tenants of the high-rise.<sup>33</sup> While the high-rise exacerbates these destructive impulses, they cannot be, as Gasiorek points out with respect to *Crash*, explained with references to these logics alone, as human desire is always already in place.<sup>34</sup> The state of crisis in the high-rise is an unresolved mental crisis.<sup>35</sup> While the crisis is triggered by the cold anonymity of the high-rise structure that does not allow for the construction of a social identity, the high-rise itself is a product of the very crisis. “Landscape”, as David Pringle suggests, “is always a state of mind.”<sup>36</sup> Peter Brigg has drawn attention to Bruce Franklin’s observation that “Ballard’s ‘error’ is making the psychology of the individual the cause rather than the product of the death-oriented political economy.”<sup>37</sup> From a Girardian perspective, this is no error, as the “death orientated political economy” is a result of conflictive rivalry of individuals, or interindividuals in Girardian terminology, as already observed earlier with respect to Erenburg’s *Life of the Automobile*. The high-rise itself is thus a symbol for the mental crisis and the loss of individual differences due to conflictive imitation. This is Girard’s sacrificial crisis which is temporarily resolved in the high-rise through the expulsion of scapegoats and the institution of the clan structure. Wilder’s sense of identity becomes more potent through drinking games within his clan that take on a serious ritual character.<sup>38</sup> It is thus necessary to foment trouble and Royal hovers over this process “like some fallen angel”.<sup>39</sup> Like Girard, Ballard thus identifies the instigator of the process with Satan. He can also be seen as a *propheta* who is “helping the two thousand residents towards their new Jerusalem.”<sup>40</sup>

The fragile clan structure that regulates desire through the expulsion of scapegoats is, however, soon threatened by collapse. “The clan system, which had once

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<sup>33</sup> See Ballard (1975), p. 28, 48, 47 and 51.

<sup>34</sup> See Gasiorek (2005), p. 97.

<sup>35</sup> See Ballard (1975), p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> David Pringle, *Earth Is the Alien Planet: J.G. Ballard’s Four-Dimensional Nightmare* (San Bernardino, 1979), p. 21.

<sup>37</sup> See Brigg (1992), p. 67.

<sup>38</sup> See Ballard (1975), p. 155.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 54, 15.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

given a measure of security to the residents, had now largely broken down, individual groups drifting into apathy or paranoia. Everywhere people were retreating into their apartments, even into one room, and barricading themselves away.”<sup>41</sup> The reason for the breakdown can be found in the maiming of the scapegoat mechanism. The transparency of the mechanism alone would be reason enough from a Girardian perspective for its dysfunctioning. The tenants are very well aware of the “untruth of the accusation against the victim” and know too well that the untruth reinforces the accusation, as usual in the scapegoat mechanism.<sup>42</sup> They understand that the logic of the high-rise is the logic of scapegoating by which “the most innocent of any offence became the most guilty.”<sup>43</sup> But while the mechanism is transparent it is nevertheless removed from the direct experience of the tenants. The real violence is experienced by the tenants as simulation. The tenants perceive themselves as being part of a film script: “The decline of the apartment building reminded him of a slow-motion newsreel of a town in the Andes being carried down the mountain slopes to its death[.]”<sup>44</sup> Ballard’s point is, as with *Crash*, to alert his readers to the fact that the world itself has become fictional.

In Girard’s theory the moment of reality is the real death of the victim. The originary violence against the surrogate victim is real and also perceived as real, and is only subsequently repressed into the collective unconscious of society, leading to a rigid social order and only leaving a trace in its myths. Although in *Violence* Girard describes the repetition of the scapegoat mechanism and rituals as almost “cinematographic”<sup>45</sup>, as it follows the script of and simulates the original expulsion of the victim, this effect does not yet exist in the originary violence. The difference between the originary violence during the sacrificial crisis and its repetition in ritual through the surrogate victim is crucial. The repetition of the originary violence of the founding murder is a

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>45</sup> See Girard (1977), p. 160.

simulation, whereas the originary violence on the other hand is real. Because the tenants perceive reality as a film script, the ritual of the surrogate victim and the originary violence are conflated in their minds. The originary violence itself is no longer perceived as real. This is an effect of Baudrillardian hyperreality, which erases the difference between real and simulated and thus creates the debauch of fiction. But Ballard seems to say along with Girard that real violence is the element that can nevertheless be recovered from it.

The perception of real violence as simulated is also the reason why the real violence, as it is not perceived as real, is no longer restorative. Real violence is reduced to a sign and, as Girard has observed in *Theater* concerning the transformation of all-against-all violence into unanimous scapegoating violence: “It must be fresh meat, not on the scale that the magnitude of the crisis seems to demand, but mere *signs* will not do. Our universal wolf is no structuralist animal, the kind that is reduced to mere skeleton, and no wonder: it is supposed to thrive on a diet of pure symbols.”<sup>46</sup>

There seems to be “some other impulse at work – a need to shut away, most of all from oneself, any realization of what was actually happening in the high-rise, so that events there could follow their own logic and get even more out of hand[.]”<sup>47</sup> It is important that Wilder makes this observation in relation to his projected documentary about the high-rise, which turns the whole process into a simulation. Because the confrontation of the high-rise tenants can only “be resolved by physical means alone”<sup>48</sup>, it cannot therefore be resolved. Their emotions are unconnected with the realities of the world around them.<sup>49</sup> At first the violence invigorates the tenants, apparently restoring a sense of reality to them, as it does for example for Wilder: “The first sight of the line of five apartment buildings soothed him as usual, providing a context of reality absent

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<sup>46</sup> See Girard (1991), p. 230.

<sup>47</sup> See Ballard (1975), p. 56.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

from the studios.”<sup>50</sup> But the pull of the camera that distances human beings from reality is too strong, so that the violence too becomes “totally stylized, [distant] spasms of cold and random aggression [that] communicated themselves like bursts of radiation from another universe.”<sup>51</sup>

While the scapegoating violence thus no longer leads to order it continues to rage at will. The final victim of the novel is the architect himself, Royal, who, like Vaughan in *Crash*, as warden of the high-rise prison becomes the final victim of the Foucauldian prison revolt. It is important that Wilder kills this final victim of the “sacred violence”<sup>52</sup> from a distance with a gunshot, despite his earlier claim that he would never fire a gunshot because the conflict could be solved by physical means alone.<sup>53</sup> *High-Rise* itself thus becomes cinematographic, as it uses the cinematic convention that whenever a gun is introduced it is going to be used at some point. The distancing of the murder is evidence that order is not going to be restored even through this final victim.

Laing is not to be trusted when he claims that with the death of Royal “everything was returning to normal.”<sup>54</sup> The final state of the high-rise rather resembles a post-apocalyptic condition as captured in for example Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* (1993) or Cormack McCarthy’s *The Road* (2006), in which all order has collapsed and people scavenge in groups of a handful of people, deeply mistrusting anyone not belonging to their group. While Laing thus forms a ménage with Eleanor and Alice, it is likely that Wilder is murdered by a matriarchal group consisting of his wife and Royal’s widow. The final sentences of the novel indicate that violence continues to spread:

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

Laing looked out at the high-rise four hundred yards away. A temporary power failure had occurred, and on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor all the lights were out. Already torch-beams were moving about in the darkness, as the residents made their first confused attempts to discover where they were. Laing watched them contentedly, ready to welcome them to their new world.<sup>55</sup>

#### 4.1.2 *Cocaine Nights, Super-Cannes, Millennium People and Kingdom Come*

Gasiorek has pointed out that *Cocaine Nights* (1996), *Super-Cannes* (2000) and *Millennium People* (2003) follow the same basic structure of the detective fiction genre.<sup>56</sup> This observation can be extended to include *Kingdom Come* (2006), published after Gasiorek's study on Ballard. In two of the narratives, both first-person narrators, middle-class central Londoners, investigate the murder of a close personal relation. In *Kingdom Come* David Pearson's father is killed by a sniper in a suburban mega shopping mall, whereas in *Millennium People* the ex-wife of David Markham is the victim of a terrorist bomb at Heathrow airport. In *Cocaine Nights* and *Super-Cannes* the interest of the middle-class first-person narrators in the crimes committed stems from the fact that a person close to the narrator is the suspected perpetrator of the crime. In *Cocaine Nights*, Frank Prentice, the narrator's brother, is suspected of having caused a fire in a holiday resort of the Spanish Costa del Sol that killed five people. In *Super-Cannes*, David Greenwood, the ex-lover of the wife of narrator Paul Sinclair, is suspected of having shot seven executives of the Super-Cannes business park before turning the gun on himself.

As Gasiorek has further pointed out, in all the novels the culprits are either known or revealed at an early stage in the novel. Because the who-question is already answered, the narrators are interested in comprehending the crimes. "In doing so",

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>56</sup> See Gasiorek (2005), p. 171.

Gasiorek writes, “[they] blend in, chameleon-like, with the subculture [they] will eventually expose.”<sup>57</sup>

What is characteristic of these subcultures is that, as in *High Rise*, people are gathered together in isolation in anaesthetic prison-like structures. In *Cocaine Nights* the cubist apartments of Estrella del Mar are likened to miniature townships and favelas that house their middle-class prisoners of early retirement like Piranesi’s carceri.<sup>58</sup> In *Super-Cannes* Eden-Olympia is a business park home to countless executives of a dozen of multinational companies. The fact that it is also referred to as “Alcatraz-sur-Mer” by Frances Baring, a former lover of David Greenwood, undermines the narrator’s description of Eden-Olympia as a “more humane version of Corbusier’s radiant city.”<sup>59</sup> *Kingdom Come* imprisons its inhabitants in the shopping malls of the suburbs of nowhere that conjured themselves from dual carriage ways as a new kind of hell.<sup>60</sup> The exception seems to lie with *Millennium People*, set in Chelsea Marina, the only place that does not form a modern peripheral structure to an older centre but is part of that very centre.

The novel however only seemingly falls out of the pattern, as even the centres are affected by the “suburbanization of the soul.”<sup>61</sup> The idea of a cultural centre that would give meaning to the periphery is an illusion, as at the centre there are only fakes, for example Shakespeare’s Globe<sup>62</sup>, simulacra of the type of heritage industry already discussed in relation to Sinclair. The inhabitants of Chelsea Harbour are a legion of “non-entities” as detached from reality by the vicious boredom of the disinformation age as their counterparts in the other novels.<sup>63</sup> Hence, all four environments are forms of

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>58</sup> J.G. Ballard, *Cocaine Nights* (London, 1996), pp. 34, 15, 216, 186.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>60</sup> J.G. Ballard, *Kingdom Come* (London, 2006), p. 137, 6, 85.

<sup>61</sup> J.G. Ballard, *Super-Cannes* (London, 2000), p. 263.

<sup>62</sup> J.G. Ballard, *Millennium People* (London, 2003), p. 180.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp. 271, 28, 29.

prosperous suburbia, one of the end-states of history that produce the same type of social deprivation.

All environments pave the way for the appearance of a *propheta*-figure in various ways. The “somnolent township”<sup>64</sup> of *Cocaine Nights* at first resists the transformation through a *propheta*, as no messiah can compete with the siesta hour.<sup>65</sup> However, the somnolent boredom is the prerequisite for the appearance of the *propheta*. The white geometries of these end-states-of history environments create a mirror-like, eternal present, in which the past is not allowed to exist. Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* novels (1865 and 1871) are *Super-Cannes*’ main intertexts and introduce the theme of infantilisation to the quartet. The inhabitants of *Millennium People* are “bored children in a video arcade”<sup>66</sup>, whereas in *Super-Cannes* work becomes the new leisure and thus childish play and the executives go beyond God by not having to rest on the seventh day but “playing” 16 hours a day, seven days a week.<sup>67</sup> In *Kingdom Come* infantilisation is necessary for the continuing growth of turnover and in *Cocaine Nights* it comes through the creation of a leisure society, where “people retire in their late thirties, with fifty years of idleness in front of them.”<sup>68</sup> Reading *Super-Cannes* and *Cocaine Nights* alongside each other reveals the irony that the type of people imprisoned in work in *Super-Cannes* is the same that is bored to death by the lack of any meaningful activity later in life.

These environments lead to an “absence of social structure” or more precisely, to “an invisible infrastructure [taking] the place of traditional civic virtues.”<sup>69</sup> This creates a new kind of togetherness: “true” community is created in “traffic jams and airport

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<sup>64</sup> See Ballard (1996), p. 288.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 260.

<sup>66</sup> See Ballard (2003), p. 23.

<sup>67</sup> See Ballard (2000), p. 253.

<sup>68</sup> See Ballard (1996), p. 180.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., pp. 35,38.

concourses.”<sup>70</sup> This is a community in isolation producing legions of non-entities.<sup>71</sup> “Lying by a swimming pool all day is a new kind of social deprivation”<sup>72</sup> and “people are entombed in their glass palaces.”<sup>73</sup> “Everywhere you look – Britain, the States, western Europe – people are sealing themselves off into crime-free enclaves.”<sup>74</sup> These end-of-history structures are paradise regained and utopia achieved.

Yet, as the *propheta* of Estrella del Mar and resident tennis-professional Bobby Crawford states: “A world lying on its back is vulnerable to any cunning predator.”<sup>75</sup> Baudrillard describes the social structure of *Cocaine Nights* in the *Transparency of Evil* adequately, by comparing it to a virus: “Under the reign of the virus you are destroyed by your own antibodies. This is leukaemia of an organism devouring its own defences, precisely because all threat, all adversity, has disappeared.”<sup>76</sup> In the absence of any ordinary sickness, society’s immune system becomes vulnerable as a whole, no longer able to defend itself against an attack that is the result of its immunisation.

But it is the formation of a crowd in isolation itself that calls forth the *propheta* from his desert.<sup>77</sup> The boredom and aimlessness of the various end-states of history creates the slime mould and unique geometry of the crowd that picks first one leader and then another and is only apparently passive.<sup>78</sup> The boundaries that isolate the individuals are threatened to disappear as the crowd grows exponentially in this game of musical chairs in reverse, in which “[e]very time the muzak stops people stand up and dance around the world, and more chairs are added to the circle, more marinas and Marriott hotels, so everyone thinks they’re winning.”<sup>79</sup> While the anaesthetised spaces

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<sup>70</sup> See Ballard (2006), p. 168.

<sup>71</sup> See Ballard (2003), p. 271.

<sup>72</sup> See Ballard (1996), p. 69.

<sup>73</sup> See Ballard (2000), p. 169.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 293.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>76</sup> See Baudrillard (1993) p. 64.

<sup>77</sup> See Ballard (2006), p. 106.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>79</sup> See Ballard (2003), p. 54.

shield the individual from mimetic rivalry, infantilisation at the same time activates the “sibling envy”<sup>80</sup> of the pre-repression Freudian subject.

There are two competing logics at work in the creation and expansion of these modern non-places. In order to grow, the shopping mall, the business park and the holiday resort have to continue to generate a growing turnover according to the logic of late capitalism. This growth is based on mimetic rivalry, as psychiatrist Richard Maxted and *propheta* of *Kingdom Come* recognises: “Our gurus tell us that coveting our neighbours’ wives is good for us, and even our neighbours’ asses.”<sup>81</sup> As already mentioned in the introduction, Girard has drawn attention to the fact that Western society is the first society which can afford an outbreak of conflictive mimesis and even thrives on rivalry. The Girardian scholars Jean-Pierre Dupuy and Paul Dumouchel have elaborated this point in *L’Enfer des Choses*. Drawing on Mandeville’s *Fable of the Bees* (1714), Dumouchel explains how in modern liberal economics envy, a traditional vice, is come to be seen as a public virtue and the motor of economic thriving.<sup>82</sup> Maxted, in *Super-Cannes* makes the same point: “Perverse behaviours were once potentially dangerous. Societies weren’t strong enough to allow them to flourish.”<sup>83</sup>

At the same time the social isolation and anaesthetisation of the individual prevents exactly this from happening. The liberation from old-fashioned jealousy renders sleeping with one’s neighbour’s wife boring, as it no longer forms a transgression and in *Super-Cannes* there is “no time for adulterous affairs or coveting their neighbours’ wives.”<sup>84</sup> The inhabitants of Ballard’s late novels find themselves in a state of post-mimetic desire as defined in the introductory chapter. Their isolation is therefore responsible for the failure of turnover growth at, for example, the Metro-

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<sup>80</sup> See Ballard (1996), p. 179.

<sup>81</sup> See Ballard (2006), p. 263.

<sup>82</sup> Jean-Pierre Dupuy and Paul Dumouchel, *L’Enfer des Choses: René Girard et la Logique de l’Economie* (Paris, 1979), p. 140.

<sup>83</sup> See Ballard (2000), p. 97.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 340.

Centre.<sup>85</sup> It is this desire for mimetic rivalry that the respective *propheta*-figures revive in the inhabitants of the modern prisons. It is a desire that lies, however, dormant and which forms an essential characteristic of human nature in Ballard's anthropology, as becomes clear in the following conversation between a police sergeant and David Person in *Kingdom Come*: "“Everyone wants more and more, and if they don't get it they're ready to be...’ ‘Violent?’”<sup>86</sup>

In order to revive these desires the *prophetae* liberate the crowd that has already been formed in isolation through the boundaries, separating the members of the crowd from each other. They do this by using what is, according to Canetti, the strongest and oldest symbol of the crowd: fire. "“Fire is the oldest signalling system”, remarks David Prentice in *Cocaine Nights* after his car is torched in a handsome spectacle for the evening crowd.<sup>87</sup> It is the fire at the Hollinger residence that sets the train of events of the novel in motion and breaks the anaesthetic spell that does not allow any form of narrative. Bobby Crawford remarks: "“I have to keep the troops in good heart, it's a constant worry. A spectacular fire touches something deep inside us.”"<sup>88</sup> The crowd is formed because fire creates what Canetti calls the flight crowd.<sup>89</sup> While there is no initial fire in the other novels, the Heathrow bomb in *Millennium People*, the sniper attack in *Kingdom Come* and David Greenwood's killing spree in *Super-Cannes* also create flight crowds.

Once the barriers between the isolated individuals are lifted, the *propheta*-figures incite the revived "sleeping beauties" of the newly formed crowds to the cultivation of conflictive imitation. Like Tyler Durden in Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* (1996), who incites his followers to pick fights and lose, *Cocaine Nights*' Bobby Crawford deliberately loses at tennis to his fellow Estrella del Mar residents in order to

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<sup>85</sup> See Ballard (2006), p. 79.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>87</sup> See Ballard (1996), p. 156,160.

<sup>88</sup> See Ballard (1996), p. 204.

<sup>89</sup> See Canetti (1962), p. 53.

energize people and give them back some sense of community.<sup>90</sup> It is the community of the crowd and it is dependent on an outside to itself for its continued existence. Canetti's observations on the fire in the theatre are instructive in this respect:

In a theatre, on the other hand, the crowd inevitably disintegrates in the most violent manner. Only one or two persons can get through each exit at a time and thus the energy of flight turns into an energy to push others back. Only one man at a time can pass between the rows of seats and each seat is neatly separated from the rest.<sup>91</sup>

In other words, if there is no outside, the reinvigorated crowd community is fragmented into its individual units, once more resulting in the struggle of all against all.

Paul Dumouchel argues that "one characteristic of globalization that often goes unnoticed, perhaps because it is so evident, is that it has no outside."<sup>92</sup> This changes also the characteristics of the spaces that one's enemies inhabit. What globalization has transformed is that "[o]thers' and 'enemies' are among us." Unlike political territories which exclude each other just as parts of Euclidian space do, globalized spaces are palimpsests. Again Sinclair's observations on the Siebel building come to mind. While inside and outside no longer exist in globalized space, "the world is divided into 'hot spots' of violence and 'cool spots' of relative peace and order. The primary goal is not to bring peace to the hot spots but to maintain certain areas as sanctuaries that are protected from violence."<sup>93</sup> Globalized terrorism attempts to subvert these fluctuating boundaries by tearing through the layer of relative peace with the terrorist attack.<sup>94</sup>

Scapegoating violence is introduced as a solution in Ballard's late fiction to restore inside and outside. However, it will become clear that these acts of scapegoating violence occur within the closed Canettian theatre. Expulsion is no longer possible. At

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<sup>90</sup> See Ballard (1996), p. 180.

<sup>91</sup> See Canetti (1962), p. 26.

<sup>92</sup> Paul Dumouchel "Inside Out: Political Violence in the Age of Globalization", *Contagion* 15/16 (2008-09), p. 173.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179f.

best temporary sanctuaries can be erected. But in accordance with Dumouchel's claim, friends and foes inhabit the same space and are no longer separated from each other.

The aforementioned torching of a car in *Cocaine Nights* is described under the chapter heading "A Pagan Rite", whereas the aim of the Hollinger fire is to get rid of the "ancient regime" of Estrella Del Mar.<sup>95</sup> The egalitarian utopia of corporate bliss of work and play of *Super-Cannes* is revealed to be an illusion. *Super-Cannes'* narrator is convinced that "[b]ehind this brave new world of surveillance cameras and bulletproof Range Rovers", "there probably existed an old-fashioned realm of pecking orders and racist abuse."<sup>96</sup> The daily humiliation of the pecking orders is deflected onto the local immigrant population of Super-Cannes. Crowd cohesion is created among the executives by the formation of "bowling clubs which in their "ratissages" "beat the shit out of a few whores and transvestites and feel good about it."<sup>97</sup>

In *Kingdom Come* the crowd created by the shopping mall turns against Muslim women, Roma and the whole Asian population because they have set up an alternative economy.<sup>98</sup> Because they refuse to participate in the creation of more turnover at the shopping mall they are blamed for the stagnation of growth. In *Millennium People* crowds are formed in a vast web of demonstrations of concerned groups "ready to spend their weekends picketing laboratories, merchant banks and nuclear-fuel depots, to halt the reviled race enemy of all demonstrators, the internal combustion engine."<sup>99</sup> The car is a rather abstract scapegoat. But what is important is that, as the narrator senses, primitive religion was being born, a faith in search of a god to worship.<sup>100</sup>

At this point one could argue that at least in *Millennium People* the demonstrations are peaceful protests against the oppressive structures of Western

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<sup>95</sup> See Ballard (1996), p. 130.

<sup>96</sup> See Ballard (2000), p. 59.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>98</sup> See Ballard (2006), p. 13.

<sup>99</sup> See Ballard (2003), p. 38.

<sup>100</sup> See Ballard (2003), p. 37f.

modernity. Yet, *Millennium People* middle-class revolutionist Kay Churchill and soon-to-be lover of David Markham recognises that “nothing brings out violence like a peaceful demonstration.”<sup>101</sup> This rather cryptic remark is explained in Girardian terms by John Roedel in an article titled “Sacrificial and Non-Sacrificial Mass Non-Violence.” Roedel draws attention to the distinction between strategic and principled non-violence made beginning with Gandhi.<sup>102</sup> The case of the *Millennium People* protestors is clearly one of strategic non-violence, in which non-violence is embraced as a tactic and not, as in principled non-violence, on the basis of a moral or religious commitment. Strategic non-violence does not address the problem of mimetic desire, whereas principled non-violence for Gandhi, according to Roedel, arises out of one’s relationship with God and thus solves the issue of mimetic desire. For Gandhi strategic non-violence was not non-violence at all but a simulacrum of it.<sup>103</sup> Thus as Roedel further writes, “[s]trategic non-violence is on a continuum with the violent techniques that people use to change the behaviours of others, and it is subject to all of the other mimetic pressures that violent conflict normally responds to.”<sup>104</sup> By analogy to the scapegoat mechanism, the non-violent protestor pacifies the violence of the opponent through suffering in order to transform the social order.<sup>105</sup> Because the protestors are the ones bringing the change through their suffering they “experience the inflation of self-divinization while they are still alive.”<sup>106</sup> In *Theater* Girard writes:

The more sacrifice reflects about itself, the more it tends to negate its own essence and turn against its own violence, against itself, so to speak, not for humanitarian reasons but for reasons of sacrificial effectiveness. [...] It is significant that doctrines of non-violence are formulated in a language that is still sacrificial, and this paradox suggests the continuity of the two.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 47

<sup>102</sup> John Roedel, “Sacrificial and Non-Sacrificial Mass Non-Violence”, *Contagion* 15/16 (2008-09), p.222.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 222,.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>107</sup> See Girard (1991), p. 216.

In non-sacrificial non-violence, the human is not in control, rather God is. Non-violence is not instrumental to change but only expresses the hope of change.<sup>108</sup> Sacrificial non-violence is effective as sacrifice is effective but it can become ineffective as sacrifice does in the sacrificial crisis. When this happens strategic non-violence can turn into violence. The creation of a mass of peaceful protestors with its erasure of differences is as much a negation of the other as the formation of the violent mob. But “every negation of the other leads towards expulsion and murder.”<sup>109</sup> The levelling in the loss of differences is combined with a desire for revenge, “if not by the protestors themselves then perhaps by those who witness the protestors’ suffering. [...] One might say that even if sacrificial non-violence doesn’t pull the trigger, it certainly loads the gun.”<sup>110</sup> For Roedel this explains why Gandhifelt intuitively responsible for the violent rebirths of India and Pakistan.<sup>111</sup> Principled non-violence, as Gandhi admitted, was a lofty ideal<sup>112</sup> and he was aware that any movement of principled non-violence would contain elements of potentially destructive strategic non-violence.<sup>113</sup>

In conversations with the narrators, a variation on the legend of the Dostoevskian “Grand Inquisitor” in *The Brothers Karamazov*, the *prophetae* explain their motives for the incitation to violence.<sup>114</sup> “[W]e’re not reasonable and rational creatures”,<sup>115</sup> explains *Kingdom Come* psychiatrist Tony Maxted. Roger Luckhurst has pointed out that the only resistance to the machine is madness.<sup>116</sup> *Super-Cannes’* psychiatrist Wilder Penrose agrees that “madness is the only freedom” and administers

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<sup>108</sup> See Roedel (2008/09, p. 229).

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 222. Roedel is quoting Girard (1987a), p. 214.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 233, 229.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 222.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 225.

<sup>114</sup> Qtd in Kumar, (1985), p. 122.

<sup>115</sup> See Ballard (2006), p. 102.

<sup>116</sup> See Luckhurst (1997), p. 120.

microdoses of madness to his patients at the business park.<sup>117</sup> In this controlled psychopathy of tribalising people the releases of hate and violence<sup>118</sup> are the rationed doses of medicine that tone up the system<sup>119</sup> and allow the executives to function like machines in the business park. In *Cocaine Nights* the revival of the beach resorts through violence leads to a revival of arts and culture. Crawford comments: “Arts and criminality always flourished side by side.”<sup>120</sup> Henri Lefèbvre corroborates this view by claiming that “very oppressive societies were very creative and rich in producing oeuvres.”<sup>121</sup> “Blood pays for arts festivals and civic pride”, Crawford continues, “sacrifice someone and seal the tribe to itself.”<sup>122</sup>

The victims of these sacrifices are, however, not only the involuntary scapegoats of the immigrant population. The inhabitants of Estrella Del Mar offer themselves as victims in a fashionable masochism that is “the new black” according to Maxted.<sup>123</sup> Penrose explains the rationale behind it: “The consumer society hungers for the deviant and unexpected. What else can drive the bizarre shifts in the entertainment landscape that will keep us buying?”<sup>124</sup> The reduction of human relationships to the sign, as Baudrillard has argued in *The System of Objects*, is a necessary precondition for continuing consumption.<sup>125</sup> There is, however, a double bind at work here, as at the same time, this reduction is also the entrance into the world of simulation that robs the world of its contingency and leads to the somnolent boredom of the individual that prevents the increase of consumption. Becoming the victim of violence not only reinvigorates the perpetrator but forms a revivifying event for the masochistic victim yearning for contingency. In the following example it becomes clear how different from

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<sup>117</sup> See Ballard (2000), p. 264.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 381.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>120</sup> See Ballard (1996), p. 181.

<sup>121</sup> Henri Lefèbvre, *Writings on Cities* (Oxford, 1996), p. 67.

<sup>122</sup> See Ballard (1996), p. 324.

<sup>123</sup> See Ballard (2006), p. 147.

<sup>124</sup> See Ballard (2000), p. 265.

<sup>125</sup> See Baudrillard (2005), p. 218.

the voluntary sacrifice of the woman in the story of Solomon's Judgment the "willing" victim of this "liberating" violence actually is. Thus Girard's fear of a confusion of the category of true sacrifice out of love and a voluntary, masochistic victimization becomes understandable.

The rape of Anne Hollinger by Bobby Crawford, filmed by Frank Prentice's former lover Paula Hamilton, exemplifies this deviant logic. David discovers the tape in the burnt down ruins of the Hollinger house. At first the film follows the standard conventions of pornography. There is a parodic lesbian scene and soon after the passive bull-shouldered stud of countless porno-films enters the picture, he ejaculates, as custom demanded, across Anne's breasts.<sup>126</sup> Pornography is the prime metaphor for the reduction of the human being to hyperreal signs and the objectification of the sexual act.<sup>127</sup> The boredom of the various utopias in the four novels is precisely captured by the reduction of the human being in the conventions of pornography. Suddenly, however, two naked men break into the bedroom, disturbing the simulated boredom of the pornographic configuration. Prentice recognizes that "the lesbian porno-film had been a set-up, designed to lure her to this anonymous apartment, the *mise-en-scène* for a real rape for which the bridesmaids, but not the heroine, had been prepared."<sup>128</sup> In a later conversation with Hamilton, Prentice reminds her that it "was a real rape."<sup>129</sup> Paula, however, sees it as a prescribed treatment: "Everything was part of the game. Afterwards Anne didn't mind." Prentice has to concede the point: "I know – I saw the smile. The bravest and strangest smile I've ever seen."<sup>130</sup> The experience of violence

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<sup>126</sup> See Ballard (1996), p. 125f.

<sup>127</sup> Martin Amis in *Yellow Dog* (London, 2003) and Chuck Palahniuk in *Snuff* (New York, 2008) both portray the porn industry and the reduction of the human being to signs.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

whether active or passive releases a flow of adrenalin, retunes the corporate nervous system and pushes profits to unprecedented heights.<sup>131</sup>

This is a variation on the *Crash* theme, where the contingent car crash has a similar revivifying effect. But in a sense the *prophetae*, engineering the revivification through violence, want to eat their cake and have it too. They let their prisoners out of their cages once in a while to keep them docile in those very cages. They do not realize that those prisoners might not return to their cages one day. In other words, they fully trust the scapegoat mechanism and are not aware that violence can escape their control. In *Super-Cannes* “[t]he first sign of revolt had appeared but not in a way that Wilder Penrose expected.” The idea behind the *ratissage* is, as in the scapegoat mechanism, to expel violence to the outside and keep the hyperreal business park zone spotless and free of crime. “[G]raffiti and vandalized cars had begun to penetrate even the well-upholstered hide of the corporate elephant.”<sup>132</sup> Penrose recruits dozens of more bowling clubs in order for the whole world to become a business park.<sup>133</sup> But once the whole world actually is a business park, there no longer can be an outside and violence begins to penetrate the inside of the system.

But there is a further factor that leads to the escalation of violence. Frances Baring recognises that “sooner or later the victims would turn on their attackers.”<sup>134</sup> The crowd created in the bowling clubs brings forth its own mimetic double and thus creates what Canetti has termed the double crowd.<sup>135</sup> Both crowds, however, depend on each other for their existence. “[T]he sight, or simply the powerful image, of the second crowd, prevents the disintegration of the first.”<sup>136</sup> This is how Ballard reads Islamic fundamentalist terrorism. The Bomb that initiates the middle-class revolution in

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<sup>131</sup> See Ballard (2000), p. 280.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 360.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 340.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 360.

<sup>135</sup> See Canetti (1962), p. 63.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

*Millennium People* is blamed on unknown al-Qaeda terrorists.<sup>137</sup> Like the myth of Goldstein in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Islamic fundamentalist terrorism, brought forth by the structural violence of corporate capitalism, ensures the continued existence of the system. It lends a fragile stability to the deracinated crowd of the global village.

William Stephenson, in “‘A Terrorism of the Rich’: Symbolic Violence in Bret Easton Ellis’s *Glamorama* and J.G. Ballard’s *Super-Cannes*” is drawing on Jürgen Habermas, and explains: “The clash of civilizations thesis ‘is often the veil masking the vital material interests of the West (accessible oilfields and a secure energy supply, for example).’ For economic and structural integrity and its sense of cultural superiority, the West depends on an ongoing conflict with an excluded outsider.”<sup>138</sup> Ballard’s late fiction thus presents the reader with “a reversal of the usual power balance of terrorist fiction, in which a disadvantaged group strikes symbolically against the dominant rich.”<sup>139</sup>

There is a progressive maiming of the scapegoat mechanism within the four novels. While in *Cocaine Nights* the narrator voluntarily chooses to become the scapegoat in order to ensure that Crawford’s mission would endure<sup>140</sup>, *Super-Cannes* closes with the narrator’s intention of killing Penrose and thus finishing David Greenwood’s work, another attempt of ending the violence by violence. In *Millennium People*, however, despite the middle class revolution ending in ruins and the restoration of some kind of order, the fragile balance of the double crowd remains a threatening presence. But it is only *Kingdom Come* that explores what happens to a system that actually no longer has an outside.

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<sup>137</sup> See Ballard (2003), p. 290.

<sup>138</sup> William Stephenson, “‘A Terrorism of the Rich’: Symbolic Violence in Bret Easton Ellis’s *Glamorama* and J.G. Ballard’s *Super-Cannes*”, *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 48.3 (2007), p. 286.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 280.

<sup>140</sup> See Ballard (1996), p. 329.

Canetti's metaphor of the crowded theatre is the structure underlying the shopping mall. John Pahl, a historian of religion, writes in *Shopping Malls and Other Sacred Spaces* (2003): "Malls *disorient* us by using natural and religious symbols and spatial patterns in an enclosed indoor setting."<sup>141</sup> Narrator Pearson recognizes that "here by the M25, in the heartland of the motorway people, all signs pointed inwards, referring the traveler back to his starting point."<sup>142</sup> The shopping mall and the M25 are metonyms of the globalized world.<sup>143</sup>

As long as the consumer crowds are able to deflect their violence onto the immigrant population or the inner-city elites, the enclosed space does not form a problem. But as the scapegoat mechanism fails to restore order, there comes the moment when they are no longer able to find any new enemies.<sup>144</sup> Girard writes in *Theater* how mimetic desire becomes an end in itself, when it no longer serves the purpose of a final reordering.<sup>145</sup> In what follows, it will be demonstrated, how this end state is reached in the Metro-Centre.

As the situation escalates in the suburbia surrounding the M25 and more and more St George's cross crowds are formed that scapegoat the immigrant population, the Home Office finally decides to take action. As a result the suburban consumer fascists find themselves under siege in the enclosed space of the Metro-Centre. It is at this point that they turn against each other, no longer able to find any external enemies. Once cut off from any outside, the "self-contained universe of treasure and promise" turns into "a gigantic sty."<sup>146</sup> However, by turning the mall into a concentration camp of sorts, the inhabitants of what becomes the "republic of the Metro-Centre" attempt to keep their empire clean. The crowd is split up into rival cleaning groups and "the team that did the

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<sup>141</sup> Jon Pahl, *Shopping Malls and other Sacred Spaces* (Michigan, 2003), p. 71.

<sup>142</sup> See Ballard (2006), p. 35.

<sup>143</sup> Baudrillard makes the same point as Ballard with respect to the globalized world. See Baudrillard (1988), p. 53.

<sup>144</sup> See Ballard (2006), p. 205.

<sup>145</sup> See Girard (1991), p. 121.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218, 233.

best job of cleaning and waste disposal during the next week would be allowed to leave the dome.”<sup>147</sup> Marketing man Pearson unwittingly “invents” the slogan “Work Makes You Free” and naively asks: “[w]ho said that? It’s very true. It keeps alive the sporting instinct, and gives them something to live for.”<sup>148</sup>

The eternal retail present of the shopping mall erases historical memory and thus the Metro-Centre is condemned to repeat history both as tragedy and farce. Consumerism is revealed as a soft-fascist world in which “everything good has a barcode.”<sup>149</sup> The latter dehumanizes the consumers just as the tattooed registration numbers dehumanized the victims of the Nazi concentration camps. The reduction of humans to signs is total. When the murderer of Pearson’s father, Duncan Christie, unloads a refrigerator at the Metro-Centre he is asked by an elderly woman if he wants a refund. An enraged Christie answers that he wants retribution. The woman does not understand and turns to her husband: “Retribution? You can’t get that here. [...] Harry what department is that?”<sup>150</sup> Obviously she can no longer think in categories other than those of monetary exchange.

No longer being able to achieve group cohesion through the scapegoat mechanism, the subjects of the Metro-Centre are returned to their isolation from each other. Mimetic desire seems, however, the only human trait to remain intact. Consumer dehumanisation is achieved through the exploitation of mimetic desire, once consumerism enters the worship phase.<sup>151</sup> As with the protagonists of *Crash* mimetic desire is also deflected from human rivals to material objects. Pearson explains: “We wanted to be like these consumer durables, and they in turn wanted us to emulate them. In many ways, we wanted to *be* them...”<sup>152</sup> Some of the “citizens” of the Metro-Centre

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 233

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 233.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p. 241.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p. 235.

even had “marked barcodes on the backs of their hands, trying to resemble the consumer goods they most admired.”<sup>153</sup> Eventually the Home Office decides to storm the shopping mall. In a last attempt to create social cohesion, the crowd, reformed into one of its Canettian ur-states in flight, turns on Maxted as their final victim. Again the reference to Foucault’s remark on the revolt against the prison manager is apt. However, even this last scapegoat cannot prevent the end state of mimetic desire in ruins. The world, having become an enclosed space in the Metro-Centre, devours itself, a furnace consumed by its own fire.<sup>154</sup>

Violence is thus shown to be energising in precisely the ways its apologists in these novels suggest that it must be. But in the late novels the destructive element is so endemic to society that the notion of going beyond it seems to be a hopeless dream. It is violence that seems to preoccupy Ballard more than sex now, in fulfilment of Freud’s premonition (at a different historical moment) in *Civilization and its Discontents* that the death instinct was gaining in force[.]<sup>155</sup>

In this final section, the role of nihilism in the four novels will be examined. Gasiorek attributes Ballard’s focus on violence to the gaining in force of the death instinct. What the discussion so far suggests, however, is that the maiming of the scapegoat mechanism is a superior explanation to invoking Freud’s death instinct. While violence does energise both perpetrators and victims, the failure of violence to lead to a meaningful social order leads to a further spread of violence that becomes self-consuming. As will be argued in the following, the “negative sublime” of the nihilist is a product of the inefficacy of the scapegoat mechanism.

As already noted in the introduction, “the will to make oneself God is a will to self-destruction which is gradually realized.”<sup>156</sup> The enlightenment myth of a self-sufficient individuality, the “mensonge romantique”, is at the root of conflictive

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., p. 268.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., p. 276.

<sup>155</sup> See Gasiorek (2005), p. 198.

<sup>156</sup> See Girard (1965), p. 287.

mimetic desire. Modern, secular men, no longer imitating God as a transcendental, external mediator thus become gods to each other. The utopian desire to create the kingdom of heaven on earth has been identified in the preceding chapters as relying on the scapegoat mechanism. If it can at all be realized it necessarily creates its dystopian other in the form of expelled victims as exemplified in Sinclair's fiction. Once the scapegoat mechanism becomes transparent and no longer leads to the restoration of order, violence is all that remains. Gasiorek quotes Albert Camus to summarise the motives of Richard Gould, the *propheta* in *Millennium People*:

He attacks a shattered world to make it whole. He confronts the injustice at large in the world with his own principles of justice. Thus all he originally wants is to resolve this contradiction and establish a reign of justice, if he can, or of injustice if he is driven to the end of his tether.<sup>157</sup>

He further writes that “[i]t is the arbitrariness of violence, its lack of motive, that is its *raison d'être*, ensuring that ‘the meaningless act is the only one that has any meaning.’”<sup>158</sup> While the nihilistic violence is a response to the fragmentation of the subject under the impact of capitalism and technology, as Benjamin Noys points out, “we appear to witness the failure of the nihilistic gesture.”<sup>159</sup> The point is that the meaningless act of violence once had meaning in its attempt to overthrow capitalism and technology and has only become meaningless because it no longer leads to a reordering of society. Noys argues that the novels are not so much about the violent underside of bourgeois existence but about the violent underside of the attempt to overturn that existence.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> See Gasiorek (2005), p. 196.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

<sup>159</sup> Benjamin Noys, “La Libido Réactionnaire? The Recent Fiction of J.G. Ballard”, *Journal of European Studies*, 37 (2007), p. 400.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 398.

David Markham, seduced by Richard Gould's logic explains in a conversation with Henry Kendall, husband to Markham's ex-wife that the ideal act of violence isn't pure nihilism:

It is the exact opposite. This is where we've all been wrong – [...]. It isn't a search for nothingness. It's a search for meaning. [...] But a truly pointless act of violence, shooting at random into a crowd, grips our attention for months. The absence of rational motive carries a significance of its own.<sup>161</sup>

There is a connection in Gould's thinking between acts of violence that have a purpose to pointless acts of violence: "We accept deaths when we feel they're justified – wars, climbing Everest, putting up a skyscraper, building a bridge."<sup>162</sup> One could say that these are sacrificial deaths for the creation of a new order. When Markham cannot see the casualties of the Heathrow bomb as the bridge to a higher order, Gould replies: "There are bridges in the mind. They carry us to a more real world, a richer sense of who we are. Once those bridges are there, it's our duty to cross them."<sup>163</sup>

Robbed of its power to recreate order, the act of violence seems meaningless, yet it still recreates a space: "a meaningless act is an empty space larger than the universe around it." Gould's underlying model for this recreation of the mental space is the death and recreation of a real space through violence: "Violence is like a bush fire, it destroys a lot of trees but refreshes the forest, clears away the stifling undergrowth, so more trees spring up."<sup>164</sup> The difference between the two examples lies in the fact that the former remains empty: there is no recreation. The Chelsea Marina revolution becomes meaningless because it does not reach its goal of creating a new order: "the

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<sup>161</sup> See Ballard (2003), p. 194.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 248.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p. 248.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

sacrifices were absurd and the gains negligible.”<sup>165</sup> Or as Noys has put it: “The desire to re-enchant the world has become meaningless.”<sup>166</sup>

This is why Gould is not even a true nihilist who stares at the void only to rejoin it again. Markham comments after Gould’s death: “He was trying to find meaning in the most meaningless times, the first of a new kind of desperate man who refuses to bow before the arrogance of existence and the tyranny of space-time.”<sup>167</sup> Gould tries so hard to enter a parallel world through violence and invents zero, so he won’t be afraid of the world.<sup>168</sup> At heart he is a utopist no longer able to reach utopia through violence.

“In his hand he carried a heavy crucifix carved from a black and polished stone, and offered it to me as some kind of explanation for the deaths.”<sup>169</sup> What seems to be a cross is an automatic pistol in the hands of clergyman Dexter who is standing next to the dead body of Gould. The cross is revealed as an instrument of violence and can reveal further insight into Gould’s project. In *Things Hidden* Girard contrasts two readings of Jesus’ last words on the cross “Eli, Eli, lama sabachtani – God why have you forsaken me.” Albert Camus’ reading, according to Girard, makes the point that Jesus’ last words have been “censored” by two Gospels and takes this as evidence for the non-existence of God. Simone Weil, on the other hand, reads Jesus’ last words as a striking sign of their supernatural origin. “To take the naturalistic character of the death, the gospel text must be founded upon the unshakable certainty of a form of transcendence that leaves this death completely behind.”<sup>170</sup> Girard’s point is that Camus’ existentialist reading understands that the violent death of Christ does not lead to a deification of Christ in the Resurrection. At the same time, as Jean-Michel Oughourlian points out, “this type of [m]odern thought places itself *in between*

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., p. 293.

<sup>166</sup> See Noys (2007), p. 398.

<sup>167</sup> See Ballard (2003), p. 292.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 291, 276.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p. 286.

<sup>170</sup> See Girard (1987a), pp. 232f.

transcendence by violence—which it has not yet succeeded in demystifying completely—and what [G]irard calls sur-transcendence through love, which violence still manages to conceal from us.”<sup>171</sup> While Christian commentators fear that the unveiling of the scapegoat mechanism in the Crucifixion will lead to an undermining of sur-transcendence, Oughourlian and Girard are convinced that “everything that demythologizes the transcendence of violence reinforces and glorifies the sur-transcendence of love.”<sup>172</sup> The existentialist reading of the Crucifixion thus poses no threat to Christian Orthodoxy. According to Girard, “Orthodox theology has always successfully resisted the temptation to transform the Passion into a process that endows Jesus with divinity. [...] Instead of making the Crucifixion a *cause* of his divinity—which is a constant temptation to Christians—it is preferable to see it as a *consequence* of the latter.”<sup>173</sup>

When asked in a 1975 interview why he had never written a work that portrayed a sympathetic male/female relationship, Ballard replied: “The protagonists of most of my fiction feel tremendously isolated, and that seems to exclude the possibility of a warm fruitful relationship with anybody, let alone anyone as potentially close as a woman.”<sup>174</sup>

Ballard’s fiction is thus situated exactly in the space in between transcendence by violence and sur-transcendence by love. The isolation of Ballard’s character is a result of the “death of affect” that according to Pringle, is the “growth of a ruthlessly emotionless and guiltless form of individualism.”<sup>175</sup> But as has been demonstrated in the four novels discussed, individuality is a myth and is revealed rather to be interdividuality, a product of imitative desire that leads to dehumanization through the imitation of object and signs, conflict, crowd formation and the scapegoating

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., p. 233.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 233.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., p. 233.

<sup>174</sup> See Pringle (1979), p. 44.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

mechanism. Canetti similarly locates the cause for modern crowd formation in the repugnance to being touched. As mentioned earlier, only in the crowd can human beings become free of this fear. However, there is an alternative to overcoming this fear. “If we do not avoid it, it is because we feel attracted to someone; and then it is we who make the approach.”<sup>176</sup> In Ballard’s fiction this approaching of the other, as an alternative to crowd formation is no longer possible. The discussed novels are cautionary tales that remind the reader that if depersonalization continues, violence is all that is left to us. Unless we recognize that the only transcendence is the sur-transcendence of love, isolation and meaningless violence are our future.

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<sup>176</sup> See Canetti (1962), p. 1.

## 4.2 Stewart Home

Home, author of a whole stream of vile, violent, occultic, sexually perverse stories and novellas – *Slow Death*, *Blow Job*, “Frenzy of the Flesh”, *Come Before Christ and Murder Love* – promotes cultural-punk aggressivity, aesthetic yobbery with violence, art criticism as violent action and resistance through the breaking-up of bourgeois exhibitions, and the like – and all done, or allegedly done, by a roster of radical anarchic-aesthetic gangs Home variously initiates, invents, dreams up and fantasizes about: The Semiotic Liberation Front, avant-bardism, Glop Artists, DADAnarchism, Decadent Action (promoting “exorbitant consumerism”: anarchist guerilla warfare along the High Street).<sup>1</sup>

It is easy to see why Stewart Home’s literary output has been ignored, criticized and dismissed by the literary establishment and why, as he explains in an interview reprinted in *Neoism, Plagiarism and Praxis* (1995), he never won an award for his work. He continues:

Personally I’m proud that I’ve never been nominated for a literary award because it’s patently obvious that young writers whose work meets with immediate acceptance by the publishing industry are doing no more than reproducing the bankrupt formulas of preceding generations, Martin Amis or some other untalented hack.<sup>2</sup>

Home attacks on many fronts. Amis is only one of numerous victims of the established cultural system consisting of writers, artists and the intelligentsia: in Home’s view that system is a bourgeois institution sustaining capitalism. Salman Rushdie is a mediocre novelist<sup>3</sup>, Slavoj Žižek is a twit leaping to the most ridiculous conclusions<sup>4</sup> and even US-academic Kirby Olson, who is one of the few literary critics to discuss Home’s work favourably in *Comedy after Postmodernism*<sup>5</sup>, is dismissed as slandering Home as an anarchist and an anti-feminist. This hostile and aggressive tone is appreciated and taken up in imitation by the counter-cultural music magazine *NME* in a blurb on the back of Home’s anti-novel *Red London* (1994): “Stewart Home’s sperm ‘n’

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<sup>1</sup> See Cunningham (2005), p. 155.

<sup>2</sup> Stewart Home, *Neoism, Plagiarism and Praxis* (Edinburgh, 1995) p. 89.

<sup>3</sup> Stewart Home, *Memphis Underground* (London, 2007), p. 92.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Thwaite and Stewart Home, “Stewart Home” (2006), par. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Kirby Olsen, *Comedy after Postmodernism* (Lubbock, 2001).

blood-sodden scribblings make Will Self's writings read like the self-indulgent dribblings of a sad Oxbridge junkie trying to sound hard."<sup>6</sup>

Recently, however, things seem to have changed. Peter Ayrtton, publisher of a couple of Home's books at Serpent's Tail, is incredulous when Home informs him in his recent fictional autobiographical anti-novel *Memphis Underground* (2007) that he is being awarded £ 7000 by the Arts Council and even gets to shake Rushdie's hand.<sup>7</sup> Home seems to have become somewhat more established. This might have to do with the fact that his representations of ultra-violence and explicit, perverse sexual behaviour are no longer as dominant and compulsively repetitive in his recent fiction such as *69 Things to Do with a Dead Princess* (2002; henceforth *69 Things*) or *Memphis Underground. Tainted Love* (2005), the fictional autobiography of Home's mother, approaches even something like social realism and thus becomes arguably the most accessible of Home's novels. That is not to say that these works conform to anything like mainstream literary taste. Descriptions of graphic violence and perverse sexuality are still pervasive. It is only in comparison to earlier works by Home that this statement is valid. Furthermore, while Home's fiction has been littered with references to cultural theory from the very beginning, the number of these references has increased in his recent fiction. These are references to the kind of en vogue theorists academics of the postmodern brand appreciate, like for example in *69 Things* references to Foucault, Barthes, Deleuze, Derrida, Donna Haraway or Baudrillard.<sup>8</sup> Also, what might contribute to the increasing popularity of Home among postmodernists is the non-linearity of his

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<sup>6</sup> Stewart Home, *Red London* (Edinburgh, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> See Home (2007), p. 195.

<sup>8</sup> Stewart Home, *69 Things to Do with a Dead Princess* (Edinburgh, 2002), p.23. However, as Home points out in *Memphis Underground*, *69 Things* makes the point that Bibliomania too is an addictive disease of capitalism (2007), p. 162. The novel is a criticism of academic career advancement that demands an endless stream of articles and leads to the curious situation where even specialists cannot keep up with their own area of interest. (2002), p. 24. Girard makes a similar point in his article "Theory and its Terrors", where he ridicules the academic system, in which "we are under a strict obligation to write, and therefore we hardly have the time to read one another's work." (in Girard (2008), p. 206).

recent fiction. In contrast, the early parodies of pulp fiction, although already deconstructive of their genre, followed a simple and linear plot.

“A lot of people who like my fiction aren’t interested in the theory or the exhibitions, and the fiction often disgusts those who might otherwise think of me as reasonably interesting and intelligent.”<sup>9</sup> Those who have the sophisticated background to grasp the parody of his fiction do not read it, whereas those who do, enjoy it for the pulp fiction that it is deconstructing. Home’s trilogy *Defiant Pose* (1991), *Red London* (1994) and *Blow Job* (1997) has been published by three different publishers, Peter Owen, AK Press and Serpent’s Tail, all of which are independent, counter-cultural presses (although Peter Owen and Serpent’s Tail have become somewhat more established). Especially the Edinburgh-based anarchist AK press, which also published Home’s history of the post-war avant-garde *The Assault on Culture* (1991), created a readership from the radical Left for Home, celebrating him as a leading anarchist. In his 1999 essay “Anarchism is Stupid: Comedy, Identity & Fictive Politics” he distances himself from anarchism, claiming that “[t]he deadening effect of anarchist ideologies on critical thinking and debate sometimes appear so readily apparent that delineating these eschatological beliefs for anything other than comic effect in fictional form proves tiresome.”<sup>10</sup>

If this is what Home is doing in his *Blow Job*-trilogy, he is also aware that the comic effect on his readership might be lost. The following passage from *Memphis Underground* illustrates the predicament. The main protagonist, who at this point in the anti-novel is still known as John Johnson to the reader but is a fictive version of Home himself, has just begun his work as artist in residence in Scapa Loch on the Orkney island of Hoy in what turns out to be a prison colony for dead celebrities.<sup>11</sup> Johnson has

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<sup>9</sup> See Home (1995), p. 160.

<sup>10</sup> Stewart Home, “Anarchism Is Stupid” (Codex, 1999), par. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Whether the name John Johnson is a deliberate allusion to Guy Fawkes, who used the name John Johnson when he was arrested, is unclear.

just finished his first work of art, a white on white canvas, onto which he sprayed a dollar sign in white.<sup>12</sup> Steve Smith, a local worker in the oil industry asks Johnson what the painting is about. There is an elaborate theory behind his work:

What I've done is make a copy of Malevich's famous white on white painting Suprematism, a classic piece of Russian avant-gardism from the nineteen-twenties. [...] You see there is this contemporary Russian artist involved in ethical avant-gardism called Alexander Brenner, who as a gesture of disillusionment with all political systems returned to Moscow from Israel, where he'd emigrated with his seventeen year-old girlfriend. [...] Anyway, Brenner is famous for going into the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and spraying a green dollar bill sign onto Malevich's *Suprematism* as a gesture against the commodification of art. [W]hat I'm suggesting here is that Brenner would have done better to spray a white dollar sign on the famous white on white painting. It would have been more subtle, the damage would have been very hard to reproduce in newspaper photographs, thereby avoiding valorising the very thing he wanted to decommodify.<sup>13</sup>

All that Smith takes from this explanation is: "What! You mean that's all you have to do to get a seventeen year-old girlfriend? I could do that! A three year-old could do it."<sup>14</sup>

While Home seems to mock the ignorance of the worker, the opposite is the case. As the reader learns later in the novel, John Johnson is pretending to be Tony Cheam, the actual artist in residence at Scapa Loch. Cheam sends Johnson in his stead, giving him instructions on how to pose as an artist, as Cheam's girlfriend Clare Grogan thinks it is more important that they stay in London and work on their relationship. Johnson is thus just reciting a script and has no clue what it means. Ultimately, Home thus ridicules the avant-garde, while at the same time being aware that the joke is lost on Smith.

"Above all, a Neoist is someone who believes that art, rather than being the creation of genius, is merely an exercise in public relations. A dull sham, not even worth debunking in public."<sup>15</sup> Home's point is to unmask the myth of originality and

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<sup>12</sup> See Home (2007), p. 35.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 35f.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>15</sup> Stewart Home, *Mind Invaders* (London, 1997c), p. 135.

individual creativity.<sup>16</sup> This observation returns the discussion to Girardian territory. The myth of the individual genius denies the tradition preceding it. In other words, for Home there is no intrinsic worth that would define an artwork. Its value is the product of social relations and taste already in place. And “taste, like law is based on precedent.”<sup>17</sup> This is why for Home plagiarism is a legitimate strategy because to him imitation is always at work in the creation of an artwork. For Home, “one of the best examples of this is Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* – which is a straight rewrite of Zamyatin’s *We*.”<sup>18</sup>

To prove his point, Home decided in 1982 to become an artist, knowing nothing about art.<sup>19</sup> Writing under the multiple name Luther Blissett, he has a ten-point guide to becoming a cult artist:

Sow confusion, so that even professional critics doubt their ability to correctly judge the value of the things that you do. Modern art is like the Emperor who had no clothes, as long as its unfounded claims about giving access to a higher realm of experience remain unchallenged, the rich and gullible will continue to invest money in stuffed sharks and houses filled with concrete.<sup>20</sup>

Home’s success seems to prove him right: “I’d thought that becoming an artist was a matter of bureaucratic manipulation, and I’d wanted to test my theoretical understanding of the matter against the cultural practice. [...] I was right.”<sup>21</sup>

Many of Home’s pranks have the goal of demythifying the bourgeois notion of individuality. But the Enlightenment myth of the independent individual is no harmless illusion. In *The Assault on Culture*, Home quotes Tony Lowes. “From our own belief in our own identity flows ceaseless misery – our isolation, our alienation and our belief

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<sup>16</sup> See Home (1995), p. 49.

<sup>17</sup> See Home (1995), p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> Stewart Home, *Blow Job* (London, 1997a), p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> See Home (2007), p.228.

<sup>20</sup> See Home (1997c), p. 26. The references here are to Damien Hirst and Rachel Whiteread’s *House*.

<sup>21</sup> See Home (2007), p. 228/9.

that another man's life is more interesting than our own."<sup>22</sup> It should be evident that this is an echo of the very definition of mimetic rivalry. There are consequences for material space. In the Scapa Loch estate of *Memphis Underground* "[f]ences were springing up to mark out spatial territories, neighbour was divided from neighbour in an unabashed frenzy of possessive individualism." The latter is signified by money: "the American government – like any other government was made of paper money (and if they didn't have enough, then they could always print more)[.]"<sup>23</sup> In very similar ways as in Sinclair's fiction the artist is just a pawn in the capitalist system, defining property values and preparing the self-destruction of the system: "Money trampled everything before it, and in the case of this and other recently gentrified neighbourhoods, what got destroyed were the very things that had attracted these fatal attentions in the first place."<sup>24</sup>

For Home, the suburb and the ghetto produce each other.<sup>25</sup> "You can't live in the ghetto because of poverty, overcrowding and noise. You can't live in the suburbs because they are so boring[.]"<sup>26</sup> The ghetto is the result of the spread of modern suburbanization based on the isolation of the individual. This leads to the marginalization of the less fortunate ones. In *Memphis Underground* the result is, as in *Super-Cannes*, the creation of crowds. "The boys had spotted me and were hurling fireworks in my direction. [...] They'd leave me alone if there were only three or four of them, but whenever there was a large group together, like the thirty who were running towards me at that moment, it was par for the course to be attacked."<sup>27</sup> Avant-garde movements protest against the structural violence of the capitalist system: "The avant-garde is in many ways a return of the repressed, the re-emergence of Protestant

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<sup>22</sup> Stewart Home, *The Assault on Culture* (Stirling, 1988), p. 77.

<sup>23</sup> See Home (2007), p. 131.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

iconoclasm in a post-Christian world where art serves as a secular religion justifying the activities of a murderous ruling class.”<sup>28</sup>

“The beliefs of those who fear change, and those who advocate it, are often mirror images of each other.”<sup>29</sup> Home recognizes that overthrowing the old order, be this symbolically through avant-garde movements<sup>30</sup> or through actual violence in anarchist movements is too simple a solution. This view is captured in such movements as Neoism and Avant-Bardism. Neoism is an innovation on No-Isms and consists of a meaningless prefix and suffix. The “neo” signifies the renewal of culture, the “ism” expresses the urge to conserve the current order. Avant-Bardism captures the same contradiction. “Bardism” refers to a tradition that has to be preserved, whereas the “avant” is the element that seeks the destruction of that tradition.

In *The Assault on Culture* Home identifies the utopian currents he discusses with the medieval heresies of millenarianists. By analogy to the latter’s attempt to abolish the role of the church and realise heaven on earth, “their twentieth-century counterparts have sought the end of social separation by simultaneously confronting ‘politics’ and ‘culture’.”<sup>31</sup> This is a goal that Home certainly shares. His interest in “smashing capitalism”<sup>32</sup> is driven by the insight that “money destroyed truly human relationships.”<sup>33</sup> Home attacks art as a specialised human activity that serves capitalism as substitute for religion. He realizes, however, that the abolishment of the specialised role of the artist is a task for which the avant-garde itself might not be ready. He quotes the Italian mail artist Vittore Baroni: “Yet, I think the problems are the same... The fact

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<sup>28</sup> See Home (1995), p. 99.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>31</sup> See Home (1988), p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> Simon Strong and Stewart Home, “The Cinema Too Must Be Destroyed” (2004), par. 25.

<sup>33</sup> See Home (2007), p. 134.

is that to participate you had to really work collectively, and this is something few in the art circles like to do without having their name in big letters...”<sup>34</sup>

“Samizdat adherents find a sense of *identity* in their *opposition* to what is considered conventional by Western society. Shock tactics are often employed to help maintain a sense of differentiation. If similar tactics are repeated too often they soon lose their impact.”<sup>35</sup> Home understands that the idea of the overthrow of an oppressive system is a product of the system itself. He criticizes movements like the Lettriste International, and later the Situationists for not advancing a workable plan of how to maintain a sense of human community during and after their *total transformation* of the urban environment.<sup>36</sup> Home draws attention to the fact that many avant-garde groups consider themselves as “movements”. The latter term, according to Home has military connotations and implies a mass of *adherents*. Invoking the term “movement” suggests an importance of those groups that they do not actually possess.<sup>37</sup> It also suggests that avant-garde groups employ at least on a symbolic level the violence of the unanimous crowd to expel the existing order.

An important reason why Home ridicules the avant-garde and anarchist movements is that in their utopian fantasies they do not recognize that they operate in cyclical rather than linear time.<sup>38</sup> The following discussion of *Come Before Christ and Murder Love* (1997) shows that Home explicitly uses a Girardian paradigm to criticize the avant-garde and anarchism. What the former and the latter do not see, is that the loss of differences and individuality in the crowd is not the formation of a genuine community but the necessary stage of the loss of differences in the cyclical renewal of culture.

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<sup>34</sup> See Home (1988), p. 77.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>38</sup> See Home (1999), par. 19.

#### 4.2.1 *Come Before Christ and Murder Love*

“Beard was the only reviewer to identify Girard’s theory of the sacrifice and the scapegoat as one of the factors structuring this novel.”<sup>39</sup> This comment comes towards the end of a lengthy footnote in Home’s essay “Anarchism Is Stupid”. In this footnote Home laments the growing consensus emerging around his work that the very essence of his novels are their pointlessness and artlessness. Although Kirby Olson in *Comedy after Postmodernism* recognizes that Home is the most political of the writers he discusses, he still lumps him together with those for whom art is an end in itself.<sup>40</sup> Home suspects that the consensus is based on shallow and not so shallow readings of Iain Sinclair’s overviews of his work in the *London Review of Books* and *Lights Out*. Those who embrace and dismiss Home do so as a reaction to the pointlessness of his fiction.

Identifying Girard’s theory as structuring *Come Before Christ and Murder Love* should alert the reader to the possibility that the novel might not be as pointless as it seems. First of all it is rather curious that scapegoating as a structural device should have escaped reviewers. Home could not have been more explicit as to the connection to Girardian theory. The reader is introduced to it on the second page of the novel:

‘Nonsense,’ Hodges snapped, ‘have you no grasp of the mechanism of mimetic desire?’ ‘No,’ I replied. We value objects,’ the doctor elaborated, ‘because other people desire them. We learn this system of value by imitating other people, we don’t so much desire objects as desire to be like other people. But wanting what other people want leads to conflict. To bring conflict to an end there has to be a surrogate, a sacrificial victim, a final killing to bring order into society. You’ve been programmed with a personality that is identical to the one we’ve implanted in the mind of Sarah Osterly’s double. This will necessarily lead to conflict between you and the unmarried teenage mother, a conflict that you will only be able to resolve through her ritual human sacrifice!’<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., footnote 40.

<sup>40</sup> Kirby Olson, *Comedy after Postmodernism* (Lubbock, 2001), pp. 19, 163.

<sup>41</sup> See Home (1997b), p. 2.

The above passage is repeated throughout the novel a total of four times with minor differences. The repetitions suggest that “this myth of functional sacrifice is no longer possible.”<sup>42</sup> The passage has to be understood as describing the situation at the peak of the sacrificial crisis, where the loss of differences of individual human beings is complete. Because functional sacrifice is no longer possible, there is no restoration of a stable identity. This also explains why in the repetitions the names of the characters become irrelevant and are exchanged for each other.

The novel is a sketchy first-person account of Philip Sloane, a film maker on the run from British intelligence.<sup>43</sup> But of course, it does not offer the reader any in-depth characterization of the narrator, as depersonalization is one of the novel’s major concerns. The question of identity is one of the main themes of Home’s writing in general. Similar to Girard’s idea of interdividuality being the guiding principle behind human identity construction in the absence of God, Home conceives of human identity as defined by social relations.<sup>44</sup> As a consequence human identity is in continuous flux. In *Memphis Underground* Home quotes God’s answer to Moses’ question about God’s name at the burning bush encounter in Exodus 3:14. “I am that I am.” Home sees himself as a proletarian postmodernist, engaged in continuous becoming of the Deleuzian rhizomorphic type<sup>45</sup>, having no time for nonsense about centred subjects.<sup>46</sup>

Kirby Olson has pointed out that identity construction often follows the Hegelian master-slave dialectic. While Hegel’s simplistic diagram was not intended to perform a division of all humanity into two categories, under the cultural studies code name of diversity, an individual’s identity is limited to a single factor or a combination of one of three factors: race, gender, and class.<sup>47</sup> Identity politics through reduction of the

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<sup>42</sup> See Home (1999), footnote 38.

<sup>43</sup> See Home (1997b), p. 29.

<sup>44</sup> See Home (2007), 165,140.

<sup>45</sup> See Home (1997c), p. 21.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>47</sup> See Olson (2001), p. 114.

individual leads to the loss of differences defining the sacrificial crisis. The loss of differences favours the formation of an ideological crowd in need of a scapegoat. Olson remarks with respect to Marxism and Feminism: “Just as Marx wished to abolish the bourgeoisie, so [Valery] Solanas wished to smash men into oblivion so that only women, the purer of the two classes would remain.”<sup>48</sup> In more general terms he observes how utopian activists tend to start their constructivist campaigns by eliminating or destroying those they regard unredeemable. In the light of Girardian theory and Home’s fiction the strong identities of Feminists, Marxists or centred subjects of any other ideology lead to a loss of differences that allows crowd formation.

In the case of *Come Before Christ and Murder Love* the loss of differences comes at the hands of capitalism. Sloane’s identity is replaced by the mass mediated spectacles of late capitalism. There is a similar confusion of reality with simulation in Sloane’s account as in the discussed Ballard novels, numbing him to his own violence against women. Sloane is an avatar of Home himself and the novel is a heavily fictionalised account of his travels as a novelist and performance artist.<sup>49</sup> The numbing of the individual is achieved in the non-places of airports and through the erasure of a sense of place through the frequent shifts in location.

Sloane is not only a film maker but also a celebrity occultist, known under the name of K.L. Callan, a name with a very specific significance in Home’s writing, as will be discussed later. Callan is travelling to various occult conventions all around the world. Occultism is, however, mocked by the narrator and perceived as the playground for petty rivalries:

We were all dressed in ceremonial clothes and two delegates were screaming blue murder about the defection of a favoured pupil from one “master” to the other. Things finally came

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>49</sup> See Home (2007), p. 252.

to blows when a German occultist accused a Swiss rival of selling information about Chaos Magick to the Jesuits.<sup>50</sup>

For Sloane the definition of occultism is related to money:

I've always laughed at those occultists who go in for devil worship and similar silliness. Like it or not, the only real measure of value in our world is money and that had always been what I'd sought from my acts of magick. Unlike the lower orders and the ruling class, I had no superstitious belief in an afterlife. Everything I did was to maximise my enjoyment of my brief span on earth and because this was the path that I followed, people called me a Satanist! [...] [T]he occult is a system of symbol manipulation. An invocation of the Goddess is only the mask, the flag, the colour of action, by which we induce various patrons to part with their money. As you know, we do our real work on our own, tonight's activities are simply a show to ensure we receive the ongoing support we need from the outside world.<sup>51</sup>

Sloane's visit to Zurich is particularly revealing with respect to the connection between occultism and money, as he visits the vault of a bank in the Bahnhofstrasse to impress his Companion Sayyida with the wealth of his Russian holdings.<sup>52</sup> In similar ways as Sinclair, Home thus connects capitalism to occultism. The implication is that late capitalism through the spectacle of the culture industry depersonalizes human beings and thus feeds on victims in the sacrificial sense of Girard. While in Sloane's Order of the Black Veil and White Light only simulated human sacrifices take place, he himself is responsible for the brutal murders of several of his lovers. But he is never quite sure if these murders really take place or not, as he similarly suffers from a loss of a sense of reality due to the immersion into a world of simulation: "'To me,' I roared, 'you're just an archetype, the idea of woman without its substance, completely lacking any sense of the corporeal.'"<sup>53</sup>

The narrator observes that "American cities aren't suited for psychogeographical investigation." In the case of American cities the immersion into the simulation is complete – evoking Baudrillard's observation about America being utopia achieved.

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<sup>50</sup> See Home (1997b), p. 38.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 60, 64.

<sup>52</sup> See Home (1997b), p. 109.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

The scapegoat mechanism has been doubly erased, as in the example of the Siebel building in *London Orbital*. This is why Sloane visits the four major druidic sites in London, which to the psychogeographer still emit traces of their foundational violence. Human sacrifice seems the only way to restore an identity that has been hollowed out by the reduction to monetary value in capitalism.

“God does not require death but we do, our Mother the Earth must be fertilised with the blood of one of her daughters!”<sup>54</sup> In the final sacrifice that is supposed to restore the identity of the narrator and should lead to the rebirth of the Celtic nation, it becomes clear that human sacrifice is something that humans require in order to deflect violent potentials. Home follows Girard’s interpretation that archaic religions are human systems built on the scapegoat mechanism. Sloane recognises that “At their root [...] all spiritual practices are simply different manifestations of the same primordial tradition.”<sup>55</sup>

The final sacrifice is, however, ruined as, when the members of Sloane’s cult unveil the victim, it turns out that it is Sayyida Nafisah rather than the designated victim Penelope Braid. Since there is not enough time to prepare a substitute, the whole ceremony is ruined. There is a double irony in the aborted sacrifice. In Girard’s theory the surrogate is an arbitrary victim, sufficiently dehumanized at the height of the sacrificial crisis. In *Tainted Love* the narrator recognizes that dehumanization is an essential aspect of the mechanism, when Michael X humiliates one of his drug dealers: “The element of humiliation was integral to these rituals, since an individual must necessarily be dehumanised as they are abused if street theatre of this type is to achieve the desired result.”<sup>56</sup> The fact that the sacrificers recognize the victim as the wrong victim points to Girard’s observation that in a culture under the Gospel revelation of the innocence of the victim, the expulsion is no longer possible. At the same time, the

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 213

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>56</sup> Stewart Home, *Tainted Love* (London, 2005), p. 170.

depersonalization in a world of simulation that is the sacrificial crisis itself cannot be resolved if the scapegoating violence is not perceived as real. Thus the sacrificers need a real victim for the expulsion to work. But the dilemma is that as soon as the victim is real, i.e. is perceived as a human being, they can no longer perpetrate the necessary violence.

In the following it will be argued that the Girardian paradigm already underlies Home's trilogy consisting of *Defiant Pose*, *Red London* and *Blow Job*. In these works preceding *Come Before Christ and Murder Love*, Home explores the consequences of the reduction of identity to one factor in the London anarchist scene. This results in the formation of rival crowds which try to overthrow each other and the existing order in order to establish an anarchist utopia. It is argued that Home's familiarity with mimetic theory lets him perceive that these attempts lead to violence without end.

#### 4.2.2 *Defiant Pose, Red London and Blow Job*

The first thing that has to be noted about the novels is that they are parodies of Richard Allen's *skinhead* novels published in the 1970s. Home's brand of fiction is an amalgamation of the poetics of the French *nouveau roman* and critique adulterated with popular story telling.<sup>57</sup> The latter is deconstructed through repetition: "In my case, violence is more often than not described using a phrase I lifted from Peter Cave's Novel *Mama* (1972): 'the bastard staggered backwards spitting out gouts of blood and the occasional piece of broken tooth.'"<sup>58</sup> The use of repetition has the effect of reminding "the reader of the fictive nature of the narrative and provides a means of exploring the bizarre ways in which much popular fiction treats sex and violence as

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<sup>57</sup> See Home (2007), p. 172.

<sup>58</sup> See Home (1995), p. 108.

both mechanical and mystical.”<sup>59</sup> In *Blow Job* repetitive depictions of violence are narrated in graphic novel style: “POW! Nihilist fists and boots thudded into Met bodies. ZOWIE! Several of the bastards staggered backwards spitting out gouts of blood and the occasional piece of broken tooth. KERRANG! The cops were beaten senseless.”<sup>60</sup> The mechanical depiction of violence reduces the human being to an empty signifier with the effect that the real consequences of violence are masked. The following passage from *Blow Job* deconstructs popular depictions of hyperreal violence of the action-film type, in which the hero can endure endless acts of violence without being seriously harmed: “Nick was in excellent physical shape and made a speedy recovery from nearly twenty-four hours of non-stop torture at the hands of Inspector James Newman.”<sup>61</sup>

The mystical aspect of depictions of sex and violence in popular fiction can be grasped when sex and violence are seen as agents of transformation of the current political order. As already discussed, Home explicitly makes the connection between mystical anarchism in the Middle Ages and post war utopian currents in *The Assault on Culture*. The mechanistic depiction of sex is parodied by reducing the sexual act to the exchange and recreation of DNA. This is a particularly prevalent feature of *Defiant Pose* and *Red London*: “Genetic information was being scrambled and unscrambled across every inch of his bulk.”<sup>62</sup> Sex, like violence, also assumes the mystic function of founding a new order as in the following example from *Blow Job*. In the novel the fascist organisation “White Seed of Christ” sends out its female members to find the anarchist leader “Swift” Nick Carter in order to become pregnant by him. To find Carter members are ordered to fellate potential informants on Carter’s whereabouts. While Carter “as a particular container is worthless, [...] it contains [...] the most precious

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>60</sup> See Home (1997a), p. 96.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 225.

<sup>62</sup> See Home (1994), p. 38.

thing in the world, the DNA codes of a pure-blooded Aryan.” The idea is for “White Warriors [...] to spring from the womb of Aryan Womanhood.”<sup>63</sup>

Home explains that he uses “Klaus Theweleit’s ideas of the fascist personality being produced by a simultaneous fear of ego dissolution and belief in violence as a means of fulfilling an alienated longing for fusion and explosion of the ego boundary.”<sup>64</sup> The fear of ego dissolution in Home’s fiction is created by the depersonalization and humiliation of the human being through capitalism. In *Blow Job*, Bogroll Bates, when he manages to finally find a job after eight hundred applications, loses it straightaway because he is on the black list of the Industrial League. He subsequently joins Mike Armilus’ Nihilist Movement and becomes one of their most violent leaders. Bates is one of the fragments of “human refuse” torn loose from the masses which modern society creates at the periphery.<sup>65</sup>

Another such product is Terry Blake, the main protagonist of *Defiant Pose*. Blake can be recognised as a heavily fictionalised avatar of Home himself, if one compares the character to the autobiographical material in *Memphis Underground*. One can understand Home’s dismissive attitude towards Martin Amis, if one compares Blake to Keith Talent, the protagonist of Amis’ *London Fields* (1989). While Amis heavily caricatures and ridicules the unemployed lower-class anti-hero Talent, Blake is the mock-hero of *Defiant Pose*. Both writers, however, share the view that modern society produces the Blake/Talent type. Amis realizes that at the margins of society a new type of mass is created: “Nicola knew that council flats were small, controversially small. They didn’t build any new council flats. They just halved all the old council flats.”<sup>66</sup> In *Defiant Pose* Blake remarks: ““This place is a fucking shit-hole[.] [...] Half the flats are infested. The locals call it Cockroach City.”” The cockroach is a common

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<sup>63</sup> See Home (1997a), p. 29.

<sup>64</sup> See Home (1995), p. 108.

<sup>65</sup> See Home (1997a), p. 72.

<sup>66</sup> Martin Amis, *London Fields* (London, 1989), p. 165.

metaphor for a dehumanized mass created at the margins of society. As in Ballard's late fiction, the boundaries separating human beings from each other will thus soon disappear and lead to crowd formation. In *Red London* the flow of traffic is stopped, due to the unleashing of a riot, producing traffic jams. Commuters are forced to abandon their cars and start fighting each other.<sup>67</sup>

That Home thinks of crowd formation in Girardian terms of "loss of differences" can be gathered from a quotation of a passage from the Ranter Abiezer Coppe's 1650 pamphlet "A Fiery Flying Roll" (1649) in *Defiant Pose* which is ultimately a reference to Isaiah 40: "Behold, I the eternal God, the Lord of Hosts, am coming to Level to some purpose, to Level with a witness, to Level the Hills with the Valleys and to lay the Mountains low."<sup>68</sup> In the context of the English Civil War this has to be understood as referring to a levelling of social differences in the Parliamentarian attempt to overthrow the Monarchy. Norman Cohn refers to Coppe as belonging to the same tradition of mystical anarchists, already discussed in the chapter on *Crash*.<sup>69</sup> Girard's reading of the levelling of Mountains and valleys Isaiah 40 suits the present context. He interprets the imagery of geological erosion as referring to the loss of differences of human beings in the sacrificial crisis, and thus as a preparatory step for the expulsion of a victim.<sup>70</sup>

What unites the novels into a trilogy is not a story arc but the theme of various extreme Left and Right wing organisations vying for the favour of the newly created crowd. But Left and Right are deconstructed in the novels. Again it is important to remember that Home sees Right-wing conservatism and Left wing revolutionary tendencies as two sides of the same coin:

Conflicting ideologies are heated until meltdown is achieved. The result is a humorous revelation of the fact that "left and right wing doctrines are distorted reflections of each

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<sup>67</sup> See Home (1994), p. 149.

<sup>68</sup> Stewart Home, *Defiant Pose* (London, 1991), p. 134.

<sup>69</sup> See Cohn (1970), p. 316.

<sup>70</sup> René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (Maryknoll, 2001), p. 28.

other. This is hardly surprising given the fact that communism and fascism ultimately spring from a single source – Hegel.<sup>71</sup>

Left and Right are locked in the Hegelian master-slave dialectic. But while for Hegel society begins and survives with the fear of the “slave” for the “master” – and thus depends on the survival of the slave – for Girard and for Home society begins with religion, i.e. with the death of the victim, if religion is understood in the Girardian sense of simply being another term for the surrogate victim.<sup>72</sup> Home’s alignment with Girard’s criticism of Hegel is reflected in his application of the literary technique he calls “the plot thins.” It consists of nothing else but killing off the characters one by one. This technique also reflects the fact that the death of the victim no longer restores order but leads to the deaths of even more victims.

Home’s deconstruction of the Left and Right is reflected in the names of the various movements in the *Blow Job*-trilogy. Names like “Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice” or *Red London*’s Buddhist Order of Teutonic Youth, amalgamate terms usually connoted with either the extreme Left and Right. Terry Blake is a progressive socialist but in outward appearance resembles a skinhead. When Blake tells Indra, an Indian woman in whom Blake is sexually interested, that he is a vegetarian and a non-smoker, she responds: “Your gear gives a different impression [.] After a while I decided you couldn’t be a racist, ‘coz no bigot would be so upfront about wanting to chat me up.”<sup>73</sup>

The “Hegelian Meltdown” Home refers to is achieved, when the extreme Left and the extreme Right become indistinguishable, as for example in the Nihilist Alliance of *Blow Job*. In *Defiant Pose* the line between the reactionary violence of fascists, “piling corpse upon corpse” to conserve their identity and Blake’s militant communist desire to surpass the destructiveness of the ruling class and to systematically act upon

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<sup>71</sup> See Home (1995), p. 111.

<sup>72</sup> See Girard (1977), p. 307.

<sup>73</sup> See Home (1991), p. 58.

those impulses that drove him towards violence”, is increasingly blurred.<sup>74</sup> In *Blow Job* the purpose of a demonstration is completely forgotten in the orgy of violence.<sup>75</sup> The victims of that violence think that “they could see a primitive violence in the behaviour of the nihilists”, whereas the nihilists still see their violence in utopian terms, “as an integral part of the material unfolding of history in the period of transition between humanism and nihilism.”<sup>76</sup>

The handbook for the violent meltdown-revolution of an amalgamated extreme Right and Left is the fictive *Marx, Christ and Satan United in Struggle* by K.L. Callan. References to the latter are frequent in Home’s fiction and non-fiction and Callan is one of the avatars of Home himself, as for example in the already discussed *Come Before Christ and Murder Love*. Callan’s full name, as the reader learns from *Red London* is Kevin Llewellyn Callan. This is important as Stewart Home’s real first name is Llewellyn. Furthermore, Home can be himself, when possessed by his mother, Julia Callan Thompson.<sup>77</sup> From a Girardian perspective, uniting Marx, Christ and Satan reflects Home’s insight into the single victim mechanism. In *Blow Job* Home’s criticism of Marxism comes through Dave Brown, a former security expert with the Industrial League:

You see, these Reds, they’re completely crazy, their ideas weren’t invented by Marx, he just popularised the thought of a mad German philosopher called Bagel. They believe that if you launch armed attacks against the state, then that’s a contradiction, because most British people are in favour of democratic government. It’s an article of faith with them that once you have a contradiction, it must inevitably lead to communism.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 120f.

<sup>75</sup> See Home (1997a), p. 98.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>77</sup> See Strong and Home (2004), par. 27. If the name Kevin has any significance remains a mystery. It is noteworthy though that Julia, the first name of Home’s mother, and Kevin form the initials J.K. The latter are, as discussed in the section on Sinclair, the letters of the victim. This forms of course no conclusive evidence, but it is the type of connection that Sinclair would want his readers to look out for.

<sup>78</sup> See Home (1997a), p. 110.

While Brown's view is parodied by his getting Hegel's name wrong, Home nevertheless criticizes Marx's appropriation of Hegelian dialectics and the belief that revolutionary struggle will lead to communism.

In *Red London* Marx, Christ and Satan are identified in Callan's revolutionary tract with the following principles:

MARX	CHRIST	SATAN
Lucidity	Duty	Lust
Discipline	Detachment	Abandon
Struggle	Mysticism	Violence <sup>79</sup>

What to the Marxist appears like lucidity, discipline and struggle, is infused with satanic lust, abandon and violence. Christian duty, detachment and mysticism are similarly based on satanic principles and can be identified with the Girardian definition of sacrificial Christianity. The fact that anything like the Christian "sur-transcendence" of love is missing from the above principles can be seen as further evidence for identifying the CHRIST-part with sacrificial Christianity.<sup>80</sup> In *Neoism, Plagiarism and Praxis*, Home asserts that only the Neoist Alliance trinity of Marx, Christ and Satan united in struggle, accurately embodies the religious worldview of the coming centuries. On the next page, he describes humanity as the devil, mean and corrupt, a liar blinded by her own deception.<sup>81</sup> In the following it will become clear that this is the deception of the scapegoat mechanism, the deception of the use of violence for cultural renewal.

Before the effects of the unleashing of the scapegoat mechanism in the trilogy can be examined, the role of mass media simulation has to be discussed. In *69 Things* K.L. Callan is introduced as the author of a fictive book of the same title as the novel. In

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<sup>79</sup> See Home (1994), p. 11.

<sup>80</sup> Also, in *Come Before Christ and Murder Love* the connection to and criticism of sacrificial Christianity is explicitly made: "Sacrifice in the Christian utopias is conducted after the following manner. [...] [T]hey cry to the God of mercy, that he may accept the offering, not of a beast as among the heathen, but of a human being. [T]he anger of God being appeased, the sacrifice becomes a priestess" See Home (1997b), p. 212f.

<sup>81</sup> See Home (1995), p. 142f.

the book within a book Callan develops a conspiracy theory that Princess Diana's death in the Paris car crash was fake and that she was strangled at Balmoral. Furthermore, Callan claims to have taken Diana's corpse and to have carted it around sixty-nine neolithic sites of Scotland. Needless to say: this act of Home's perverse imagination is understandably offensive to the sensibilities of the reader. However, Home's point of the novel, taken up again in *Memphis Underground*, is that Diana was already dead before the car crash, by becoming a simulated, mass-mediated idol of the modern age. In the death of Diana Vaughan's fantasy of Elizabeth Taylor's death in *Crash* has become a simulated reality. For Home the simulation of modern mass-media is founded on the sacrificial death of a real human being. The narrator of *69 Things* suggests visiting all the supermarkets in Aberdeen and treating these excursions in much the same way as the trips to stone circles. As the latter are sites of pagan sacrifice, modern structures like the supermarket are similarly seen as the future ruins of the scapegoat mechanism.<sup>82</sup>

“There is a joke in there somewhere about murdering the dead,”<sup>83</sup> John Johnson's come-to-life sex doll tells him in *Memphis Underground*. Diana is “murdered” a first time by becoming the cult object of the mass media, thus being alive in death as a celebrity. Her second, real death is experienced by the masses only as simulation. In *Blow Job* the narrator again invokes Callan: “It took K.L. Callan, the most radical of contemporary social theorists, to play Marx to Baudrillard's Hegel and stand postmodern theory on its feet. Thanks to Callan, it is now generally recognized that what is simulated tends to become real.”<sup>84</sup>

As for Home, so for Girard the simulated remains connected to the real. Girard too stands postmodern theory on its feet by pointing out that the scapegoat victim is the

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<sup>82</sup> See Home (2002), p. 103.

<sup>83</sup> See Home (2007), p. 259.

<sup>84</sup> See Home (1997a), p. 147. Julian Barnes' *England, England* (1998) also makes the same point. While the England theme park on the Isle of Wight starts out as a simulation, the revolutionary violence of the hired actors who bring to life England's history turns the simulation soon into a brutal reality.

first signifier of society. This returns the discussion to crowd violence incited by radical political groups in the *Blow Job*-trilogy. In “Anarchism Is Stupid” Home criticizes Ian Bone’s 80s’ anarchist movement Class War by referring to Sinclair: “What was being declared here was not so much a class war as a style war.”<sup>85</sup> This is “life-style” anarchism of would-be revolutionaries who find it hard to endure the privations of life, after years of TV dinners, double-glazing and central heating.”<sup>86</sup> The violent image of Class War is only a projection for the benefit of the mass media.<sup>87</sup> In *Blow Job* Home ridicules Class War by making their ultimate goal the spread of VCRs and virtual reality: “The Nihilist Alliance was fighting for a world of ever-growing ecstasy.” In Home’s view Class War is not interested in revolution but in getting rich by playing the role of anarchists, in order to participate in the late capitalist society of the spectacle.<sup>88</sup>

While Home considers Class War essentially to be “guerilla theatre worthy of the Berlin Dadaists”, the group was considered by the “naïve” mass media as a serious threat. Class war thus created a mass first on the level of the image. This was possible because Class War adapted its message to the interpretative logic of the media. Whatever the media said was evil, Class War glorified. The movement was drawing on suitably cultural stereo-types which could be fed back into the media. But the simulated mass was on the verge of becoming a threatening reality. That is why “MEDIA SICKNESS IS MORE CONTAGIOUS THAN AIDS”<sup>89</sup>. The moment came when Class War had to decide if they wanted to actually start a civil war. Eventually this option was rejected. The media, however, continued to credit Class War with a major role in the London riots of 1985.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> See Home (1999), par. 10.

<sup>86</sup> See Home (1997a), p. 145.

<sup>87</sup> See Home (1999), par. 19.

<sup>88</sup> See Home (1997c), p. 263.

<sup>89</sup> See Home (1994), p. 153.

<sup>90</sup> See the discussion of “Class War” in Home (1988), pp. 95-101.

In the *Blow Job*-trilogy Home explores what the outcome would have been if Class War had not recoiled from violent struggle. In *Red London* Brother Colin, a member of the Teutonic Order of Buddhist youth, reflects on his initials: “[M]any other members of our Order refer to me by my initials. That’s because they’re BC, Before Christ. Buddha came before Christ.”<sup>91</sup> At the very beginning of the novel, the formula “come before Christ and murder love” is thus introduced. “Cold blooded murder was a step along the path of recovering his most primordial instincts.”<sup>92</sup> Home criticizes and ridicules Class War for consisting of only a handful of “violent” malcontents, rather than representing a movement. He is, however also aware that “in the early stages of a revolutionary upheaval, the support of numerous small, well organized groups might prove vital to the success of the proletarian project.”<sup>93</sup> These groups can be understood in terms of Canettian “crowd crystals”: “the small, rigid groups of men, strictly delimited and of great constancy, which serve to precipitate crowds.”<sup>94</sup>

In the trilogy the rival groups, initially each dedicated to their own reductive cause, become more and more united through their hatred of the system, as for example in *Blow Job*:

Hundreds of youths who’d descended upon the cenotaph to fight each other were suddenly united by their hatred of the filth. [...] A thousand hearts beat as one during those fleeting moments of union as members of Class Justice, the No Future Party, the Regulated Activity Movement, the Violent Party, Invisible Banner and the Anglo Saxon Movement, chanted their support for the Shepherds Bush cop killer.<sup>95</sup>

Home captures in these lines the moment in the scapegoat mechanism when the unanimous crowd is united in the violence against one victim. Left and Right wing extremists are united to the chagrin of fascist leader Jackboots Houghton:

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<sup>91</sup> See Home (1994), p. 6.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>93</sup> See Home (1999) par. 11 and (1994), p. 17.

<sup>94</sup> See Canetti (1962), p. 73.

<sup>95</sup> See Home (1997a), p. 5.

“‘No,no,no,no! [...] We must support the police. You mustn’t join in when the Reds sing unpatriotic songs!’”<sup>96</sup>

The newly formed crowd thus adopts the sacrificial logic of violent rebirth of society. “Many a man will have to be sacrificed” and “deaths are an unfortunate necessity”.<sup>97</sup> But the question is: to reach what exactly? In another quotation from K.L. Callan’s fictive book, “only those who’ve fought and died for disorder, will die with a happy heart.”<sup>98</sup> As all the quotes from Callan, in this one too the apparently radical content is deconstructed. In the present case, the utopian fantasy of reordering society is shown to lead to disorder. Home implicitly criticizes Bakunin’s famous dictum that “the urge to destroy is also a creative energy.” In the trilogy, scapegoating violence does not lead to a new utopian order but to a Hobbesian war of all against all. The crowds face the same problem as the protagonists of Ballard’s late fiction: there is no outside. Canetti’s metaphor of the crowded theatre also applies in this case: “When Nazi thugs can find no external target, they direct their violence against each other! This is why even the most successful Nationalist Socialist regime is necessarily unstable, it must expand or collapse.”<sup>99</sup> In terms of the sacrificial crisis it would be more precise to say that it must *first* expand *and then* collapse. Since the death of the victim no longer restores society, anarchy, literally the absence of order, is the end state of the use of violence. In the light of the discussion on *Crash* it is significant that *Defiant Pose* ends with the death of Terry Blake in a meaningless “scarifice”:

Terry made a split-second decision – he was more than willing to die if he could take Roberts with him. In a blur of speed, the naked boot-boy rammed the spymaster’s bike. The two cyclists skidded across the road and were crushed under the wheels of a Kent-bound lorry. [...] Terry was one of two hundred and thirty-five proletarian fatalities during a month of revolutionary violence. However, the death was recorded as a road accident and his name does not feature in histories of the period.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> See Home (1997a), p. 5.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., pp. 12, 122.

<sup>98</sup> See Home (1994), p. 142.

<sup>99</sup> See Home (1997a), p. 147.

<sup>100</sup> See Home (1991), p. 166f.

Terry's sacrificial death does not lead to his deification as a proletarian revolutionary. The cycle of cultural rebirth is interrupted at the stage of the violent death of the hero.

This end state is thus not a blissful anarcho-utopian paradise of absence of order. In *Come Before Christ and Murder Love* anarchy and the condition of war are named in the same sentence.<sup>101</sup> It is the post-apocalyptic stage of total annihilation. In his fictional interrogation of anarchism from the mid-80s Home takes the various groups' fantasies of mass murder with their ready made identities to their logical conclusion and demonstrates how there is nothing beyond destruction.<sup>102</sup>

If Home was taken to be an anarchist, it was due to his use of deconstructive techniques which are not always easy to identify. Recently he has described himself in a fictive interview with "New Laddism" printed in *Memphis Underground* as "Satan incarnate" to the anarchist movement, with the majority of those purchasing his books, now perceiving him as a profoundly moral author.<sup>103</sup> In the questions posed to Home by New Laddism all of them presuppose that Home is a Christian. Home's answers are however in no way related to the questions. Obviously Home is not interested in being identified as a Christian – possibly because that comes with all the historical baggage of sacrificial Christianity. Also, he leaves no doubt in his writing about what he thinks of the "rotten-egg smell idea of God".<sup>104</sup> But for Home the historical Jesus does exist.<sup>105</sup> It is interesting that in the chapter "Laddism and Labyrinth" of *Mind Invaders* (1997) Home connects Manchester, the cultural centre of laddishness to the sacrificial "lad regiments", slaughtered in Flanders during the First World War. Underlying this comment is a deeper sense of sacrificial origins of the region in the Persian Mithras cult. The article's aim is "to lift the subterranean power-circuit of sacrifice." As a reader of

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<sup>101</sup> See Home (1997b), p. 66.

<sup>102</sup> See Home (1999), par. 21, 24.

<sup>103</sup> See Home (2007), p. 155.

<sup>104</sup> See Thwaite and Home (2006), par. 9.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 24.

Girard, Home is thus a Christian in the Girardian sense. He understands that the death of the historical Christ unveils the violent foundations of human societies.

Rather than seeing himself as a Christian, Home describes himself as a communist. Thus he is still interested in the overthrow of capitalism<sup>106</sup> but realizes that “it’s bizarre, the way in which those possessed by Utopia will try to destroy useful actualities in order to attempt to build something that is unbuildable, in order to place the placeless.”<sup>107</sup> Anarchists, trying to violently overthrow the existing capitalist order, are not so different from the capitalist order which through suburbanization produces the ghetto, as discussed in *Memphis Underground*. Both destroy useful actualities. In a lecture given at the *Work, Talk, Rest & Play* conference in Liverpool, summarized in *Memphis Underground*, Home explains:

When arts money is available it is unrealistic to expect those who might bag it not to go for it. However, while it is desirable that arts money should go to those with progressive views, progressive artists must always keep in sight the goal of self-negation, aiming in the long term for the abolition of their role as specialist non-specialists.<sup>108</sup>

From his early days of unemployment, having to depend on the welfare state, to his days of pretending to be an artist in order to obtain “arts money”, Home’s aim has been to unmask ideologies which reduce the human being to just one category, such as race, gender or in the case of capitalism to the *homo oeconomicus*. This is not to say that Home is a postmodernist who believes in the free-floating identity of the subject made up of signifiers. “Not that I’m a fan of realism, but you need to have some understanding of your starting point, even if you’re going to jump off from it to complete fantasy.”<sup>109</sup> Home rejects realism because it too simplifies the complexity of the human being – it is not real enough.

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., par. 18.

<sup>107</sup> See Home (1997c), p. 196.

<sup>108</sup> See Home (2007), p. 217.

<sup>109</sup> See Thwaite and Home (2006), par. 5.

The various reductive ideologies Home identifies become mirror images of each other through their rivalry for preeminence and mask the fact that “the working class struggles against commodification”. According to Home, the working class is identified with and reduced to the violent image of radical groups by the mass media. And at this point Home parts company with Girard. While Girard emphasizes that there no longer are recipes – not even a Marxist one<sup>110</sup> – in a world that has demythified violence, Home believes “that since it is under attack, the working class may quite legitimately use force to defend itself and its interests.”<sup>111</sup> It seems Home suggests that, once the scapegoat mechanism is understood and therefore does not serve as a means of identity construction and for the creation of utopia and since the working class occupies the position of victim, the working class can use violence legitimately. But here Home seems to forget his own insight. In the *Blow Job*-trilogy, all the extreme movements portrayed start from their perceived roles as victims. If, as Girard claims, we live in a world of victims, where everyone could claim the right to use violence, this would result in a war of all against all. This is why Girard’s conclusion is more radical than Home’s. Only a total renunciation of violence will not lead to violence without end.

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<sup>110</sup> See Girard (1987a), p. 446.

<sup>111</sup> See Home (1999), par. 26.

### 4.3 David Peace

“But I think for most people who have read the quartet, *GB84* is a natural continuation – in terms of both style and content – in the same way that the previous four books built upon each other.”<sup>1</sup> Only *GB84* (2004) explicitly deals with the formation of crowds in its re-imagination of the 1984/85 Miners’ Strike. It is also Peace’s first novel of literary fiction, whereas his first four novels, *Nineteen Seventy Four* (1999), *Nineteen Seventy Seven* (2000), *Nineteen Eighty* (2001), and *Nineteen Eighty Three* (2002; henceforth *1974*, *1977*, *1980*, *1983*), also referred to as the *Red Riding Quartet* (henceforth *Quartet*), are strictly speaking crime novels of the noir-genre. However, as Matthew Hart has pointed out, the novels of the quartet are “each rooted in a particular period that included industrial unrest throughout the UK, something tantamount to civil war in Northern Ireland, the looming threat of neo-fascist thuggery, the Falklands War, and the gradual emergence of New Right conservatism as a political way of life.”<sup>2</sup> In order to understand the events portrayed in *GB84* it is necessary to first come to terms with the historical build-up leading to the Thatcherite eighties as narrated in the *Quartet*.

#### 4.3.1 *The Red Riding Quartet*

The events of the *Quartet* are loosely based on a series of real murders committed by Peter Sutcliffe between 1975 and 1980 in Yorkshire. Sutcliffe, famously known as the “Yorkshire Ripper”, was convicted of the murders of thirteen women, most of them prostitutes in Leeds’ Chapeltown district. However, *1974* opens with the investigation

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Hart and David Peace, “An Interview with David Peace” *Contemporary Literature*, 47.4 (2006), p. 568.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 547.

into the murder of the Morley school-girl Clare Kemplay.<sup>3</sup> Although at the end of the novel the murderer is identified by the novel's narrator, the journalist Edward Dunford, the narrative focus lies not primarily on the "whodunit" question but rather on the wider implications of the murders. Like Sinclair and Ballard, rather than being interested in the solution of the crimes, Peace wants to understand them, as he makes explicit in an interview with Matthew Hart:

The *Red Riding Quartet* also wrestles with a very fundamental question about crime and society [...] [T]o what extent are / were the people of Yorkshire, and the North in general, culpable in these crimes? Then again, might it simply be—and this goes against my own basic political instincts—that Yorkshire happened to be, by chance, the unlucky place where a very evil man was born and lived?<sup>4</sup>

In order to examine the culpability of the people of Yorkshire it is useful to compare the *Quartet* to the riddle of the Sphinx in the myth of Oedipus. Girard writes in *Violence*: "The Sphinx plays a role similar to that of the plague terrorizing all Thebes and demanding a periodic tribute of victims."<sup>5</sup> The murders of school girls in 1974 and 1983 and the murders of women in 1977 and 1980 are symptoms of a plague-like societal crisis. For Girard the plague is a sacrificial crisis converted into a physical disorder. The motif of the plague indicates that the responsibility of the events is evenly distributed among all. While Eddie Dunford locates the murderer of Clare Kemplay, he also uncovers the wider involvement of the police and the Yorkshire social elite in the murders. Dunford is "bringing a plague to all their houses" precisely because he uncovers the implication of all.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Gordon Burn's novel *Alma Cogan* (London, 1991) also re-imagines the murders of two serial killers in the North of England: the so called Moors Murders committed by Ian Duncan Stewart and Myra Hindley in the Greater Manchester area between 1963 and 1965. The plot centres around a collector of Alma Cogan memorabilia who has heard, and wants, a tape of one of the torture-murder actions on which a Radio Luxembourg broadcast of Alma Cogan is heard in the background. The Tape actually existed and came into police possession to be eventually sold on the black market.

<sup>4</sup> See Hart and Peace (2006), p. 561.

<sup>5</sup> See Girard (1977), p. 86.

<sup>6</sup> David Peace, *Nineteen Seventy-Four* (London, 1999), p. 198.

While the plague motif reveals the responsibility of all for the crisis in the Oedipus myth, the motif of incest and murder “leads to a transferral of violent undifferentiation from all the Thebans to the person of Oedipus. [...] Oedipus is responsible for the ills that have befallen his people.”<sup>7</sup> In *Violence and Difference* Andrew McKenna argues that the structure of transferral of social guilt to one victim survives in the procedures of law:

As heir to sacrifice, [they] do not fail to display a dramaturgical structure that issues in turn from and remains party to a more primitive liturgical imperative; it is precisely when proper juridical procedure appears designed more to satisfy the demand for ritual purity than to meet transcendent goals of justice that the law is, as it seems now, in crisis. According to what is identified as a “structural theory” of crime, our entire political economy is one that generates crime, such that criminals are reinterpreted as being victims of an established order.<sup>8</sup>

In 1974 the corrupt Yorkshire police work exclusively according to this ritual logic. Eventually a local Morley youth, Michael Myshkin, is convicted of Clare Kemplay’s murder, although everyone involved knows he is innocent.<sup>9</sup> His confession is the result of brutal police torture, repeatedly described in the *Quartet* and following a formulaic, one could even say ritual script. Confessions thus become meaningless and the primitive, ritual aspect of the judicial system completely eclipses any form of justice.

The events of 1974 are revisited in 1983 by the repenting Superintendent Maurice Jobson. The reader learns that very early in the investigation the real killer, George Marsh, was protected by the local social elite, as many of its members, like the architect John Dawson, were involved in a child pornography ring run by Marsh and the Morley photographer Ted Jenkins. In 1983 Jobson, plagued by his conscience, kills George Marsh. The latter had been buried alive by Eddie Dunford in the abandoned coal mine where Marsh was hiding the missing girls. Dunford understands the wider implications of the child murders and, despairing of the utter corruption and perversion

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<sup>7</sup> See Girard (1977), p. 77.

<sup>8</sup> See McKenna (1992), pp. 85f.

<sup>9</sup> Like Prince Myshkin in Dostoyevsky’s *The Idiot* (1868), he is thus the holy fool.

of the legal system that fails to bring those responsible to justice, he takes justice in his own hands. At a local pub, The Strafford, he kills a number of local mafia bosses and injures two police officers, both involved in the local corruption.

Through his act of vigilante justice Dunford redirects the attention from one culprit to the culpability of all. In Girardian terms this means that the societal crisis continues, as Dunford unmasks Marsh's and Myshkin's role as scapegoats. The survivors of the shooting at the Strafford are subsequently killed by the Yorkshire police, as no witnesses can be tolerated. However, a local rent boy, Barry James "BJ" Anderson manages to escape in time and finds temporary shelter with his friend Clare Morrison, whose sister Grace, a bartender and witness at the Strafford, is also killed by the police.

In order to maintain the role of Myshkin as scapegoat and the public's belief in his full responsibility for the murders, Clare Morrison and BJ have to die. By the time of 1977 the Yorkshire Ripper has been raging for two years and the police decide to eliminate Morrison, who has changed her name to her married name of Strachan. The police brutally murder Strachan and make it look like one of the Ripper murders. Thus again the police try to transfer their own guilt onto a scapegoat, the Yorkshire Ripper. The fact that the latter is guilty of murdering prostitutes makes it easier to frame him as a scapegoat for the police's own crimes. Again the police try to solve the crisis ritually rather than by doing justice.

In the real case of the "Yorkshire Ripper" (1975-1981), the police were sent three letters and a tape by John Humble from Sunderland, who claimed to be the Ripper. The letters were, however, a hoax, and led the investigation into a dead end, allowing Sutcliffe to kill three more women before he was caught. Numerous conspiracy theories still maintain that the Ripper murders were committed by more than one killer. In the *Quartet* the letters and the tape have the function of convincing the police that there is

only one ripper, whereas at least one of the murders is committed by the police themselves. The attempt to blame their own murder on the Ripper has serious consequences for the investigation. A semen sample gathered from the site of Strachan's murder reveals that her murderer has the rare blood group type B. But of course, as Strachan's case is not a Ripper murder, all suspects who do not have blood group B are no longer investigated.

The Ripper is thus allowed to rage at will. In terms of the sacrificial crisis, the continuing murders are a metaphor for the failure of the resolution of the crisis through the expulsion of a scapegoat. When, in 1980, due to the failure of the local police to capture the Ripper, Peter Hunter, an external investigator from Manchester, is brought in, he recognizes the sacrificial logic of the police: "[H]alf that Ripper Room are looking for a hunchbacked Geordie with hairy bloodstained hands, flesh between his teeth and a hammer in his pocket." Just like in the case of Oedipus, monstrous undifferentiation is projected onto the Ripper. Hunter, on the other hand, is looking for a killer with a regular job, who is probably married, a "taxi driver, lorry driver, sales rep [...] copper." In short it could be anyone.<sup>10</sup>

Sensing the truth that everyone is somehow involved in the Ripper murders, Hunter becomes the next scapegoat of the corrupt system and is killed by Bob Craven, one of the police officers involved in the shootings at the Strafford. At the end of 1980 the police finally catch the "Yorkshire Ripper" and it seems as if the police have successfully managed to pass on the blame for their murder onto the Ripper. The murders stop, the plague seems to have come to an end. However, 1983 brings the *Quartet* full circle with another Morley school girl gone missing. With the real killer George Marsh dead and the scapegoat Michael Myshkin in prison, in 1983 the question of responsibility of the crimes can no longer be projected onto one individual.

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<sup>10</sup> David Peace, *Nineteen Eighty* (London, 2001), p. 83.

One of the three narrators of *1983* is the solicitor John Pigott, whose aim is to prove Myshkin's innocence. In his conversations with Myshkin in prison, Pigott returns again and again to the same question: who killed Clare Kemplay? Myshkin says he knows but always evades the question by responding: "The Wolf".<sup>11</sup> But not only Myshkin's answer is strange. A careful reader of the *Quartet* will recognize Pigott from his brief appearance in *1977* as Bob Fraser's solicitor. Fraser, married to the daughter of Bill Molloy, a senior officer of the corrupt Leeds police, inherits Eddie Dunford's mission of unveiling the corruption of the social system. Dunford had gathered all the evidence in a room of the abandoned Redbeck motel and Fraser, shortly before his death, visits the room with Pigott and Jack Whitehead, a journalist colleague of Eddie Dunford.

Having seen the evidence, Pigott must know that George Marsh is the real killer but he does not understand the deeper meaning of the murders. Myshkin is irritated by the continuous repetition of the question and answers: "But you already know".<sup>12</sup> Unlike Pigott, the slightly retarded Myshkin not only knows who killed Kemplay but also understands the meaning of the murders. In *1974*, investigating Myshkin as a murder suspect, Dunford finds a disturbing comic in Myshkin's house:

A full page cover of a comic stared back up at me. It had been hand-drawn in felt-tip pen and crayon:

*Rat Man, Prince or Pest?*

*By Michael J. Myshkin*

In a childish hand, a giant rat with human hands and feet was sitting on a throne in a crown, surrounded by hundreds of smaller rats.

Rat Man was grinning, saying, '*Men are not our judges. We judge men!*'

Above the Rat Man logo, in biro, was written:

*Issue 4, 5p, MJM Comics.*

I turned to the first page.

In six panels, the Rat People asked Rat Man, their Prince, to go above ground and save the earth from the humans.

On page two, Rat Man was above ground being chased by soldiers.

By page three, Rat Man had escaped.

He'd sprouted wings.

<sup>11</sup> David Peace, *Nineteen Eighty Three* (London, 2002), pp. 13, 143, 372.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 372.

Fucking swan's wings.<sup>13</sup>

Myshkin's comic evokes the idea of sacred kingship. The Rat Man, like the sacred king, is also a monster.<sup>14</sup> For Girard sacred kingship is a weaker form of the deified victim, the product of the single victim mechanism. The fact that the rat king has swan wings relates him to the victim Clare Kemplay. There is another hint that the Rat Man represents deified victims. Myshkin's supposedly imaginary publisher MJM comics actually exists in the world of the novel and publishes *Spunk*, a hardcore pornographic magazine run by the corrupt Yorkshire police, in which some of the Ripper victims, including Clare Strachan, appear. Thus when Myshkin tells Piggot that the wolf killed Clare Kemplay, it is not only a reference to the fairy-tale of red riding hood but also evokes Girard's universal wolf, representing the war of all against all that is prevented by the expulsion of a scapegoat.<sup>15</sup>

The symbolism of the swan wings can be read as an allusion to the myth of Leda and the swan. Clare Kemplay's brutally murdered body is found with Swan wings stitched onto her back. A Girardian reading of the myth is helpful to understand Peace's use of the motif. For Girard, the confusion of animals and human beings is a mythic modality of the monstrous. In *The Scapegoat* he alludes again to the witch trials as an intermediate stage of the disintegration of myths, to connect the motif to victims of persecution:

If the alleged witch possesses a pet, a cat, a dog, or a bird, she is immediately thought to resemble that animal, and the animal itself seems almost an incarnation, a temporary embodiment or a useful disguise to ensure the success of certain enterprises. These animals play exactly the same role as Jupiter's swan in the seduction of Leda[.] [...] We are distracted from the resemblance by the extremely negative connotations of monstrosity in the medieval world which are almost always positive in later mythology and in our modern conception of mythology.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See Peace (1999), p. 189.

<sup>14</sup> See Girard (1977), p. 252.

<sup>15</sup> See Girard (1991), p. 226.

<sup>16</sup> See Girard (1986), p. 48.

No such positive appreciation of the motif is possibly in the case of Clare Kemplay. But *1974* portrays an attempt at deification of Kemplay. John Dawson's house, Shangrila, resembles a sleeping swan and he is working on a shopping centre project carrying the name "the Swan".<sup>17</sup> This is also why "all great buildings resemble crimes".<sup>18</sup> Shangrila and the Swan Centre are the apotheosis of Clare Kemplay. And behind the newly created architectural myths, is hiding the unanimous, violent crowd, expelling the victim. In *1983* it is revealed that the corrupt Yorkshire forces want to found a new era of civilization. As Molloy puts it: "The whole of the North of England, from Liverpool to Hull, Nottingham up to Newcastle – it's ours for the taking: the girls, the shops, the mags – the whole bloody lot. [...] To us all and to the North – where we do what we want!"<sup>19</sup>

This new era of civilization erases its horrific foundational violence with structures of Baudrillardian hyperreality: terrifying lorries, motorways and shopping malls.<sup>20</sup> The sites of human conflict and violence are reduced to signs. *1980* depicts the transition to the digital era. Human reality is henceforth reduced to ones and zeros. This is signified by the digital watch Peter Hunter receives from his wife for Christmas.<sup>21</sup> From that moment onwards, rather than indicating the time in his narrative in the specifically English way of am and pm, he narrates time digitally: "Outside in the car park, looking at my new digital watch: 10:27:09 –" In the *Quartet* the sacrificial crisis is not resolved but erased through an epistemic shift to digital reality.

Peace elaborates further:

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<sup>17</sup> See Peace (1999), p. 84, 288.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>19</sup> See Peace (2002), pp. 227f.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 21

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p. 264.

I was unaware that there was a booming nostalgia industry in the U.K. in the late 1990s, with TV programs devoted to the particular music and fashion of certain years—such as “I Love 1974.” Even though I was, at the time, ignorant of this trend, I did not want to write a kind of “glam rock and flares” history of the 1970s, and I think what I wrote instead was “I Hate 1974.”<sup>22</sup>

The reduction of individuals to people with no faces or features on TV allows the misremembering of and nostalgia for a dark period of history. *1983* opens with a quotation from a traditional poem, capturing a similar mechanism:

‘Oh, this is the way to the fairy wood,  
Where the wolf ate Little Red Riding Hood;  
But this is the riddle that you must tell –  
How is it, if it so befell,  
That he ate her up in that horrid way,  
In these pretty pages she lives today?’<sup>23</sup>

This piece of fairytale wisdom hints at the double function of the expelled victim, as both physical being and signifier of the new system. The death of Red Riding Hood is as foundational for “these pretty pages” as the death of Clare Kemplay and all the other victims in the *Quartet* is for the new system of hyperreal and digital simulation. Charlie Gere observes in *Digital Culture* (2002): “The computerization of banking, international currency exchange and trading has greatly aided the rise of globalization and financial liberalization. [...] Neo-liberal economics instantiates a kind of cybernetic fantasy of self-regulation.”<sup>24</sup> It is the entrance into the world of *GB84* and the rise of Thatcher. The cybernetic phantasy of liberal economics rises out of the ashes of the *Quartet*. *1983* ends on an Orwellian note of “The Hate”, mixed with the suicide of John Pigott:

The Hate:  
‘Where there is discord, may we bring harmony –  
The Hate:  
‘Where there is error, may we bring truth –  
The Hate:  
‘Where there is doubt, may we bring faith –

<sup>22</sup> See Hart and Peace (2006), p. 556.

<sup>23</sup> See Peace (2002), no pagination. The source is Grace Rhys’ *Little Red Riding Hood & The History of Tom Thumb* (London, 1895).

<sup>24</sup> Charlie Gere, *Digital Culture* (London, 1999), pp. 9, 140.

The Hate:  
*Where there is despair, may we bring hope.*<sup>25</sup>

This is the false hope rising out of the scapegoat mechanism – in *GB84* the foundational violence of the neo-liberal system is directed against the whole of the English North, the collective single victim.

#### 4.3.2 *The Miners' Strike of 1984/85*

“I can remember a time when these sorts of things never happened.” So does Eddie Dunford’s Aunt Madge comment Dunford’s article in the *Yorkshire Post* on the disappearance of Clare Kemplay. Dunford’s relatives have gathered for the funeral of his father. When his uncle Eric entertains the gathering with a joke, Eddie thinks: “Uncle Eric holding court, proud the only time he ever left Yorkshire was to kill Germans. Uncle Eric, who I’ve seen kill a fox with a spade when I was ten.”<sup>26</sup> Thus at the very outset of *Red Riding* Peace documents the migration of violence from the outside of the nation state to the inside. As Girard, he recognises that “[t]here will no longer be any good quarrels. There will no longer be any bad Germans.”<sup>27</sup>

For Peace, the English North in general and Yorkshire in particular have been slowly forged in English history to become Thatcher’s “enemy within” in the 1984/85 Miners’ Strike:

But particular periods of Yorkshire history do fascinate me—the Harrowing of the North, when the Norman Army perpetrated what we would now describe as a “genocide” on the people of Yorkshire and the land, and also the Wars of the Roses. Historically, Yorkshire is the place of the defeated, subjugated, and ultimately neglected people of England [...]<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> See Peace (2002), p. 404.

<sup>26</sup> See Peace (1999), p. 10,12.

<sup>27</sup> See Girard (2010), p. 199.

<sup>28</sup> Hart and Peace (2006), p. 562.

The neglect of the English North produces the ruthless social elite of the *Quartet*, which is also already a prefiguration and a mirror image of the rise of Thatcherite individualism in the 1980s. The series of murders in *Red Riding* unveil the state of continual social unrest in Yorkshire and the necessary foundational and structural violence inherent in the transition to a globalized, post-industrial society with its shopping malls and digital, virtual realities.

Beneath the emerging hyperreality of Thatcherite neo-liberal economy lies the secret of an escalating conflict that finds its culmination in *GB84*. Peace sees the Miners' Strike of 1984/85 not just as an industrial conflict but as the third English Civil War. It is thus not surprising that the novel opens with "The Argument", adapted from *Paradise Lost*. The first two lines are of specific interest to the present discussion:

"Electricity  
– Harsh service station light."<sup>29</sup>

Until the strike of 1984/85 in Britain electricity was largely generated by coal. The emerging virtual world of hyperreality relied thus on the human workforce of British miners. In the course of the twentieth century, the miners rose to become the vanguard of the British labour movement.<sup>30</sup> As the country was largely dependent on the miners for the production of energy, the miners' position in society gradually yielded tremendous political power. Solidarity among the miners was forged through the isolation and the brutal nature of their work.<sup>31</sup> Three major miners' strikes, in 1926, 1972 and 1974, preceded the industrial action of 1984/85. One could say that the British governments of the 1960s and 70s were at the mercy of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). In 1972 the miners' strike over pay-raise led to the 3-day working week, in order to save electricity. The strike was successful and as a result, the

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<sup>29</sup> David Peace, *GB84* (London, 2004), no pagination.

<sup>30</sup> See Andrew Richards, *Miners on Strike* (Oxford, 1996), p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228.

wages of the miners were amongst the highest of the working class. In 1974, another strike over pay raises led to another three-day week and the calling of a general election by the conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath. The Conservatives lost the election and Labour governed the country until another wave of strikes in the “Winter of Discontent” of 1978-79 led to Prime Minister James Callaghan’s resignation and brought the Tories under Margaret Thatcher back to power.

Seumas Milne, in his book *The Enemy Within* (1994) recognizes that there was much more at stake in the strike of 1984/85 for both the government and the miners than in a “regular” industrial conflict. Milne writes that both sides were preparing for collision since Thatcher had to back down over the question of pit closures in 1981.<sup>32</sup> Throughout his book, Milne speaks of the Government’s measures taken against industrial action from the 1960s to 80s as a twenty year vendetta to avenge the humiliation of 1972 and 1974.<sup>33</sup> Matthew Hart, in his article “The Third English Civil War: David Peace’s ‘Occult History’ of Thatcherism” observes how in the strike the liberal ideal of self-regulation devolves into anomie and self-slaughter.<sup>34</sup> The occult, as in the discussions of Sinclair and Home, refers not to the realm of the supernatural, but in the sense of “the hidden” to the obscure elements of British political history. Visceral revenge as the driving force behind conflict, leads, as Hart further notes, to the failure of politics and to the Schmittian “Ausnahmezustand” in which two contestants are locked in a fight to the death.<sup>35</sup>

*GB84* portrays this conflict of two mortal enemies in terms of archaic violence. One of the miners refers to the Frankie Goes to Hollywood song “Two Tribes”, a song about the cold-war rivalry between East and West. The main line of the song “When two tribes go to war / One is all that you can score”, expresses the belief that the

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<sup>32</sup> Seumas Milne, *The Enemy Within* (London, 1994), p. 16.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 13.

<sup>34</sup> Matthew Hart, “The Third English Civil War: David Peace’s ‘Occult History’ of Thatcherism”, *Contemporary Literature* 49.4 (2008), p. 587.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 588.

outcome of such a conflict can only come at the expense of the total annihilation of one of the contestants, or, as the music video, which ends with the world being blown up, suggests, with the end of both. Peace, as Hart further remarks, wants us to see the world in a grain of sand.<sup>36</sup> In the following it will be argued that *GB84* writes “mimetic history” as Girard has called it in *Battling to the End*, his recent book on Carl von Clausewitz. *GB84* is mimetic history because it unmask the merciless battle between enemy twins leading to an escalation to extremes that undermines the political system and shows that violence is not part of politics but politics is part of violence. While for Schmitt, the division of the world in two tribes is constitutive of politics, Peace reveals the underlying scapegoating and abuses of power that “render a state like Britain a democracy in name alone.”<sup>37</sup> As *GB84* reveals, underlying and threatening the fragile balance of the political system, is the Canettian double crowd: “Ten thousand men kicking the living fuck out of each other – Like something from bloody Middle Ages.”<sup>38</sup> In order to read *GB84* as a piece of mimetic history, it is necessary to briefly summarize Girard’s argument in *Battling to the End*.

#### 4.3.3 *Battling to the End*

As the original French title, *Achever Clausewitz*, indicates, *Battling to the End* is Girard’s interpretation of Clausewitz’s seminal *On War*. His definition of war as a duel that is a trend to extremes captures Girard’s attention. He quotes from *On War*:

Even the most civilized of peoples, in short, can be fired with passionate hatred of each other.... The thesis, then, must be repeated: war is an act of force, and *there is no logical limit to the application of that force*. Each side, therefore, compels its opponent to follow suit; a reciprocal action is started, which must lead, in theory, to extremes.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 578.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 591,594.

<sup>38</sup> See Peace (2004), p. 68.

<sup>39</sup> See Girard (2010), p. 5.

It is not surprising that to Girard this definition immediately suggests mimetic conflict. However, as he observes, Clausewitz, after his brief and frightening apocalyptic epiphany, qualifies his argument by pointing out that in the real world, “the whole thing looks quite different.” In reality, according to Clausewitz, various factors function as obstacles to total war: military power cannot be totally mobilized, the terrain may not allow the concentration of all forces, alliances may prevent escalation. Because in reality it is not possible to overcome the enemy and make him powerless, the political aim will reassert itself and peace negotiations will take place.<sup>40</sup>

Girard’s interpretation of Clausewitz’s differentiation between absolute war and real war differs from Raymond Aron’s interpretation. For Aron, writing in the 1970s, absolute war is nothing but a concept. There is an unbridgeable abyss between the concept of war as duel and real war. Aron’s position emerges from the trust in human rationality and the context of the cold war, where politics managed to keep in check a nuclear apocalypse. For Girard on the other hand, total war is on a continuum with armed observation. Because Girard believes that passions rule the world, the abyss between the concept and reality of war is due to obstacles in reality that might disappear in time. Thus, because at the root of war is the desire to annihilate the enemy, new ways of conducting war that might be more successful in annihilating the enemy in the future are constantly devised. This is also why war is the only engine of technological progress.<sup>41</sup>

According to Girard, Clausewitz was able to perceive the trend to extremes because Napoleon introduced military conscription: “The Napoleonic Wars and the ‘total war’ they had launched in which all the nation’s ‘masses’ were mobilized had changed the rules of the game. The trend to extremes thus returns, in the unforeseen

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. xii.

face-off between two nationalistic hatreds.”<sup>42</sup> The defeat of Prussia at the hands of Napoleon was possible because the idea of the nation state allowed a mobilization of a larger, more uniform army. Napoleon was for Clausewitz thus a model/obstacle in that, as military expert, Clausewitz was fascinated by Napoleon’s success, while at the same time, he felt humiliated as a member of the Prussian army through the defeat. Conceiving of the enemy as a Girardian model/obstacle leads the adversaries to reciprocal action, to behave in the same way.<sup>43</sup> This mimetic setup leads eventually to the disappearance of frictions in space and time. Because of the fuelling of the trend to extremes by fascination and resentment, the gap between the concept of total war and the reality of war begins to disappear. Girard takes Clausewitz’s insight to its logical conclusion with the example of French-German relations that led to the Second World War: “The theory had a long range, since after the ‘counter-attack’ of the 1870 war, Germany prepared for the 1914 ‘counter-attack’ and then again with the remilitarization of the Rhineland in 1936.”<sup>44</sup> Every defeat in a war is a humiliation that leads to a response – even and especially if that response is delayed. The battle becomes only more terrible if it is suspended:

It was because he was “responding” to the humiliations inflicted by the Treaty of Versailles and the occupation of Rhineland that Hitler was able to mobilize a whole people. Likewise, it was because he was “responding” to the German invasion that Stalin achieved a decisive victory over Hitler. It was because he was “responding” to the United States that Bin Laden planned 9/11 and subsequent events.<sup>45</sup>

One final aspect of Girard’s argument has to be mentioned before *GB84* will be discussed in the light of his insights. Girard draws attention to Clausewitz’s remarks on “Interaction between Attack and Defense”:

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 12f.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

Consider in the abstract how war originates. Essentially, the concept of war does not originate with the attack, because the ultimate object of attack is not fighting: rather, it is possession. The idea of war originates with the defense, which does have fighting as its immediate object, since fighting and parrying obviously amount to the same thing... It is thus in the nature of the case that the side that first introduces the element of war, whose point of view brings two parties into existence, is also the side that establishes the initial laws of war. That side is the defense.<sup>46</sup>

From the perspective of mimetic theory, the defender is the model, the one who possesses something which the attacker wants. “The defending side determines what the attack will be, as it has the choice of terrain and the support of the people, and benefits from the fatigue experienced by the attacking side.”<sup>47</sup> But as the escalation to extremes involves double mediation it is difficult to know who attacks first: in a way, it is always the one that does not attack. The paradox is that the attacker wants peace because he fears the defensive counterattack of the defender. Because the defender has been humiliated by the attacker the next defensive blow will be more extreme and is aimed at the total annihilation of the opponent, in order to prevent a possible counter-attack. Humiliation turns hostile intent to hostile feeling, which allows the mobilization of a whole people against an enemy. The end state of the escalation to extremes is the Canettian double-crowd, each part seeking the destruction of its mirror image.

#### 4.3.4 GB84

Girard’s reading of *On War* reveals the underground psychology behind war. This underlying logic will never surface as the official reason for war, which will always be rationalized through ideology. As Girard writes: “Everywhere, politics, science and religion have used ideology to mask a duel that is becoming global. They have simply provided themes and justifications for the principle of reciprocity.”<sup>48</sup> For Girard ideologies replace mythology but the mechanism is similar. Ideologies, just as myths,

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

hide the magma of undifferentiated crowds, the result of conflictive mimesis. The sacred, understood as the indirect representation of human violence, survives in the modern nation state. As Andrew McKenna points out, every modern industrial state is dependent on covert operations, precisely because of the dangers attending anything liable to be identified as “naked aggression,” for such aggression solicits a symmetrical response whose planetary escalation is abhorred by all.<sup>49</sup>

The operations of the secret state during the miners’ strike are one of the main themes in *GB84*. One of six perspectives on the strike follows the actions of Neil Fontaine, a veteran of the military-security complex, assisting Stephen Sweet, whom he labels with the racist epithet “The Jew”. The latter’s task, assigned by the Prime Minister herself, is to sabotage the strike through bribes, incentives and the use of force. But even at the level of the secret state there has to be a rationalization of the clandestine activities against the miners. In “The Miners and the Secret State” Robin Ramsay quotes Stella Rimington, in charge of MI5’s operation against the NUM during the Strike: “We in MI5 limited our investigations to the activities of those who were using the strike for subversive purposes.”<sup>50</sup> According to Rimington the strike was directed by a triumvirate who had declared that they were using the strike to try to bring down the elected government of Margaret Thatcher. Milne observes that Thatcher was convinced that a secret communist cell around Scargill was orchestrating the strike in order to bring down the country.<sup>51</sup> Whether this was the case or not is irrelevant for the present discussion. But aligning Scargill and the Miners’ Strike with communism allows for a rationalization of the activities of the secret state. As Ramsay notes in his *Lobster* review of Milne’s book: “In any case, how could the NUM leadership think it a good idea to appeal to Libyan and Soviet ‘trade unions’ for support? If you want to

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<sup>49</sup> See McKenna (1992), p. 144.

<sup>50</sup> Robin Ramsay, “The Miners and the Secret State”, in Granville Williams, ed. *Shafted: The Media, the Miners’ Strike & the Aftermath*. (London, 2009), p. 74.

<sup>51</sup> See Milne (1994), p. 24.

challenge a Right-wing Tory government led by a cold warrior, the one thing you should *not* do is publicly ally yourself with that government's *betes noires*.”<sup>52</sup>

When in the novel, Terry Winters, a high NUM official modelled on the real Roger Windsor, returns from his meeting with Ghaddafi in Libya, and information about the visit leaks to the press, Sweet is delighted:

The President's man caught *in flagrante* on film in the arms of the Tyrant of Tripoli. The Union's begging bowl outstretched to the Terrorist's Friend. [...] Their president with his pants down. His monstrous political agenda finally exposed. National news. International news. Hold-the-front-page-fucking news. [...] Heads would now roll. Heads for tall poles. These are the nights of the long knives, and the Jew has the sharpest blade of all – No more distraction. No more conciliation. No more negotiation – Much more litigation. Much more retaliation. Much, much more determination – To win, win, win, win, win, win, win, win, win, win, win and win again. But the Jew knows they need a better public face. No more plastic bags on heads.<sup>53</sup>

Behind the justification of the measures taken against the miners, in Peace's fictionalization of the events, there lies visceral, blind desire for retaliation. But this desire has to remain hidden from the public. The plastic bag in the quotation refers to the famous incident, when Ian McGregor, head of the National Coal Board (NCB) and Arthur Scargill's immediate antagonist, placed a green plastic bag in front of his face, as he arrived to talks with the NUM at a secret place near Edinburgh and was filmed by the media. McGregor did not perform well on television, unlike the charismatic Scargill. This reveals that, regardless of what was happening on the ground, the war would be won on the level of mass-media simulation.<sup>54</sup>

According to Granville Williams, “nightly television reports of violent confrontations on picket lines were powerful amplifiers of the message the government insistently promoted of, in Margaret Thatcher's repugnant phase, the miners as the

<sup>52</sup> Robin Ramsay, “Enemies Within?” *Lobster* 29 (Hull, 1995), N.pag.

<sup>53</sup> See Peace (2004), p. 305.

<sup>54</sup> Baudrillard makes the same point with respect to the Vietnam War in *America* (1988): “That is why the war was won by both sides: by the Vietnamese on the ground and by the Americans in the electronic mental space.” (p. 49).

‘enemy within’ engage in an anti-democratic insurrection.”<sup>55</sup> In *GB84* David Johnson, known as “the Mechanic”, is forced to work as a security service freelance, as his wife Jennifer Johnson is held captive by the secret state. Johnson’s job is to pick fights with strikers: “*The Mechanic and his men walk into the next pub and the next and the next. They look for badges. Look for stickers. Spill drinks. Pick fights. Take it outside. Fight. Fists and boots.*”<sup>56</sup>

In Peace’s imagination this is the basis for portraying the miners as a violent mob. It gives the government also the reason, with reference to *Battling to the End*, to see itself as the defending side in the war with the miners. Hart observes: “as the novel continues a third possibility arises: that the miners’ agitations, both physical and political, have released a new—Thatcherite—malevolence that now controls the country, destroys their livelihood, and breaks their bodies.”<sup>57</sup> There is an important analogy to the Falklands War. Just as in the latter, Thatcher adopted the role of defender, since it was Argentina that posed as attacker by occupying the Islands first, so in the strike, the miners’ decision to go on strike is constructed as the initial attack on the state that releases the new malevolence in the form of a defense of the state. Milne writes:

[T]he timing of the final all-out confrontation was clearly that of the Coal Board and the government. [...] In the wake of her 1983 general-election victory, Thatcher appointed Peter Walker Energy Secretary with the words: “We are going to have a miners’ strike.” It would, she told him be a political assault orchestrated by Scargill and aimed at achieving his ‘Marxist objectives’. [...] Against such a background, any attempt by the union leadership to postpone action in March would have been interpreted as a sign of weakness, encouraged a further acceleration of closures, and very likely led to a battle in still more unfavourable circumstances.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Granville Williams, “The Media and the Miners”, in Granville Williams, ed. *Shafted* (London, CPBF), p. 36.

<sup>56</sup> See Peace (2004), p. 93.

<sup>57</sup> See Hart (2008), p. 583.

<sup>58</sup> See Milne (1994), p. 16f.

In this case, as Girard observes, “the defender is thus who begins and finishes the war.”<sup>59</sup>

The government has to force its enemy into being first in order to defeat the miners completely later. Scargill was retrospectively right to recognize that the conflict was not about the loss of “just” 22,000 jobs but about the destruction of the whole industry.<sup>60</sup> Andrew J. Richards observes that between 1984 and 1992 the number of workers employed in mining dropped from almost 200,000 to 11,000.<sup>61</sup> But for Peace the will to a total destruction of the industry cannot be explained simply by the adoption of a neo-liberal economic ideology alone, in which the decline of the mining industry is the inevitable outcome of a restructuring of the global work force that leads to Britain’s transformation into a post-industrial service economy. In this view pit closures were justified because the pits were no longer profitable.

The perspectives of two miners, Peter and Martin, are interspersed between chapters in *GB84* in the form of two run-on text columns that are broken in mid-sentence by the chapters and continue before the following chapter. Peace already used this technique in *1980* to represent the subaltern voices of the Ripper victims amalgamated with the voice of the Ripper himself as victim of society. While the perspective of the individual miners is thus marginalized to these columns, the latter have the almost Biblical authority of the subaltern voices of victims. Peter reports:

They go on about uneconomic pits and then they spend sixty-five million quid a week on police, compensation costs to industry, alternative power and lost income tax. Sixty-five million fucking quid, Every week. That’s nigh on ten million fucking quid a day. It’s been over a hundred days. Hundred days at ten million quid a day. Never spent a bloody penny round here before. Think about it, said Billy. Ten million quid a day for a hundred days. Fucking hell, she must really hate us. Really fucking hate us[.]<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> See Girard (2010), p. 16.

<sup>60</sup> See Milne (1994), p. x.

<sup>61</sup> See Richards (1996), p. 2

<sup>62</sup> See Peace (2004), p. 158.

The above quotation not only reveals that the term “economical” is relative – the astronomical investments in combating the strike rely on the utopian belief that a neo-liberal restructuring of the economy will in retrospect justify those investments. But also, more importantly, behind the apparent rationality of neo-liberalism, there is a deeper irrational driving force in line with Clausewitz’s observation that hostile intent is turned into hostile feeling.

The miners were thus confronted by a full frontal attack on their livelihoods. In Peace’s reading of events there is no room for negotiations because the escalation to extremes is too far progressed. The utopian engine of neo-liberalism, fuelled by hostile feeling, forces its mirror image into being: the only possibility for a victory of the miners is a total victory over the government. The miners’ strike is the apex of a class war that began with the end of the corporatist compromise in post-war Britain and led to the strikes of 1972 and 1974. It becomes a full-blown battle between neo-liberalism and Marxist class war. Scargill’s rhetoric reveals as much: “Scargill was telling NUM conference delegates that the union had ‘challenged the very heart of the capitalist system...we are involved in a class war...you have written history. The only way is to fight again with the same determination, the same pride.’”<sup>63</sup> In *GB84* Scargill is fictionalized as “the President” and makes clear that the Marxist revolution is his aim: “Every working man and woman in this country will have to rise as one to defeat this government. This Union will be in the vanguard of that battle, as it has been in every struggle, as it has been in every victory.”<sup>64</sup> Two utopian systems, a neo-liberalist and a Marxist, are thus locked in an existential battle, the main protagonists both convinced that a total victory over the enemy will lead to a Hegelian *Aufhebung* and the arrival of utopia, either Marxist or neo-liberal.

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<sup>63</sup>Qtd. in Milne (1994), p. 25.

<sup>64</sup> See Peace (2004), p. 16.

However, as already noted, Peace implies that the strike was not caused by NUM militancy but rather a result of Thatcher's desire to redress the defeats of 1972 and 1974. He is cautious to take sides in *GB84*. While, in an interview with *The Socialist Worker* Peace expresses regret of not supporting the miners enough at the time, he also states that he wanted "to have as many different perspectives as possible – both from the union side and the other side."<sup>65</sup> In an interview with Michael Williams, Peace furthermore states:

I don't purposely set out to write bleak and depressing novels but it's very hard to write a novel that's true to the strike but that isn't ultimately depressing when you see the legacy... just the brutality and violence that was used on both sides. So yeah, I think that was a very dark time.<sup>66</sup>

These comments are a reminder that *GB84* is not written from a Marxist revolutionary perspective, dismissing the neo-liberalist utopia while adopting a rival utopian perspective, despite the fact that Peace sides with the miners.

The sympathy with the miners as victims of the Thatcherite retributive attack is restricted to the quasi-Biblical reports of Peter and Martin, or as Matthew Hart has put it, to the subaltern experience missing from the political drama of the main chapters.<sup>67</sup> The latter document the escalation to extremes, "the whole occult history from left to right".<sup>68</sup> While Left and Right seem opposites, there is a secret, an "occult" collusion between the two, as Stephen Sweet recognizes: "The TUC and the government. *Hand in hand*. The government and the Board. The Board and the TUC. The TUC and his own fucking Union. The Left and the Right. The Tweeds and the Denims. The Traditionalists and the Modernists. The Europeans and the Soviets. The wet and the dry

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<sup>65</sup> David Peace, "David Peace interview: GB84's shadowy forces ranged against the miners", *The Socialist Worker Online* (2009), par. 31.

<sup>66</sup> Michael Williams and David Peace, "The Brit crime writer digs deep with his new novel, GB84", *BBC Online* (2004), par. 4.

<sup>67</sup> See Hart (2008), p. 580.

<sup>68</sup> Hart and Peace (2006), p. 566.

–.”<sup>69</sup> For the president too it becomes difficult to tell the sides apart: “The President couldn’t tell the difference between union and management – / Management and government - / Government and police – “.”<sup>70</sup>

Michael Williams has observed that Peace deliberately disorients the reader. Peace confirms this view: “It’s all written fast-paced, present tense. The events are coming at you as they did at the time. And I think - I know this sounds a bit odd - but sometimes I don’t actually know what’s going on.”<sup>71</sup> The reader is disoriented because it is not possible to take sides in the main narrative, as both sides are locked in an ever accelerating “endgame” as Sweet puts it. When NUM member Bill Reed recognizes that ““WE. ARE. ALL. BEING. MANIPULATED. AND. DESTROYED – “”, the President asks ““But by whom?[...] That’s the question.””<sup>72</sup> This is first and foremost a reference to the activities of the secret state undermining the strike but it can also be read as a subconscious recognition that, by participating in the duel with the government, the NUM is in secret, mimetic collusion with its opponent in the escalation to extremes.

While both sides perceive themselves to be utterly different from each other, they start to resemble each other more and more. Sweet’s motivation for fightback is “That one man’s war” that “has brought over five thousand arrests. Injured six hundred police and two hundred pickets. It has seen miner attack miner. Colleague attack colleague. Brother attack brother.”<sup>73</sup> Sweet is blind to his own implication in the violence and uses the President as a scapegoat responsible for all the violence. The violence of the secret state is justified, as already argued, by the fact that the NUM is perceived as a subversive threat. The measures of the secret state are perceived as to defend the rule of law and the nation state, whereas the state of exception actually suspends the rule of law and the state itself functions more like a mafia family. On the

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<sup>69</sup> See Peace (2004), p. 433.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>71</sup> See Peace and Williams (2004), par. 5.

<sup>72</sup> See Peace (2004), p. 389f.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 193.

side of the miners, the threat of a “totalitarian” neo-liberalism and the utopian Marxist struggle justify the violence against “scabs” and the police. Police stations are “stoned” and scabs are excluded from the community for life. The scab has the power to release a visceral urge for revenge that leads to the unity of the miners, as Martin recognizes:

War. That’s what it is now – Pete always said it was civil war. But there’s nothing fucking civil about it – It’s a one-man war. Lads want that one man dead and all. Fucking strung up – [...] Things he’s brought to village. Things pigs have dished out on his behalf – [...] Things he’s caused. Thing he’s done – Shame. Shame. Shame – Every day he works. Shame and fucking siege – Fucking siege. That’s what it is. A fucking siege – For one scab. One bloody fucking scab. No one else. Just him – He’s going to have to pay the price for what he’s done. Price is revenge – Revenge. That’s what folk want – Revenge. What everybody wants – Picket. Non-picket. Miner. Non-miner. Man. Woman. Young. Old – Revenge. For what he’s done. Every single person in village wants it – Revenge. They’re going to fucking get it and all. One way or another – Pete has petitioned Panel for a mass picket.<sup>74</sup>

The scab clearly functions as a scapegoat in the Girardian sense as he unites everyone against himself. Even the police are exculpated from their violence against the miners, as the scab becomes the ultimate reason for their violence. The police and the miners are united against the scab and become a unanimous crowd through their focused hatred. But later, in the subaltern account of Peter, the demonization and absolute contempt for scabs is questioned when Kev Shaw, a staunch picketer, decides to go back to work: “I’ve been on more pickets than most”, he objects, when Peter tells him that “it doesn’t matter whether he scabbed through whole strike or just last bloody day – [...] But for rest of your life you’d be known as Kev the Scab and your kids as the children of Kev the Scab.”<sup>75</sup> While Kev eventually succumbs to Pete’s logic, the passage reveals the cracks in the justification of the absolute vilification of scabs and the latter’s structural innocence. There are good reasons for scabbing – an obvious one is that by February 1985 most miner families were literally almost starving. The revealed structural innocence exposes the scapegoat mechanism: unanimity is created through transference of absolute guilt. Dave Rainer, another miner, even more tellingly, recognizes the

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<sup>74</sup> See Peace (2004), p. 272.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 420.

structural dependence of the strike on scabs: “But you know what? If it hadn’t been for picketing them, I’d have had no brass. I’d have starved – NO picket. No pay. No scabs No scoff – Fucking starved without them.”<sup>76</sup>

In *GB84* the unanimity of the two tribes is maintained by the visceral hatred against one scapegoat each: the scab on the side of the miners and the President on the side of the government. The expulsion of the scapegoat has no longer the power to dissolve the crowds and to restore order. The Canettian double crowd therefore continues to exist. The escalating antagonism must end with the destruction of one or both tribes. Peter recognizes that “they’d sit on their fucking hands and watch this country crash before they’d break and give us even an inch. [...] It was then that it dawned on me. [...] Just a matter of time. Be like waiting for end of bloody world.”<sup>77</sup>

Peter is not the only one to think of the dispute in apocalyptic terms. Malcolm Morris, a participant in the MI5 counterinsurgency operation against the miners, reflects:

*“[T]hings fell apart – / Hearts. Minds. People. Marriages. Families. Unions, Governments and societies – / They always did. They always have. They always would –*

<sup>78</sup> When Bill Reed from the NUM, together with Terry Winters witnesses “[t]ransit after police transit tear through the fog in a massive metal motorcade”, he realizes that these are “the armies of the dead awoken, arisen for one last battle – [...] “It’s the end of the world,” Reed laughs. “The end of all our worlds.”<sup>79</sup> The societal crisis leading to the end of the world is reinforced by disaster imagery: “Much of the country was flooded. The pound had slipped further. There were unreported power cuts.”<sup>80</sup>

It has been argued that the theme of the end of the world is subject to a victory by the Thatcherite neo-liberalist economy. The apocalyptic theme would be thus restricted to the end of the way of life of the miners. A hypothetical victory of the

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 428.

<sup>77</sup> See Peace (2004), p. 384.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 437.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 320.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 421.

miners on the other hand has been described in terms of utopia. Milne, for example, argues that the strike could have been won by the miners. He cites an incident where Thatcher considered sending troops to move coal. “If that had happened “[Lord] Marshall [then CEGB chairman] believed the power workers ‘would have gone on strike immediately and the lights would have gone out within a week’”.<sup>81</sup> Milne is certainly right in considering the possibility of a victory of the miners, rather than seeing their defeat as inevitable. But reflected in this position is a Hegelian-Marxist belief that a victory of the miners would not only have led to an alternative society, but to utopia achieved. Ramsay writes in his review of Milne:

Milne is day-dreaming. The miners’ defeat was the culmination of the British revolutionary Left’s fantasies. Though rarely so crudely stated, these said: as we push the modern capitalist state it increases repression. Push it hard enough and the repression will radicalize the working class and thus – hey presto! – we will be on the way to having a revolutionary working class.”<sup>82</sup>

Andrew Richards in *Miners on Strike* has a similar belief in a “Hegelian Aufhebung” through class revolution: “A single victory helps to alter inaction owing to the anticipation of defeat, leading to more action and so on.”<sup>83</sup> Michael Bailey in “Unfinished Business: Demythologising the battle of Orgreave” believes that

[c]ontrary to the prevailing orthodoxy of neo-liberalism, and in spite of the wider political losses endured since the miners’ strike, the spectre of a socialist politics continues to haunt society and the miners’ strike is very much a part of this historical materialist process, hence the importance that socialists, to paraphrase Walter Benjamin, take ‘control of that memory’, particularly ‘as it flashes in a moment of danger’. In short, the miners’ strike –as with all political struggles of the past – may yet ‘blast open the continuum of history.’<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> See Milne (1994), p. 20.

<sup>82</sup> See Ramsay (1995), N.pag.

<sup>83</sup> See Richards (1996), p. 7.

<sup>84</sup> Michael Bailey, “Unfinished Business: Demythologising the battle of Orgreave”, in Granville Williams, ed., *Shafted* (London, 2009), p. 126.

He might succeed in demythologizing the Battle of Orgreave but he mythologizes the strike by reducing it to a jigsaw piece in the Marxist dialectic that leads to a utopian end of history.

*GB84* does not succumb to such Leftist romanticism. Not only, as previously pointed out by Hart, does the liberal idea of self-regulation devolve into anomie and self-slaughter. But it is shown that the dialectic that is supposed to lead to the revolution of the proletariat can easily get out of hand. In *GB84* it is not the proletariat that triumphs but violence:

“Two of their members in South Wales had dropped a concrete block from a bridge onto a taxi taking a working miner to Merthyr Vale Colliery. The block had gone through the windscreen. The taxi-driver had been killed. [...] They were thugs and bullies. Hooligans. Terrorists and now murderers.”<sup>85</sup>

Despite the fact that Terry Winters is a traitor, he recognizes that “[i]t was the hour of the lynch mob. The year of the noose. [...] The men at Abervan had dangled a noose over the Fat Man – [...] There was a noose and gallows at Cortonwood.”<sup>86</sup> In the case of a victory of the miners, it could be expected that retributive actions against scabs and the Nottinghamshire miners, who kept on working during the strike, would increase. Furthermore, the sacrifices of the miners are incorporated into the Marxist salvific narrative and are therefore seen as necessary. Gareth Thomas, a more moderate voice within the union realizes that “[t]here’s no prospect of victory now, [...] [n]ot the kind of victory we were all so sure we could achieve a year ago in March 1984. What we must make sure of now is that we do not abuse the loyalty that has been shown to us by the thousands of miners throughout this country.”<sup>87</sup> Another voice in the NUM concurs: “‘It is unreasonable on humanitarian grounds’, agreed Durham, ‘to call upon the

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<sup>85</sup> See Peace (2004), p. 351.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 325.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 444.

membership to endure still further pain and still further sacrifice, to themselves and their families, in loyalty to this Union –<sup>88</sup>

But, as the authoritative comments in italics suggest, the unleashed antagonism against the government cannot simply be ended. *“But there would be further pain and there would be further sacrifice – / For the men. For their families. For their Union – / For weeks. For months. For years and years to come –*”<sup>89</sup> This is a reference to the effects on the miners due to the destruction of their industry in the following years. But the suffering is also the effect of the rising militancy due to the escalation to extremes. And if viewed as a jigsaw piece that eventually should lead to the proletarian revolution, it is foreseeable that a possible, even aggravated militancy would lead to an even harsher reaction from the state. *“Historic compromises”* are not possible because each side believes in their utopian idea of the end of history, for which sacrifice and pain are an acceptable price to be paid. Not only the compromises are *“false dawns”*.<sup>90</sup> They have rather become *“false dawns”* because each side believes in their own *“false dawns”* through absolute victory over their enemy. Behind these false dawns, as Peace confirms, “is the division and almost state of civil war that existed not only between the government and the union but within the government and the union themselves.”<sup>91</sup>

As already discussed, the cohesion of the Canettian double crowd in *GB84* is created through scapegoating violence within and between the crowds. Due to this escalation to extremes, as already noted, the conflict can end only with the total annihilation of one or both antagonists. Eventually Thatcher won and the miners were forced to go back to work, only to disappear completely with the annihilation of their industry in the coming years. The victory of neo-liberal economy is portrayed as a ritual of expulsion in *GB84*. Girard’s metaphor of the underground tomb, the double erasure

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 445.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 445.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 411.

<sup>91</sup> See Hart and Peace (2006), p. 566.

of the scapegoat victim is again appropriate. In the case of the miners it is the literal truth. Martin writes as he goes down into the pit: “The cage descends – To cover us with dirt. To leave us underground – In place of strife. In place of fear – Here where she stands at the gates at the head of her tribe and waits – triumphant on the mountains of our skulls.”<sup>92</sup>

This returns the discussion to the initial argument of *GB84*: electricity. As already pointed out by Gere, international finance depends on computerization. Computerized trading, turning money into a pure sign and enabling the signifiers to move independently from the world of material objects,<sup>93</sup> nevertheless depends on electricity. The bits that replace the atoms<sup>94</sup>, are produced by the buried victims of the miners’ strike. At the root of the virtual world of the neo-liberal economic utopia, there is the hidden expulsion of the miners. While the new economic model literally depends on the physical labour of the expelled victims, at least until the production of electricity is fully divested from the miners and substituted by oil and nuclear power, metaphorically this means that the neo-liberal utopia depends on and is an effect of the scapegoat mechanism. And in order for the mechanism to work, it must be hidden. As Martin, in the position of buried victim perceives: “But the people of England are blind and deaf – “. <sup>95</sup>

But because the mechanism is exposed in *GB84*, the neo-liberal economic utopia is unmasked as part of the catastrophe. Martin observes:

Looking at all things money could buy – Three piece suites. Fitted bedrooms. Fridge freezers. Video recorders – Cath didn’t like to just look, though. Had to have something. I encouraged her and all. Made her feel better. That would last a day or so. Then catalogues would come back out. Tape measure. Like a drug with her, it was. Buying stuff. Filling up all empty spaces. Needed her fix or there was no talking to her. It was like an addiction.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> See Peace (2004), p. 462.

<sup>93</sup> See Gere (1999), p. 21,28.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>95</sup> See Peace (2004), p. 462.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 330.

Gere compares the instituting of neo-liberal economy to the Big Bang. “It is a process of expansion from a highly condensed and compressed primordial state.”<sup>97</sup> But this expansion is entropic. The universal tendency towards equilibrium is a tendency towards decay. In the case of *GB84* the condensed primordial state is represented by the clash of the double crowd. The expulsion of the miners does not lead to a new order. The neo-liberal economy is an order of disorder, of the expansion of individualistic desire. “Disasters of deregulation” are not aberrations or mistakes within this system, but confirmations of its catastrophic nature.”<sup>98</sup> The atomic bomb is another fitting metaphor for the outcome of the clash of the two tribes and deregulation: massive amounts of destructive energy are released, and as Paul Virilio has pointed out, “the metaphor of nuclear catastrophe and fallout is no longer a stylistic trope, but in the end an accurate enough image of the damage to human activity[.]”<sup>99</sup>

The belief in neo-liberalist economic progress thus depends on the hiddenness of the expulsion of scapegoats. While post-industrial, individualistic consumerism thus appears as the utopian promised land to those unaware of the cost involved, consumerism is recognized as a drug, filling the void created by the devastation of the industrial conflict. It is not the only one. Behind the erasures of the empty fields and car parks of the virtual world that begin to cover the sites of conflict and violence,<sup>100</sup> the consequences of the strike loom large: “The social scars left by the destruction of the industry can be seen across Britain’s former mining areas, in levels of unemployment and heroin addiction far above the national average and in communities abandoned to the tender mercies of the neo-fascist British National Party.”<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Charlie Gere, “Armageddon Time”, in Andrew Gibson, Joe Kerr and Mike Seaborne eds. *London from Punk to Blair* (London, 2003), p. 120.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117,118.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>100</sup> Patricia Holland, “The After-Memory: Documentary Films and the Aftermath of the Miners’ strike”, in Granville Williams ed., *Shafted* (London, 2009), p. 110.

<sup>101</sup> See Milne (1995), p. xvi.

Taking London as an example, geographer Doreen Massey discusses the hidden logic of economic neo-liberalism: “In reality these two aspects of London – the success and the poverty – are intimately related. [...] In 1980, the top 10 per cent of full-time male earners in London had weekly earnings just over twice as high as in the bottom 10 per cent. In 2000, the ratio had grown to nearly four times.”<sup>102</sup> It is at least not market forces alone that led to the increase of income for the then emergent class of “yuppies”. Related to the individual inequalities of the city is the myth of London as the “golden goose”, whose global success as a financial world city benefits the whole country. Rather, the economic growth of London and the South East, with Canary Wharf as a powerful symbol of the emerging service economy, has negative effects for other regions. Finally, this is a global effect, as “replicating the expansion of the small group of the very rich in London, at the world level the richest 500 people own more wealth than the poorest 416 Million.”<sup>103</sup>

The end state of the promotion of competitiveness between individuals and, on a global level, between local places of the neo-liberal economic model is thus the post-apocalyptic landscape of the North, as described by Peace in *GB84*. Marge Piercy, in her novel *He, She, and It*, adapts George Orwell’s societal model of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where 85% per cent of the population are “proles”, to the conditions of multinational capitalism. The majority of the world population lives in the post-apocalyptic “glop” basically a dump, spanning the globe, whereas some executives still have private lakes and are separated from the glop by artificial domes.<sup>104</sup> The latter are the same spaces of simulated exclusivity that Sinclair identifies in his visit to the Siebel building discussed earlier. In *He, She, and It* these spaces are shrinking, whereas the glop is continually expanding and eventually swallows the spaces of privilege. But it is the hyper-competitive world of neo-liberal economics itself that is the driving force

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<sup>102</sup> Doreen Massey, *World City* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 55/89.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.* p. 179.

<sup>104</sup> Marge Piercy, *He, She, and It* (New York, 1991), p. 308.

behind its own extinction. The privileged executives can only enjoy their private lakes, once they have come out on top of the fierce competition with their rivals. While it is not explored in *GB84*, novels like Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho* (1991) explore the damage done to the psyche of the yuppie through hyper-competitiveness and the attempt to join the perfect circulation of signs in the Baudrillardian simulation.<sup>105</sup> The end state of the hyper-competitive world of neo-liberalist economy as Baudrillard has argued in *America*, and as the following discussion of *Radon Daughters* (1994), *The Book of Dave* (2006), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *Oryx and Crake* (2003) will demonstrate, is the desert; it is an initiation into nothingness. But before attention is turned to these works, a final and important aspect of Peace's fiction shall be briefly examined: the apparent absence of hope.

#### 4.3.5 A Note on Hope in the *Red Riding Quartet*

While Matthew Hart has noted with respect to the *Quartet* that “[t]hrough some critics are turned off by the bleakness of Peace's fiction, the series was more often subject to laudatory reviews”, it cannot be denied that Peace presents the reader with a disillusioned world drenched in violence. Even the half-way decent characters like Eddie Dunford or John Piggot have decisive flaws that contribute to their downfall and prevent an end to the brutality. While, as already argued, Peace's aim is through bleakness to create the moral gravity necessary to unveil the dark side of the periods he

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<sup>105</sup> For an analysis of *American Psycho* from the perspective of mimetic theory see: Daniel Cojocaru, “Confessions of an American Psycho: James Hogg's and Breton Easton Ellis's Anti-Heroes' Journey from Vulnerability to Violence”, *Contagion* 15/16 (East Lansing, 2008/09). As a result of the fierce competitiveness in the yuppie world, Bateman can no longer appreciate the beauty of the natural world: “...where there was nature and earth, life and water, I saw a desert landscape that was unending, resembling some sort of crater, so devoid of reason and light and spirit that the mind could not grasp it on any sort of conscious level and if you came close the mind would reel backward, unable to take it in.” (Bret Easton Ellis, *American Psycho* (London, 1991), p. 374f. Since Bateman is the same type as the executives in *He, She, and It*, the irony is that once the yuppie has become one of the privileged few, his psyche has been so badly damaged that he can no longer appreciate the “fruits” of his privilege.

examines, the question can be legitimately asked, whether, underlying the novels, there is a pessimistic anthropology and whether the end of the world is inevitable.

As has been demonstrated, the discussed novels can be read as being similarly concerned with the effect of the exposure of the scapegoat mechanism on human societies, as Girard's theory is. Girard too has been described as a cultural pessimist, preaching the end of the world. But, this argument neglects that Girard writes from an explicitly Christian perspective. For Girard, the real problem is one of mediation. As he has emphasized in *Battling to the End*: "Think about the conversion of Saint Paul. He keeps repeating, 'Stop imitating one another and making war; imitate Christ, who will link you with the Father.' Christ restores the distance with the sacred, whereas reciprocity brings us closer to one another to produce the corrupt sacred, which is violence."<sup>106</sup>

While Girard claims that his theory is scientific, the last quotation is metaphysical speculation. There is no way he can prove that Christ is the ideal mediator scientifically. But that is not the point here. What can be demonstrated is that in Peace's fiction the same understanding of the Christ event, as revealing the scapegoating violence and pointing to Christ as perfect mediator, shapes the narratives. When, in *1977*, Jack Whitehead, slowly recognizing the truth about human violence and dreaming of "rivers of blood", asks Martin Laws if there is no other way, the latter responds: "Jack, if the Bible teaches us nothing else, it teaches us that this is the way things are, the way things have always been, and will always be until the end."<sup>107</sup> Laws is at the very centre of the corrupt Yorkshire social elite and cannot be the voice of morality in the novels. However, in this instance his insight is accurate. He speaks the truth but

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<sup>106</sup> See Girard (2010), p. 102.

<sup>107</sup> See Peace (2000), p. 291.

chooses to be on the side of the perpetrators. Girard points out: “This is why Pascal says that truth fails to calm violence and can only ‘irritate’ it.”<sup>108</sup>

The Language of the *Quartet* is full of Biblical allusions pointing to the truth of the victim. When in 1974 Eddie Dunford is tipped off by Maurice Jobson (as the reader finds out in 1983) that the police are violently removing a Roma camp in order to clear the space for the Swan Centre, it is noteworthy how he describes the scene of victimization that presents itself to him: “A gypsy camp on fire, each of the twenty or so caravans and trailers ablaze, each beyond relief; [...] There below me in the basin of Hunslet Carr, just 500 yards beneath me, was my England on the morning of Sunday 15 December, in the year of Our Lord 1974 [...]”<sup>109</sup> The Christian revelation allows a chronicling of the violence that would otherwise have been mythically disguised by the scapegoat mechanism.

Furthermore, in 1974, Dunford compares the child murders to the slaughtering of children by King Herod.<sup>110</sup> The Swan, whose wings are later stitched to Kemplay’s body, is found literally crucified.<sup>111</sup> In 1980 Paul Hunter finds a Bible in his hotel room, opened at the Book of Job. But strangely, the Book of Revelation is missing. “It is ripped and torn, stripped and shorn.” Girard reads Job as the victim of his people. Hunter feels like Job, with his house burnt down by the Yorkshire police, but he does not yet see that he is becoming the next scapegoat of the corrupt forces – hence there is “No *Revelation* / Not tonight – .”<sup>112</sup>

It is with John Piggot, however, that the necessity of Christ as mediator becomes apparent. In his narrative, the theme of absent men occurs repeatedly, as when he describes Mrs Myshkin’s front room: “The room is filled with photographs and paintings, photographs and paintings of men, photographs and paintings of men not here

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<sup>108</sup> See Girard (2010), p. 270.

<sup>109</sup> See Peace (1999), p. 45.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>112</sup> See Peace (2001), p. 325.

– Her husband, her son, Jesus Christ.”<sup>113</sup> In Piggot’s own life it is the absence of his father, a prominent officer in the Yorkshire police force and implicated in the child pornography ring, that is most felt. When Piggot, in imitation of his father commits suicide at the end of *1983*, the absence of Christ, the ideal mediator, is most poignantly felt. For Piggot Christ remains a *deus absconditus*, shaping his reality in absence. For him, similar to the existential reading of the Crucifixion in Ballard’s late novels, the Gospel narrative ends with the revelation of violence in the death of Christ and the end of the world.

So where then is hope in the *Quartet*? As earlier noted, Peace introduces *1983* with a quotation from a traditional poem about Little Red Riding Hood. The Source of the poem is Grace Rhys’ *Little Red Riding Hood & the History of Tom Thumb* (1895). Rhys uses Charles Perrault’s earliest known printed version from seventeenth-century France which ends with the death of the girl. The Brothers Grimm version on the other hand has a huntsman rescue the girl and her grandmother. These two versions reflect the structure of Girard’s comparison between Simone Weil’s and Albert Camus’ reading of “Eli, Eli, lama sabachtani” quoted before. In *1983* the repenting Maurice Jobson reads the same material evidence in a different way from Piggot. In the final chapter of his narrative in *1983* he is struggling for faith. It is worth quoting at length:

I took off my terrible glasses. I closed my tired eyes.  
I prayed:

*‘Lord, I do not understand my own actions.  
I know that nothing good dwells within me, in my flesh.  
I do not what I want, but I do the very things that I hate.  
I can will what is right but I cannot do it.  
I do not the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.  
When I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand.  
Wretched and damned man that I am!  
Will you rescue me from this body of death?’*

I opened my eyes. I looked up at Christ –  
The wounded, dead Christ.  
I was crying as I stood –

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<sup>113</sup> See Peace (2002), p. 27.

I was crying when I saw him.  
 He was sat among the Stations. His head shaved –  
 He was dressed in white, bleeding from his hands and his feet.  
 There were children sat around him –  
 Little girls and little boys.  
 ‘Jack?’  
 He smiled at me.  
 ‘Jack?’  
 He stared through me.  
 ‘What?’ I cried. ‘What can you see?’  
 He was smiling. He was staring at the Pietà –  
 ‘How can you still fucking believe?’ I shouted. ‘After all the things  
 you’ve seen?’  
 ‘It’s the things I’ve not seen,’ he said. ‘You just can’t see it.’  
 ‘I –’  
 ‘But in your heart you know the sun will shine again, don’t you?’  
 I nodded.  
 ‘Faith,’ he whispered –  
*‘The substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.’*  
 I turned again to the Pietà. I turned back to the wounded Christ –  
*No other name.*  
 There was a hand squeezing mine –  
 A ten-year-old girl with blue eyes and long straight fair hair, [...]  
 I looked down at my hand in hers –  
 There were no bruises on the backs of my hands.  
 ‘He was not abandoned,’ smiled Clare. ‘He is loved.’<sup>114</sup>

Peace too draws on Saint Paul to express the possibility of hope: the italics of the above quotation are taken from Romans 7:14ff. The final part of *1983* is titled “Total eclipse of the heart.” Whereas the *Quartet* ends with the total eclipse, in Jobson’s vision, the turned-to-Christ Jack Whitehead, offers the structural pattern underlying the end; the Crucifixion is the hermeneutic explaining both Piggot’s and Jobson’s account. The latter has however, the additional perspective of the Resurrection that points to the love of God, as the resurrected Clare Kemplay points out. But this is a transcendent dawn, one that can only be seen through the eyes of faith. It is only hinted at as a possibility of reading the disillusioned end. It is more authentic than the miraculous salvation of Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother in the Brothers Grimm version of the tale. This transcendent dawn exposes the violence rather than being founded upon it. It is the reason why it is not like one of the *false dawns* of *GB84*. This is hope deferred to the believer, who against hope in hope believes – it is foolishness to the existentialist.

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 402f.

## 5. Violentropy

### 5.1 *Radon Daughters*

Nick Austin, my editor at Paladin, was always very keen on, obsessed by William Hope Hodgson, and wanted a sequel to *House on the Borderland*. He said there's no money for *Downriver*, but I can get you this money for a sequel. Which then becomes *Radon Daughters*[.] [...] Now it's completely impossible to write a sequel to the House on the Borderland, because it ends with the death of the cosmos, time, and everything else, the recluse who's involved in this story is about to be devoured by alien beasts...there's nowhere to go, that's the whole point of it. [...] I saw these photographs in the London Hospital. The London Hospital was the only real archive of memory for Whitechapel, they had the best collection of images of the place, the best texts. I'd go into the basement of the London Hospital and see these very early X-ray photographs of hands with rings, and the people who took them – the flesh was rotting off them, they all died, they died of cancer.<sup>1</sup>

Whereas *Downriver* is concerned with the Thatcher era, *Radon Daughters* portrays the exhaustion of the Thatcherite energy in the Major years. *Radon Daughters* is thus not only narrating its main protagonist's quest for the manuscript of the fictitious sequel of its major intertext, William Hope Hodgson's *The House on the Borderland* (henceforth: *House*). It is itself the sequel to *House*, as, with the discussions of *GB84* and *Downriver* in mind, it portrays the post-Thatcherite period, as a post-apocalyptic world of entropic decay. The latter, it will be argued, is the result of the failing of the scapegoat mechanism. In *Radon Daughters* the situation is structurally similar to the case of the Kaingang Indians of Santa Katarina in Brazil that Girard discusses in *Violence*, following the description of Jules Henry in *Jungle People* (1941). For the Kaingang the scapegoat mechanism begins to fail as soon as they are installed on a reservation:

[M]embers of a group tend to turn against one another. They can no longer polarize their aggressions against outside enemies, the "others," the different men [...] Such is Henry's conclusion after contemplating the terrible plight of the Kaingang. He uses the phrase social suicide, and we must admit that the potentiality for such self-destruction always exists. In the course of history a number of communities doubtless succumbed to their own violent impulses and disappeared without a trace."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Jackson and Sinclair (2003), p. 127.

<sup>2</sup> See Girard (1977), p. 53.

In the case of the Kaingang, violence exhausts the community because in the reservation there is no longer an outside to which a scapegoat could be expelled. The entropic decay of society is a result of this failure to channel violence to the outside of society. It will be argued that all the narratives discussed in this chapter conform to the principle of “violentropy”: societal entropy occurring as a result of the failure to resolve a sacrificial crisis through the violent expulsion of a victim: entropy is the end result of violence out of control.

In the case of *Radon Daughters* the claim has to be defended, first of all that the novel actually fits the post-apocalyptic genre. For example, Helen/Isabel, Todd Sileen’s girlfriend, works as a weather presenter on TV. Thus it seems that the societal infrastructure is still intact. This is not exactly what one would expect from a post-apocalyptic novel, where the social world has supposedly broken down. But it has to be remembered again that Sinclair’s fictive worlds are split. Helen, who becomes Isabel whenever she is presenting the weather, works in the simulated environment of a broadcasting company. Sileen on the other hand inhabits the expelled, post-apocalyptic space. These parallel worlds follow the pattern of the expulsion of Sinclair and Renchi Bicknell from the Siebel Building in *London Orbital*. They are as different from each other as the glop from the shielded world of the executives in *He, She, and It* or the post-apocalyptic world of the miners from the Thatcherite neo-liberal economic utopia.

The contrast between the two worlds is most apparent when the different means of transport used by the Sinclair and Bicknell avatars Sileen and Rhab Adnam, and by Helen, Andi Kuschka and Sofya Court are considered on their respective travels from London to Oxford. The women travel by coach, whereas the men, in typical psychogeographical fashion, walk to Oxford. Helen, looking out of the window of the coach, sees “the only creatures left on their feet – a mud-spattered, filthy, staggering duo. [...] Helen knew them and turned, blushing, away. [...] Soaking wet, they had paid

their dues, and were primed for slaughter. Todd Sileen and his ghastly companion, Rhab Adnam.”<sup>3</sup> Brian Baker relates the two experiences to Mikhail Bakhtin’s chronotope of the road:

There are two types of time on Sinclair’s road: that of the pedestrian, such as Todd Sileen, or Sinclair himself in the non-fiction; and that of the driver, such as Petit in the London Orbital film. [...] Bakhtin’s chronotope of the road, with its emphasis on encounter and chance, is closer to the walking subject than that of the driver, who encounters nobody in her or his sealed experiential bubble.<sup>4</sup>

These two chrono-topoi, however, do not co-exist in isolation from one another. As already argued in the “Atrocity” and “Crowds” chapters, and as becomes clear in the above passage, with Sileen and Adnam referred to as “primed for slaughter”, the sealed, experiential bubble of the car or the shopping mall is the product of the violent expulsion of a victim, of the erasure of crowd violence or, in Girardian terms, of the expulsion of the state of sacrificial crisis.

There is abundant evidence scattered throughout *Radon Daughters* that Sileen in particular is a scapegoat victim in the Girardian sense. He is a “dysfunctional pedestrian” in that he only has one good leg. His other, amputated leg has been replaced by a tin leg.<sup>5</sup> He thus bears the signs of the victim, the third stereotype of persecution identified by Girard in *The Scapegoat*. In fully functional archaic myths, in which the mask of scapegoating violence is still intact, it is hard to recognize the victim as victim, as this is precisely what myths repress. There are nevertheless traces of the violent expulsion of the victim. While victims are chosen arbitrarily in the sense that they are innocent with respect to the sacrificial crisis, they might be chosen as victims because they show certain signs of weakness. Physical weakness of any kind in particular, sickness, madness, genetic deformities, accidental injuries, and even disabilities in

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<sup>3</sup> Iain Sinclair, *Radon Daughters* (London, 1994), p. 136.

<sup>4</sup> See Baker (2007), p. 164.

<sup>5</sup> See Sinclair (1994), p. 92.

general tend to polarize persecutors.<sup>6</sup> In the case of Oedipus (literally “Swollen Foot”), for example, it is significant that he limps, a trait that he shares with Sileen. There are also indications that Sileen as victim descended from the world of myths, for example, when he is described as a “bionic centaur”.<sup>7</sup> But *Radon Daughters* is not a myth because myths, according to Girard’s theory emerge from re-ordered cultures after the resolution of a sacrificial crisis. *Radon Daughters* is a narrative of the in-between-state of the sacrificial crisis. Hence, Sileen is not divinized but remains a monstrous hybrid, resembling the figures of a Girardian text of persecution. However, if there were a possibility of leaving the borderland, i.e. to resolve the sacrificial crisis and to restore order, Sileen would be divinized. “One step across the borderland threshold and the hybrid becomes a god.”<sup>8</sup>

But *Radon Daughters* remains within the borderland, as “Sileen abhorred cure. He thirsted for the wisdom of monsters.”<sup>9</sup> Thus the truth of the victim is not repressed through mythification. The signs of Sileen as victim therefore abound: while in *GB84* the scab is a dead metaphor for a strike breaker, Sileen’s skin is literally covered with scabs making him “so ripely present, he stinks”. “He was the sickness or he was nothing”. He describes himself as “the face of pestilence”, he is “plague news”, “outfall”, “a fatal toxin” and “a maggot”. Furthermore the narrator observes: “If you see a cripple walk, you can be sure he wants to get away.”<sup>10</sup>

Sinclair and his avatars, as already argued in “Atrocity”, occupy the middle ground of the victim, the space at the height of the sacrificial crisis before the restoration of order through the expulsion of the victim. While *Downriver* explores the failure of sacrificial expulsion, *Radon Daughters*, from the perspective of the victim, portrays the consequences of a failed resolution of the sacrificial crisis. Sileen embodies

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<sup>6</sup> See Girard (1986), p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> See Sinclair (1994), p. 30.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 285,86, 13, 73, 187, 293, 304, 44, 355.

this state, vicariously and metonymically, representing the violent mob which, deprived of the possibility of scapegoating, consumes itself in a struggle of all against all. Later in the novel, as Brian Baker notes, the reader finds out that Sileen is another split subject<sup>11</sup>, which makes him amenable to a Canettian reading of the schizophrenic as incorporating the crowd within himself.

The self-consumption of the crowd is represented by Sileen's addiction to X-rays. In the basement of the London Hospital, Sileen is "treated" by the "X-ray martyr Ian Askead, who wants to "cook his client" by exposing him to x-rays, in order to "milk him to the final drop, through a dozen sessions."<sup>12</sup> Like Sileen, he believes that by exposing the cripple to x-rays, he will somehow receive hints as to the location of the Hodgson manuscript. Sileen's X-ray afterburns are the result of the exposure to "radon daughters", decay products of radon-222. These radioisotopes attach themselves to airborne particles and can damage the lung-lining on inhalation and cause cancer. The end-state of Sileen's exposure to x-rays is a reduction to nothingness. Or as the narrator puts it: "another X-ray binge and his bones would be Emmental."<sup>13</sup> Sileen thus inhabits a space of "informed twilight in which all things decay."<sup>14</sup>

The trope of radioactive decay accurately describes the condition of the crowd in its incapacity to expel the victim. Once critical mass is reached, the crowd can be dissolved in two ways: either through the expulsion of the victim that dissolves the crowd or through the struggle of all-against-all in a nuclear explosion-like catastrophe that leads to the reduction of society to nothingness, analogous to the decay of radon daughters. The borderland is "the bite of radon daughters, or it was nothing".<sup>15</sup>

This is the right moment to briefly summarize Hodgson's *House* and to highlight relevant aspects from a Girardian perspective and for the current discussion of *Radon*

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<sup>11</sup> See Baker (2007), p. 170.

<sup>12</sup> See Sinclair (1994), p. 84.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 266.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

*Daughters*. Hodgson's novel is a pioneering work of twentieth-century fantasy and horror fiction and Hodgson's writing in general had a deep impact on writers of horror fiction such as H.P. Lovecraft. The novel consists of a frame narrative and a diary. The former introduces two British gentlemen, the Messrs Tonnison and Berreggnog who in 1877 spend a week's fishing holiday in the West Irish village of Kraithen. During one of their expeditions along the river, they come across a large chasm containing the ruins of a house – the house on the borderland – and discover among the ruins the diary of the previous owner of the house, containing the strange adventures of an anonymous recluse.

As the diary reveals, soon after having moved to the house on the borderland in order to spend the rest of his life there in quiet seclusion with his spinster sister Mary and his faithful dog Pepper, the middle-aged narrator is transported in a vision into an arena, "the plain of silence", which is surrounded by mythological deities such as "Kali, the Hindu goddess of death" or the "ancient Egyptian god Set, or Seth, the Destroyer of Souls."<sup>16</sup> At the centre of the arena is an exact copy of the recluse's own house, the only difference being the copy's enormous size. In his vision the narrator then encounters a large swine-thing. There is a pit next to the house which is inhabited by more swine-like creatures. When the hermit is returned to his study and considers what he has seen, he suddenly realizes that his house has become a space-time capsule. Outside the house time is accelerated and the recluse witnesses the passing of millions of years, which brings about the end of the solar system and eventually the universe. While the universe is coming to an end, souls drift past him, including the soul of the one woman he ever loved. As the universe ends in cold darkness, he finds himself in his study again, with everything gone back to normal and his sister preparing breakfast.

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<sup>16</sup> Hodgson (1908), p. 20.

On encountering the mythological deities, the narrator is gripped by the thought that there was “after all, something in the old heathen worship, something more than the mere deifying of men, animals and elements.”<sup>17</sup> As he examines the deities further, he describes their animation as a “life in death—a something that was by no means life, as we understand it; but rather an inhuman form of existence, that well might be likened to a deathless trance—a condition in which it was possible to imagine their continuing eternally. [...] I grew to wondering whether this might be the immortality of the gods.”<sup>18</sup> “Life in death” already suggests a deification of a dying and resurrected god rather than immortality. As the narrative progresses there are further indications that the deities are created through their violent deaths. It is significant that the deities are on the periphery of the arena. As soon as the recluse moves towards the centre, he encounters the swine thing, a creature that is no longer a god but a hybrid between a human being and a swine. When he moves yet further into the centre and discovers the pit and the swine things, there is a semi-human yell of agony from the pit.<sup>19</sup> When the swine-things attack the recluse’s house, he recognizes that they are “something beyond human; yet in no good sense; but, rather, as something foul and hostile to the *great* and *good* in humanity.”<sup>20</sup> With the move towards the centre of the arena, the narrator thus changes his position from admirer of the heathen deities’ immortality to demonizer of the swine things. There is a continuum between the swine-things at the centre and the deities at the periphery and the narrator’s position oscillates between deification and vilification of the creatures according to their current state of their development from vilified victims to gods.

From the pit he hears “a Babel of swine-talk”, indicating the state of chaotic undifferentiation as found in the sacrificial crisis. Hunted by the swine-creatures, the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

narrator manages to escape into a cellar that is connected by a trap door to the swine-pit. As it starts to rain, the noise from the pit suddenly ceases and the recluse wonders whether the creatures were all drowned.<sup>21</sup> The drowning of the swine-creatures evokes the Gospel accounts of the healing of a man in Gerasa who is possessed by the demon legion, as related in Mark 5, Luke 8 and Matthew 8. Jesus casts out the demon, who is one and many at the same time, into a herd of two thousand pigs which then throw themselves off a cliff and drown in the sea.

It is a strange story, because, when the Gerasenes see the man after being healed, “sitting there, clothed and in his full senses”, rather than rejoicing over his healing, they are afraid and ask Jesus to leave. Girard, in his discussion of the Demons of Gerasa in *The Scapegoat*, explains this strange behaviour by claiming that the Gerasenes depend on the madness of the man.<sup>22</sup> Possession, according to Girard is not an individual phenomenon but is the result of an aggravated mimeticism within the whole community. Before his healing, all efforts by the community to restrain the man have failed. The man again and again manages to escape to the tombs where he throws stones at himself.

But why, Girard asks, would anyone stone himself? In the case of the Gerasenes, according to Girard, physical violence has given way to the violence of psychopathological relationships that is not fatal but is never resolved or ended. The name legion that the demons give themselves suggests that the individual has internalized the crowd. Therefore the man represents the inner-societal tensions of the community and the scapegoat singled out as a cure of these tensions at the same time. For Girard the fact that in the Gospel of Matthew there are actually two demon-possessed men, points to an understanding of possession as representing the basic unit of mimetic relationships, the double that underlies the violence of the crowd. Todd

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>22</sup> All references in the following two paragraphs are to Girard (1986), pp. 170-172 unless otherwise stated.

Sileen, as already observed, also conforms to this pattern of incorporating within himself the one and the many. However, because the Gerasenes no longer actually expel the demon-possessed man by using physical violence but only cast him out socially, he does to himself what the crowd would do to him in archaic violence. Thus the attempts to restrain him and his escape to the tombs assume a ritual character that is necessary for the social balance of the Gerasene community.

By healing the man, Jesus deprives the community of its social and psychological scapegoat. The drowning of the herd of pigs signifies an inversion of the scapegoat mechanism. “Normal relationships are reversed. The crowd should remain on top of the cliff and the victim fall over; instead, in this case, the crowd plunges and the victim is saved. [...] The drowning of the swine has a definitive character; it is an event without a future, except for the person cured by the miracle.”<sup>23</sup> The story of the demons of Gerasa is a prototypical account of an unresolved sacrificial crisis that ends with the self-consumption of the crowd and the survival of the victim. From a Girardian perspective all survivor stories can thus be read as failed expulsions of a victim.

The recluse in *House* inhabits the same position at the margins of society as the demon-possessed man of the Gospel accounts. There are also hints in his account that his strange experiences are the effects of madness. If his account of the end of the universe is taken at face value, it becomes significant that he is the sole survivor of the cosmological apocalypse. On the other hand, if his account is read allegorically, the end of the universe can be taken to signify the end of society because, as Girard remarks, imagery of the end of the world and the cosmos is often used by societies in times of a sacrificial crisis. There is only scant evidence in *House* that this is the case but the slow progression towards the end of the universe is described as a strange loom of blood. Immediately after this description the narrator finds himself “wandering, mentally, amid

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<sup>23</sup> See Girard (1986), p. 179.

an odd chaos of fragmentary modern theories and the old Biblical story of the world's ending", which at least faintly suggests a connection to a societal crisis.<sup>24</sup>

The narrator not only draws an analogy between fragmentary modern theories and the impending collapse of the universe but he finds it hard to think at all: "I find it is useless, to attempt consecutive thought. My brain seems curiously blank."<sup>25</sup> This remark returns the discussion to *Radon Daughters*. It seems that, like the recluse, the narrator of *Radon Daughters* too can no longer think consecutively.

Brian Baker points out that *Radon Daughters* is certainly the most "plotted" and least episodic of Sinclair's novels, endeavouring to create the depth and coherence of a literary novel proper rather than the deliberately fractured forms of Sinclair's other fiction and poetry. He finds it curious, however, that it is nevertheless the densest of all Sinclair's novels and, as Sinclair confesses in *The Verbals*, the most difficult.<sup>26</sup> This is due to the impossibility of narration itself in the novel, as the covert narrator constantly reminds the reader: "He can't shape a coherent narrative from the mess."<sup>27</sup> When Sileen asks Drage-Bell for a few quid to stay on the story, the latter is amused: "*Story?* It's an apocalypse, chum, a freaks' carnival."<sup>28</sup> The novel is a "post-narrative" that "could never be completed".<sup>29</sup>

The ability to tell a coherent story would depend on the expulsion of a scapegoat. Sileen suggests as much when he utters the conviction that "[b]lood sacrifice would restore his capacity for invention" and Drage-Bell thinks the same with Sileen as victim in mind: "The cripple must shape fresher fictions [...]. Pale as something rescued from the waters, he might still be profitably bled."<sup>30</sup> While "bled" in the latter clause is usually understood metaphorically, in the present case it can be taken as referring to a

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<sup>24</sup> See Hodgson (1908), p. 96.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>26</sup> See Baker (2007), p. 162.

<sup>27</sup> See Sinclair (1994), p. 65.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 331, 348.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 356.

literal bleeding of Sileen's expelled body as the basis of literary construction. Such a reading alters the meaning of the preceding sentence: the cripple does not actively shape fictions by writing them but the shaping of fictions, the creation of narrative order depends on the expulsion of Sileen. Expulsion is, however no longer possible: Sileen realizes that "[h]e'd lost the novelist's power to destroy."<sup>31</sup> In *Radon Daughters* the house on the borderland is thus also a "house of expired narratives".<sup>32</sup> Text not only becomes material space, as Baker proposes,<sup>33</sup> but the borderland of material space also becomes text – or rather fails to become text: "Spasms of language [are] ameliorated by the random collisions of the city."<sup>34</sup> Form and structure do not exist in this borderland of undifferentiation that erases all boundaries.<sup>35</sup> Because the protagonists of the novel are incapable of writing themselves into a verifiable Cartesian city through sacrifice,<sup>36</sup> entropic, violent self-consumption is also the consequence at the textual level of the narrative: "Sileen couldn't make the words work. A glossolalic outpouring in which the components achieved some kind of sense, but the sentences, taken as units, fell apart. Blood sang in his ears."<sup>37</sup> The narrator sympathises with the reader for having invested too much to abandon a tedious book.

The narrator realizes that "The Borderland story had to be concluded" before "the borderland becomes a universal condition."<sup>38</sup> In Book Three of *Radon Daughters* "Drage-Bell's Library" it becomes clear why Drage-Bell, the spook, fought to bury all

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 449, 390.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 347. This point is reinforced by the soft lead dust jackets in Drage-Bell's library. The lead protects them from "the siren songs of radon daughters." Michael Ward draws attention to C.S. Lewis' study of the medieval cosmos, *The Discarded Image*. Lewis points out the Saturnine qualities of lead: "In the earth his influence produces lead; in men, the melancholy complexion; in history, disastrous events." (qtd. in Michael Ward, *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis* (Oxford, 2008), p. 192). The omnipresence of lead as a protection against x-rays in *Radon Daughters* thus signifies disaster and therefore fails as protection against radon daughters.

<sup>33</sup> See Baker (2007), p. 62.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 355.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 303.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 42, 91.

transcripts of Hodgson's words.<sup>39</sup> His is the satanic position of the manipulator of the scapegoat mechanism. In accordance with the logic of "violence casting out violence", in the world of Drage-Bell, outrages are pre-planned to keep outrage at bay.<sup>40</sup> These attempts to restore order through the scapegoat expulsion will be discussed later. For the current purposes it is important to note that in order to instigate a new stable system based on scapegoat expulsion, Drage-Bell must repress the revelatory insight of entropic decay of *House*. This insight regards the impossibility of writing a sequel to *House*, not only in the obvious case of a literal understanding of Hodgson's story as ending with the universe, but also when it is understood as an allegory of the collapse of society due to the ineffectiveness of the scapegoat mechanism.

However, in the course of the novel, Sileen and his companions discover the fictitious sequel of Hodgson's novel and are puzzled when they find that it was written before *House*. If the borderland is understood as signifying the condition of the sacrificial crisis, the precession of the sequel can be explained in terms of the cyclical nature of the scapegoat mechanism. There is a hint that connects cyclical history to the scapegoat mechanism in *Radon Daughters*: "The cycle of history had *limped* gratefully back to its point of departure."<sup>41</sup> This remark by the narrator immediately follows a paragraph in which Sileen is described as a "wrongly accused man". As already discussed, limping is a sign of the victim. The sequel of a story that ends with the entropic decay of the universe, if understood as part of a cyclical paradigm, would have to narrate the beginnings of a new culture, expelling the decaying one that has become dysfunctional. The knowledge of the borderland would have to be repressed to allow narrative structure and order back into the text. Thus, paradoxically, the sequel would describe a new order that expels disorder. This is exactly how T.C.P. Hinton, another of Sileen's companions on the road, in his tape diaries describes the finding of the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 411.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 56. emphasis added.

manuscript: “The sequel was written *first* and in a simpler form. [...] I thought it was a fake, too pure.”<sup>42</sup> The cyclical nature of the scapegoat mechanism resolves the problem of the precession of the sequel. As long as the mechanism is intact it is inessential if it was written before or after *House*, as it would occupy the same position of representing order on the cycle of peace and violence.

The fictitious sequel of *House* in *Radon Daughters* thus conforms to the cyclical pattern of order and disorder through exclusion of the knowledge of the borderland. But this is not so in the case of *Radon Daughters* taken as the sequel of *House*. The former is written through the specific lens of the borderland, documenting the entropic decay that becomes universal despite Drage-Bell’s efforts to contain it. As in *Downriver*, the perspective of Sinclair’s protagonists is the middle ground of the sacrificial crisis. But in *Radon Daughters* they are no longer between orders but at the end of order. While Sinclair’s witnesses see through the futility of the scapegoat mechanism in both novels, the illusion of the mechanism still works for some in *Downriver* through the eventual expulsion of “the widow”. The world of simulation that allows the myth of order and progress to continue in *GB84* and the early parts of *Radon Daughters*, is shrinking in the later parts of the latter. Cinema, for example “has crept back into the tentshow from which it emerged.”<sup>43</sup>

When Sileen and his fellow travellers return to London, the former becomes the victim of a strange ritual by “black robed ones”. The narration in the journal of Rhab Adnam is interspersed with extracts from *House*. Adnam perceives “an ashpit overlaid with swine demons, revengers, cultists”. As Gifot, presiding as a high-priest of sorts over the black robed ones, wields the bowie knife, Adnam wonders if he will tear out Sileen’s exhausted heart.<sup>44</sup> But Gifot only cuts off three of Sileen’s scab-infested fingers and “butchers his sickness with swift sure strokes.” It is a botched ritual and, as already

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 295.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 288.

discussed with respect to *Downriver*, another “critical parody of mythologies which place bodily sacrifice at the centre of a narrative of rebirth” to use Baker’s terms again.<sup>45</sup> But here too, Baker’s comment does not go far enough. In this parody not the community is healed through the death of Sileen but the latter is made whole: literally because he is purged of his leprosy and metaphorically because the leprosy representing the transferred social unrest onto the victim is taken away from him. The failed ceremony can be read as an inversion of the scapegoat mechanism, as portrayed in the story of the Demons of Gerasa, which exonerates the victim and returns the problem of violent undifferentiation to the universal borderland of the crowd.

The protagonists’ perception is filtered by this universal borderland. They realize that “[t]here was no ‘House on the Borderland’. A condition had been described, a pathology, *not* a specific location.”<sup>46</sup> In their triangulation of London, Oxford and Cambridge, Sileen, Adnam and T.C.P. Hinton discover everywhere they go the failure of blood sacrifice to restore order and to disperse the violent crowd. Rhab Adnam comments on the Castle Hill in Oxford: “The mound is the city born as man – beheaded, sacrificed.”<sup>47</sup> Faceless numbers are to be sacrificed, the already dead who can die no more.<sup>48</sup> Nothing dies,<sup>49</sup> once the victims are revealed as the foundational basis of order. Further expulsion is no longer possible. Hackney is awash with victims. Because it’s “impossible to nail the right bastard, all of them have to be nailed.”<sup>50</sup> The narrator focalizes Sileen’s thoughts as follows: “It was all too familiar – the cycle of challenge and counter-challenge, the sorry rituals of violence glissading into a show of blood and tears.”<sup>51</sup> The spread of violence to the crowd is rehearsed in a video Sileen watches: “Tops of heads are sliced like onions. The form of the crowd is clearly visible – how it

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<sup>45</sup> See Baker (2007), p. 75.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 442.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 271.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

clusters and darts, surges to escape[.]”<sup>52</sup> These are “terminal crowds”, “high on their own secretions” and devoured by their own violence.<sup>53</sup> The crowd of Ian Bone’s *Class War* demands to hang John Williams, the Ratcliffe vampire, and to hang the dead men. The futility of the demand is recognised by the earlier reference to Williams as the “Radcliffe Highway scapegoat”.<sup>54</sup>

The result of this failure to channel violence onto a scapegoat is not a *fin de siècle* but a *fin de tout*.<sup>55</sup> Sileen, in his X-ray visions, experiencing decay in his own body, sees what had always been there: psychotic nature on the march and the nifty logo of apocalypse.<sup>56</sup> Read from a Girardian perspective, apocalypse had always been there, as the resolution of the sacrificial crisis rests on a double illusion. While the restoration of order based on that illusion is real, the hidden logic of the scapegoat mechanism has always been the self-destructive logic of the crowd. Once it is revealed, order as an outcome of the sacrificial crisis is no longer possible: the use of violence only expands the crisis until it reaches apocalyptic dimensions and eventually leads to decay in the self-consumption of the crowd. Sileen and his companions offer the reader a “grand tour of entropy”.<sup>57</sup> They are forerunners of apocalypse seeing “torched cities”, “forests on fire”, scorch marks where the Christian martyrs have been toasted and smelling “the tragic odour of decay.”<sup>58</sup> Chaos is the grand-design of the scapegoat mechanism and the experience of the expelled “Sleeping-Bag vagrants and scavengers” becomes the norm, in the post-apocalyptic world that eventually will dissolve into nothingness.<sup>59</sup>

Book three of *Radon Daughters* narrates one last attempt to restore order through violent expulsion, reveals the root of the sacrificial crisis in mimetic desire and points to an alternative way out of the crisis. In one of the subplots of the novels, Helen

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 189, 102.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 102, 48.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 380.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 244.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 100, 99, 158, 304.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 443, 177

is trained by East London low-life character Nicholas Tarten, the “Maltese pimp”, for a boxing bout against Andi Kuschka. As the fight goes underway, it becomes clear that

“they are more evenly matched than it first appeared. The one in white was perhaps the one with the dark wig – but which was that? She’s slimmer, but taller. 5’10” against 5’9”. (It could be the other way about.) Nothing in it. Similar reaches. Not a lot, contrary to rumour, in the weight. Black’s slimmed down, White was bulked up through diet and hard training.”<sup>60</sup>

In preparation for the fight, the rivals become interchangeable, differences between them are erased. The theme of conflictive undifferentiation and fluctuating identity is represented in *Radon Daughters* through the trope of Luke Howard’s nineteenth-century breakthrough in the classification of clouds: “Individual identities are in the clouds, provisional.” Helen walks among the hierarchies of Luke Howard’s clouds. “Clouds were to be analyzed like broken minds. [...] They fabulate – crease fold, brag, dissolve. Luke Howard’s wispy watercolours illustrate tendencies as distinct as Freud’s case histories.” Eventually also the cloud hierarchies are dissolved and even the sky becomes unsteady, mirroring the dissolution of stable identities in the sacrificial crisis: “clouds [are] on the charge, like a flock of decapitated sheep. Animals yelped and barked. They were killing each other out there.”<sup>61</sup>

The spectacle of the fight is supposed to keep the audience in check: “the lynch mob. Pandemonium. Factions splitting like rogue cells.”<sup>62</sup> The fight becomes a ritual with Andi as designated victim. Everything therefore depends on the scripted outcome – Helen’s winning of the fight: “Andi, putting Helen down, will plunge the universe into ten thousand nights of unfathomed evil.”<sup>63</sup> But Helen and Andi disregard the script and deliberately disappoint the bloodthirsty crowd: “Andi drops her hands. The women embrace – talking to each other, rubbing cheeks.” Sileen and Helen are rescued from the

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 408.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 382, 165, 390.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 408.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 410.

ensuing pandemonium by helicopter. These two designated victims both escape the fate of becoming sacrificial victims and the clutches of Drage-Bell and flee to Ireland on a boat hosting a science-fiction convention.

In its final pages *Radon Daughters* turns into a quasi-love story, opening a possibility of escaping the apocalyptic, entropic self-consumption of the crowd. Sileen and Helen are “lashed close together in the self-serving conspiracy of love.” Sileen learns “to enter into this new, collaborative existence – to sustain and depend upon another human being, a female.”<sup>64</sup> Only the self-giving love for an other will evade the cyclical violence of the scapegoat mechanism that escalates into violence without end and the violent appetite of the crowd. Sileen is freed from the wish for anonymity that only the mindless crowd can fulfil through loving and being loved by an other. This again evokes Canetti’s remark in *Crowds and Power* that the only alternative to overcoming the burdens of distance through the crowd is a genuine approaching of an other.

In *House* and in *Radon Daughters* the deaths of the universe and society coincide. But they do not have to. As the narrator, alluding to Luke Howard suggests: “Mankind, though fated, *could* live usefully upon the earth.”<sup>65</sup> *Radon Daughters* is thus a cautionary tale, suggesting that averting the apocalypse of social entropy is possible. But it depends on the overcoming of mimetic rivalry and the foregoing of violence as a peace-producing mechanism.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 413.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

## 5.2 Margaret Atwood

As Earl G. Ingersoll points out in “Survival in Margaret Atwood’s Novel *Oryx and Crake*”, Margaret Atwood has emphasised in the publicising of *Oryx and Crake* (henceforth *Oryx*) that the novel functions as a “book end” to *The Handmaid’s Tale*.<sup>1</sup> But rather than documenting a totalitarian regime as *The Handmaid’s Tale* does, *Oryx* takes up the theme of the post-apocalyptic “Last Man” pioneered by Mary Shelley.<sup>2</sup> It will be argued that both novels read together reveal the gradual exhaustion of the scapegoat mechanism, culminating in social entropy and the potential end of the human race in *Oryx*. Furthermore, the novel unmask the apparent sufficiency of the last man and forces the main protagonist Jimmy to encounter the other – and thus to make a choice between negative and positive reciprocity.

### 5.2.1 *The Handmaid’s Tale*

*The Handmaid’s Tale* consists of the first-person account of Offred, a “handmaid” in the fictive totalitarian state of Gilead. Her narrative is completed by “Historical Notes” from the twelfth symposium on Gileadean Studies, held at Cambridge University in the year 2195 – long after the collapse of Gilead. In the Historical Notes, the reader learns in retrospect that Offred’s account was recorded on audio cassettes, thus originally oral rather than written, and subsequently edited by the chauvinistic Professor Piexioto, two centuries later. As Dominick M. Grace observes in “*The Handmaid’s Tale*: ‘Historical Notes’ and Documentary Subversion”, the Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Earl G. Ingersoll, “Survival in Margaret Atwood’s Novel *Oryx and Crake*”, *Extrapolation* 45.2 (2004), p. 162.

<sup>2</sup> See Parrinder (2002), p. 27.

destabilize the reader's sense of Offred's narrative as history.<sup>3</sup> While the objectivity of Offred's account is an intriguing issue which shall be duly considered later in the discussion, the question what the reader can learn about Gilead from Atwood's construction of Offred's account is more pressing. Coral Ann Howells draws attention to Atwood's comment on the solitary diary writer Doctor Glas in a novel by Hjalmar Söderberg: "But the truth...is that the writing is not by Doctor Glas[.] It's by Hjalmar Söderberg, and it's addressed to us".<sup>4</sup>

Gilead is a highly stratified society, with clearly delineated social roles. The term "Handmaid" refers to surrogate mothers, whose sole purpose is to bear children for the "Commanders" and their Wives – the social elite of Gilead. Handmaids are women, who, when Gilead was still the USA, had already borne a child and whose chances of giving birth again are therefore considered high by the Christian-fundamentalist authorities of Gilead. The intercourse ritual, in which the handmaids rest their heads in the laps of the Commanders' Wives while the Commanders are having sex with them, is inspired by the Biblical account in Genesis 29 and 30 of Jacob and his two wives Leah and Rachel. The latter are interlocked in a competition of who will bear Jacob the most children. At first Leah is ahead with four, which prompts the barren Rachel out of jealousy to persuade Jacob to have sex with her maidservant Bilhah. The latter bears Jacob two sons, after which it is Leah's turn to be jealous. She imitates the Bilhah arrangements and forces her maidservant to have sex with Jacob. It is noteworthy that Jacob's twelve sons, which are to become the founding fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel are born as the result of the mimetic rivalry between Leah and Rachel.<sup>5</sup> As will become clear later, envy thus becomes the secret foundation of Gilead, as the literalists

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<sup>3</sup> Dominick, M. Grace, "The Handmaid's Tale: 'Historical Notes' and Documentary Subversion", *Science Fiction Studies* 25.3 (1998), p. 483.

<sup>4</sup> Coral Ann Howells, "Margaret Atwood's Dystopian Visions", In Cora Ann Howells ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 173.

<sup>5</sup> The mimetic rivalry between Leah and Rachel continues to haunt the tribes of Israel, as for example the millennial prophecy concerning the Branch of Jesse in the Book of Isaiah shows: "Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim." (Isaiah 11:13). The tribe of Judah descends from Leah, whereas Ephraim is with Manasseh part of the tribe of Joseph, which descends from Rachel.

of the Christian-fundamentalist Gilead unwittingly import this arrangement of mimetic rivalry into the societal structure, in the hope of increasing fertility.

Assigning certain women to the specialized social function of giving birth, points to the major problem in Gilead: infertility. The latter is an indirect cause of Western consumerism, as Offred's account reveals: "The air got too full, once, of chemicals, rays, radiation, the water swarmed with toxic molecules, all of that takes years to clean up, and meanwhile they creep into your body, camp out in your fatty cells."<sup>6</sup> The causes of infertility are the side-effects of the quest for immortality through the promise of objects.<sup>7</sup> And while Offred nostalgically recalls the consumerist freedom of the pre-Gilead US when given a *Vogue* by the Commander, she also realizes that there is continuity between the two systems:

[T]he lawns of Gilead are] like the beautiful pictures they used to print in the magazines about homes and gardens and interior decoration. There is the same absence of people, the same air of being asleep. The street is almost like a museum, or a street in a model town constructed to show the way people used to live. As in those pictures, those museums, those model towns, there are no children.<sup>8</sup>

Offred remarks further: "Nothing changes instantaneously: in a gradually heating bathtub you'd be boiled to death before you knew it."<sup>9</sup> Reflecting on the introduction of computerized banking and the coup d'état of the Christian fundamentalists she realizes: "that's how they were able to do it, in the way they did, all at once, without anyone knowing beforehand. If there had still been portable money, it would have been more difficult."<sup>10</sup>

As already noted with respect to *GB84*, the computerization of banking introduces the free-flowing, virtual circulation of signs and detaches the sign from any concrete material reality. It is also conducive to the postmodern decentring of the

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<sup>6</sup> Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (London, 1985), p. 122.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.182.

subject and the dissolution of fixed identities. In Girardian terms it signifies the loss of differences as found in the sacrificial crisis. The coup d'état of the Christian Fundamentalist is made possible because of the total circulation of signs, the total connection of the network society. At the same time, paradoxically, fundamentalism is reacting against the dissolution of fixed identities and hierarchies and attempts to re-introduce a fixed order into society.

David S. Hogsette has pointed out that Piexoto's Historical Notes "provide readers with an example of how not to read Atwood's novel."<sup>11</sup> It is certainly true that remarks like "we must be cautious about passing moral judgement upon the Gileadeans" or "Gileadean society was under a good deal of pressure" relativise the totalitarian violence and oppression revealed in Offred's narrative.<sup>12</sup> However, Piexoto's comments reveal important structural prerequisites for the rise of totalitarianism in the world of the novel. In *Battling to the End* Girard remarks on totalitarianism: "We no longer confront a clearly demarcated enemy. [...] We have entered a world of pure reciprocity [...]. War has acquired an autonomy that politics will be able to control less and less unless it goes one up and becomes totalitarian."<sup>13</sup> For Girard capitalism is a means of "dissimulating reciprocity" of avoiding the supreme law of the duel. Trade can therefore control war up to a certain point.<sup>14</sup> Gilead has moved beyond the point where capitalism can keep reciprocity in check, where the duel can be deferred through trade and has entered a world of total war, as Offred recognizes: "First, the front lines. They are not lines, really: the war seems to be going on in many places at once."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> David S. Hogsette, "Margaret Atwood's Rhetorical Epilogue in *The Handmaid's Tale*: The Reader's Role in Empowering Offred's Speech Act", *Critique*, 38.4 (1997), p. 263.

<sup>12</sup> See Atwood (1985), p. 314f.

<sup>13</sup> See Girard (2010), p. 68.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57ff.

<sup>15</sup> See Atwood (1985), p. 92.

Because the world has entered a state of total war in *The Handmaid's Tale*, inner-societal negative reciprocity cannot be displaced onto an outside enemy and order cannot be restored through the winning of a war. Inner-societal order is therefore imposed through a totalitarian stratification of the Gileadean society. There is abundant evidence in the novel that the purpose of the total codification of human interaction in Gilead is to prevent the escalation of inner-societal mimetic conflict. Ironically, total stratification reinforces conflictive mimesis: Offred envies the Commander's Wife's knitting and in her house everybody also envies everybody for something. She reflects on instances of murder of pregnant Handmaids by Wives: "Jealousy, it must have been, eating her up." When one of Offred's fellow handmaids gives birth and Wives and Handmaids gather ceremoniously, "envy radiates from them". In a world where the birth of children is a rare event, it might be argued that it is scarcity as such that produces envy. However, scarcity itself is a construct, as the Handmaids are taught that "a thing is valued only if it is rare and hard to get." Thus everyone is doing things to look good. Every act is done for show. Gilead is a society of pure conflictive mimeticism as Offred's perplexity over her own jealousy reveals: "Partly I was jealous of her; but how could I be jealous of a woman so obviously dried-up and unhappy? You can only be jealous of someone who has something you think you ought to have yourself. Nevertheless I was jealous."<sup>16</sup>

Envy and jealousy are thus not rooted in the rare object but in a fundamental human trait Atwood identifies by having Offred ask the rhetorical question: "How did we learn it, this talent for insatiability?"<sup>17</sup> A desire for a position higher up the pecking order of Gilead reflects the lack of being of the current position and at the same time is fuelled by "this talent for insatiability". Human interaction itself becomes dangerous and in order to dispel the danger of mimetic conflict, interaction is kept to a strictly

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 23, 57, 21, 136, 124, 41, 170.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

codified minimum. This is the reason why “[f]riendships were suspicious” and why the handmaids avoid each other during the mealtime lineups.<sup>18</sup> Human beings become isolated in their social roles and contact between the different social classes is discouraged. Offred feels so isolated that she hungers to “commit the act of touch.”<sup>19</sup>

Strict categorisation extends itself to also include language. Gilead is founded on a literalist reading of certain Bible passages, particularly, as already mentioned, the passage in Genesis 29 and 30. Deborah Hooker in her article “(Fl)orality, gender, and the environmental ethos of Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*” identifies an Old Testament hostility towards the environment rooted in a presumed androcentric privilege.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, according to Hooker, it is monotheism that lays the ground for writing’s analytic, dissecting tendencies and the dualistic epistemology bolstered by alphabetical literacy.<sup>21</sup> She detects resistance to this system in Offred’s frequent use of floral images and preference for oral language. Hooker interprets Offred’s “(fl)orality” as a return to a polytheistic gestalt which is not so aligned with masculinity but restores the connection to the mysterious female forces of fertility rites.<sup>22</sup>

There are several objections that need to be raised with respect to Hooker’s argument. Dorota Filipczak has argued in “Is there No Balm in Gilead? – Biblical Intertext in the *Handmaid’s Tale*” that “[p]atriarchal interpretation does not always result from the Biblical texts. It may arise from the sexist assumptions of the interpreter.”<sup>23</sup> Hooker clearly neglects “the fact that the biblical texts talk to each other and sometimes deconstruct each other.” Filipczak’s comment on the novel can be adapted to Hooker’s interpretation of the latter. Her reading “enforces the stereotype of

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>20</sup> Deborah Hooker, “(Fl)orality, gender, and the environmental ethos of Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*.” *Twentieth Century Literature* 52.3 (2006), par. 34.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., par. 5, 8, 38.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., par. 5, 7, 11, 49.

<sup>23</sup> Dorota Filipczak, “Is there No Balm in Gilead? – Biblical Intertext in the *Handmaid’s Tale*”, *Journal of Literature & Theology* 7. 2 (1993), p. 182.

a monolithic text destroying its victims.’<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, there is evidence in the novel that glaringly contradicts Hooker’s argument. Her claim that the efficient alphabetic literacy replaces Semitic pictographs, which express “haptic harmony” and are therefore polyvalent, is irreconcilable with the following passage:

The store has a huge wooden sign outside it, in the shape of a golden lily; Lilies in the Field, it’s called. You can see the place, under the lily, where the lettering was painted out, when they decided that even the names of shops were too much temptation for us. Now places are known by their signs alone.<sup>25</sup>

In this case it is the regime which reverts from alphabetic to pictorial signification. The obvious conclusion is that the inverse of Hooker’s argument is true in the novel: the pictogram, being closer to speech, is a more adequate tool for oppression than the written, alphabetic signifier.

Hooker relies on Walter Ong’s postulated anteriority of orality over writing in *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982). But as Derrida has pointed out in “Plato’s Pharmacy”, and as already discussed with respect to Sinclair, the anteriority of speech over writing can only be reconstructed *ex post facto* by a culture which is always already a culture of writing. Writing, according to Derrida, is the supplement, the expelled trace of speech. In a Girardian reading of Derrida’s essay, the supplement is of course related to the real, expelled victim. It is noteworthy that one of the words that Offred forms when she and the Commander transgress the rules of Gilead by playing a game of scrabble is “limp”.<sup>26</sup> As with Todd Sileen, the word “limp” is a sign of the victim, relating the scrabble signifiers to the expelled referential body of a scapegoat. It is the exposure to writing that creates the possibility of resistance against totalitarian categorisation for Offred: “This is freedom, an eyeblink of it. *Limp*, I spell.” Writing as an expelled supplement of speech in the Derridean sense, is ambiguous. It

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>25</sup> See Atwood (1985), p. 35

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

resists categorisation and therefore is a tool for subversion of and resistance to the rigid categorisations of Gilead.

In the Girardian theory of the origin of language, the expelled victim functions as the source of differentiation and stable order. The victim absorbs the ambiguity as demonized and subsequently divinized being. If the Bible gradually deconstructs the single victim mechanism as the origin of culture, it is not surprising that “the Bible is kept locked up, the way people once kept tea locked up, so the servants wouldn’t steal it. It is an incendiary device: who knows what we’d make of it, if we ever got our hands on it? We can be read to from, by him, but we cannot read.”<sup>27</sup> Again, contrary to Hooker’s argument, it is the inaccessibility of the written word that allows for totalitarian subjection.

If the Bible is taken as the repository of the knowledge of the scapegoating mechanism, then the point can be made that the leaders of Gilead try to suppress that knowledge in order to make full use of the mechanism for sustaining a rigidly stratified society. And at this point too objections must be raised to another of Hooker’s arguments, namely that the polytheistic gestalt and return to female fertility rites are spaces of resistance against Gilead. Filipczak again offers a view that is more in accordance with the text. She identifies the intercourse ceremonies between the Commanders and the Handmaids, in which the Wives hold the Handmaids’ hands, as ritualistic and aligns them with the pagan fertility rites of the Baal Peor ceremony, criticised by the Prophet Hosea:

The motif of the fertility cult appears in *The Handmaid’s Tale* in the guise of surrogate motherhood whose ideological, pseudo-religious aspects are strongly reminiscent of Lebensborn in Nazi Germany. [...] Intercourse ceremonies for Commanders and handmaids can be termed ritualistic because they are sanctioned by the state, and are normally preceded by a kind of religious service. [...] The goal of the pagan ceremony was to ensure the fertility of the newly gained land by resorting to Baal.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.

<sup>28</sup> See Filipczak (1993), p. 176.

Piexoto also suggests that “There are echoes here of the fertility rites of early Earth-goddess cults. [...] Gilead was, although undoubtedly patriarchal in form, occasionally matriarchal in content[.]”<sup>29</sup> Although he fails to fully understand his own observation, it cannot simply be dismissed as a meaningless remark occasioned by his chauvinism. As Shirley Newman, for example points out, the novel is also Atwood’s criticism of feminist or doctrinaire separatism.<sup>30</sup> Madeleine Davies intersects the novel with Hélène Cixous’ seminal essay “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1975). Reading Offred’s experience through the lens of the latter is a fruitful endeavour, for example when Offred compares the relation of her body to the earth: “I sink down into my body as into a swamp, fenland, where only I know the footing. Treacherous ground, my own territory. I become the earth I set my ear against, for rumours of the future.”<sup>31</sup> In the latter quotation it can be argued that her body, the “treacherous ground”, serves her as a resource to write *écriture féminine* in the Cixousian sense against Gilead. Davies, however, also points out that Atwood refuses Cixous’ idealizing totalities.<sup>32</sup> In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, utopian feminism endangers feminist liberalism, as Fiona Tolan has claimed<sup>33</sup>, and, once it is realized, it is revealed – just as any other utopia – to be dystopic. The Handmaids are trained and supervised by the Aunts, a matriarchal elite within Gilead. Offred addresses her criticism of the aunts to her mother, a staunch feminist: “Mother, I think. Wherever you may be. Can you hear me? You wanted a women’s culture. Well now there is one. It isn’t what you meant, but it exists.”<sup>34</sup>

The unreachable and nameless primordial ‘space’ of the Platonic “chora”, as already pointed out in the introductory chapter, has been appropriated by feminist critics

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<sup>29</sup> See Atwood (1985), p. 320.

<sup>30</sup> Shirley Neuman, “‘Just a Backlash’: Margaret Atwood, Feminism, and *The Handmaid’s Tale*”, *University of Toronto Quarterly* 75.3 (2006), p. 858.

<sup>31</sup> See Atwood (1985), p. 83.

<sup>32</sup> Madeleine Davies, “Margaret Atwood’s Female Bodies”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, Coral Ann Howells, ed. (Cambridge, 2006), p. 60.

<sup>33</sup> Fiona Tolan, “Feminist Utopias and Questions of Liberty: Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* as critique of second wave feminism”, *Women: A Cultural Review* 16.1 (2005), p. 25.

<sup>34</sup> See Atwood (1985), p. 137.

like Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray as a “womb-like, nurturing space of origin of harmony” similar to Offred’s body as a swamp in that it resists closure. Paul Fiddes furthermore writes how “they have resisted the Nietzschean association of desire with violence and have imagined this space as semiotic, preceding linguistic symbols.<sup>35</sup> But as already discussed in the example of “Lilies in the Field”, the pre-linguistic, semiotic realm too can be a space of violence. In a Girardian framework the chora has as its origin the unanimous crowd. In such a reading the resistance to closure of the chora is due to the undifferentiated crowd stage before the expulsion of the victim. Filipeczak, relates the fertility rites of Gilead, which like the chora open a door to a primordial space to the ceremony of human sacrifice in the novel called “Participation”. The denunciation of human sacrifice is one of the most common entreaties of the Old Testament prophets, which again complicates Hooker’s dichotomy between a supposed Old Testament based “autocratic monotheism” and a benign polytheistic world. It is a further piece of evidence for the Bible as an incendiary device and why Gilead represents a deliberate, reductionary misreading of the Bible which rather aligns it with the world of pagan human sacrifice than monotheism.

With “Participation”, described towards the end of Offred’s account, the reader is introduced to the secret heart of Gilead. Participation consists of the lapidation of Gilead’s political enemies by a particular caste of the state, the handmaids in the instance described by Offred. She reflects on the ritual as follows:

It’s a mistake to hang back too obviously in any group like this; it stamps you as lukewarm, lacking in zeal. There’s an energy building here, a murmur, a tremor of readiness and anger. The bodies tense, the eyes brighter, as if aiming. [...] Two Guardians [...] come forward [...] [b]etween them they half-carry, half-drag a third man. His face is cut and bruised[.] This doesn’t look like a face but like an unknown vegetable, a mangled bulb or tuber, something that’s grown wrong. “This man”, says Aunt Lydia, “has been convicted of rape.” [...] A sigh goes up from us; despite myself I feel my hands clench. It is too much, this violation. [...] It’s true, there is a bloodlust, I want to tear, gouge, rend. [...] Aunt Lydia waits a moment; then she gives a little smile and raises her whistle to her lips. We hear it, shrill and silver, an echo from a volleyball game of long ago. [...] There’s a surge

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<sup>35</sup> Fiddes, (2000), p. 242.

forward, like a crowd at a rock concert in the former time, when the doors opened, that urgency coming like a wave through us. The air is bright with adrenalin, we are permitted anything and this is freedom, in my body also, I'm reeling, red spreads everywhere[.] [...] He has become an it. [...] But also I'm hungry. This is monstrous, but nevertheless it's true. Death makes me hungry. [...] I want to go to bed, make love, right now. [...] Things are back to normal. How can this be *normal*? But compared with this morning, it is normal.<sup>36</sup>

Participation provides an institutionalized space for venting the accumulated violent potentials of the mimetic rivalry suppressed in the totalitarian system. Scapegoating allows Offred to perceive Gilead as “normal” and makes her existence bearable. The rock-concert simile is yet another hint at the continuity between the pre-Gilead consumerist world and Gilead. While the victims are not deified in Gilead, their expulsion still has the effect of sacred violence to maintain the order in society. As Piexoto recognises: “Scapegoats have been notoriously useful throughout history[.] [...] So popular and effective did this practice become that it was regularized in the middle period, when it took place four times a year, on solstices and equinoxes.”<sup>37</sup> As usual with Piexoto's Historical Notes, while they are factually accurate, he fails to grasp their true meaning. The increase in frequency of Participation suggests an interpretation diametrically opposed to Piexoto's. If the ritual were effective in exhausting the mimetic tensions, it would not have to be repeated so often. The increase in rituals point rather to a growing inefficiency of the mechanism. The system is overheated and its disintegration imminent. The very fact that Offred is able to question the normality produced through expulsion, is evidence that the mechanism fails to work to full effect. Piexoto too recognises the functioning of the mechanism but fails to see that the very ability to perceive the mechanism is a sign of its disintegration. The architects of Gilead fail to institute a functioning scapegoat mechanism because they are not able to hide it. Girard writes:

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 289ff.

<sup>37</sup> See Atwood (1985), p. 320.

Centuries were needed to demystify medieval persecutions; a few years suffice to discredit contemporary persecutors. Even if some totalitarian system were to control the entire planet tomorrow, it would not succeed in making its own myth, or the magical aspect of its persecution, prevail.”<sup>38</sup>

From Piexoto’s Notes the reader knows that Gilead eventually perished but it is not made clear in the Notes what the reasons for its downfall were. Filipczak draws again on a Biblical analogy to account for the Gileadean “decreation”:

[T]hrough the end of human fertility, Ephraim will face a convincing rebuttal of their devotion to Baal’. [...] The decreation starts with the general barrenness of nature, which signifies the withdrawal of divine Grace.[...] Such is the condition of Gilead in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, where sterility and general shortage of food result from the changes in an environment contaminated by nuclear fall-out, the world sliding into slow decreation.<sup>39</sup>

But sterility, food shortage and changes in the environment do not simply occur. At least for sterility, the novel through Piexoto’s account suggests an origin in conflictive mimesis: “[M]any of the Commanders – had come in contact with a sterility-causing virus that was developed by secret pre-Gilead gene-splicing experiments with mumps, and which was intended for insertion into the supply of caviar used by top officials in Moscow.”<sup>40</sup> Because the state of war, as noted earlier, does not allow Gilead to demarcate a clear enemy, conflictive mimesis migrates just as in *GB84* to the inside. While rivalry and envy are kept in check for a while through scapegoating violence, there are a few hints in the Notes that the end of Gilead is related to an intensification of conflictive mimesis – which indirectly points to a growing inefficiency of scapegoating: for example when Piexoto comments on rivalries within the regime: “Like most Gilead Commanders who were later purged, he considered his position to be above attack. The style of Middle Gilead was more cautious.”<sup>41</sup> If scapegoating were still effective of deflecting conflictive mimesis, Gilead’s elite would not have turned against itself.

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<sup>38</sup> See Girard (1986), p. 201.

<sup>39</sup> See Filipczak (1993, 176f

<sup>40</sup> See Atwood (1985), p. 321.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 322.

Before turning to *Oryx*, the question of Offred's objectivity with respect to her historical situation has to be addressed. Dominick M. Grace draws attention to David Ketterer's observation that Atwood adopts a cyclical rather than a linear model in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Grace concludes that through the "Historical Notes" the reader leaps forward two hundred years and discovers

a society much like our own pre-Gileadean society, which suggests a cyclical rather than linear model of history, and we discover in that society that the extreme repression of Gilead has ended, so the apparently essentialist model is replaced by a materialist model, one that suggests that Gilead is neither inevitable nor permanent.<sup>42</sup>

As Grace furthermore rightly points out, Offred's essentialist, linear account, suggesting the inevitability of oppression, clashes with Piexoto's retrospective, cyclical account of oppression. But of course, how could Offred not see oppression as inevitable, as for her personally it has indeed become inevitable? Her account is objectively correct but its validity is limited to Gilead. Likewise, Piexoto cannot but see history as cyclical, in the clearer light of his own day.<sup>43</sup>

It will become clear in the discussion of *Oryx* that these two views are two sides of the same coin, if one adopts the Girardian view of history as the growing inefficiency of the cyclical scapegoat mechanism which potentially leads to apocalyptic violence and a potential linear end of history. Piexoto views history as cyclical, because, as already pointed out, he is blind to the growing inefficiency of the scapegoat mechanism. Offred's side of the coin, however, offers a view on history that, while leading to an end of history, is not exactly linear but rather spiral due to the growing inefficiency of the scapegoat mechanism. Her view thus comprises and criticizes both a strictly linear and a cyclical view of history. It is precisely Offred's position as victim that allows her to perceive both sides of the coin. Coomi S. Vevaina in "Margaret Atwood and History"

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<sup>42</sup> See Grace (1998), p. 483f.

<sup>43</sup> See Atwood (1985), p. 324.

quotes Atwood's view on history: "History is natural selection. [...] Only the mutations of the strong survive. The weak, the anonymous, leave few marks...[.]"<sup>44</sup>

It is striking that, to illustrate Atwood's point, Vevaina quotes from Atwood's narrative poem "Half-Hanged Mary" (1995) which fits Girard's category of a "text of persecution" like a glove and provides further evidence that Atwood can be read as a theorist of the consequences of scapegoating violence.<sup>45</sup> The poem re-imagines the case of Mary Webster, who was accused in the 1680s in Massachusetts of witchcraft and was hanged from a tree. She was left all night hanging but surprisingly survived and lived for another fourteen years. The poem is Mary's first-person account of her hanging. Occupying the position of victim, she perceives the connection between her role as scapegoat and deified victim: "Up I go like / [...] a goddess, old original, / who once took blood in return for food. [...] / their own evil turned inside out like a glove, and me wearing it." As a deified victim she absorbs good and evil as on the one hand she cured a baby but flushed out another one of a woman's body. As she struggles overnight against death, she fights the temptation to die "to become a martyr in reverse". If "martyr" is read in the Girardian sense of becoming a witness of the scapegoat mechanism, then to become a martyr in reverse means that if she were to die, the mechanism would remain veiled. But during her struggle she refuses to take on the role of scapegoat: "a crime I will not acknowledge". As the townsfolk discover to their horror the next morning that Mary is still alive, she becomes their accuser: "Now I only need to look / out at them through my sky-blue eyes. They see their own ill will / staring them in the forehead". Because she fails to absorb the guilt of the community she becomes a witch in the sense that her very existence is a constant reminder of the community's guilt. "Before, I was not a witch. But now I am one." Through her survival

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<sup>44</sup> Qtd. in Coomi S. Vevaina, "Margaret Atwood and History", in Coral Ann Howells, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 89.

<sup>45</sup> Margaret Atwood, "Half-Hanged Mary", *Morning in the Burnt House* (London, 1995). pp. 58-59.

her position as innocent scapegoat rises to the consciousness of the people: expulsion becomes an impossibility: “you can’t execute me twice for the same thing”. The process of violent restitution is in plain sight and the poem leaves the community in the unresolved state of the sacrificial crisis.

### 5.2.2 *Oryx and Crake*

Coral Ann Howells has pointed to an important difference between *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *Oryx*: “Offred is imprisoned in a domestic disaster situation where she is always aware of a world beyond Gilead [...], whereas *Oryx and Crake* shifts the emphasis to a world ruined by global warming and pollution, [...] where no alternative framework is available.”<sup>46</sup> The primary difference between the novels lies therefore not so much in the kind of apocalypse or decreation but in its size. The latter is also the solution to the problem of linear or cyclical history. In *The Handmaid’s Tale* history appears cyclical because the apocalypse is limited to Gilead. Rebirth of society is possible because there is an outside world uncontaminated by the totalitarian arrangements of Gilead. But it is linear – i.e. it ends in nothingness – within Gilead. In *Oryx* the crisis has gone global. In a sense Gilead has enlarged itself to include the whole world. There is, as already pointed out by Dumouchel, no outside to the globalized crisis.

The global size of the crisis hints also at a mutation of totalitarianism between the two novels. Political state repression has been replaced by the soft fascism of capitalist, multinational corporations and their advocated consumerism. The world of *Oryx* is rigidly divided between rich and poor. The latter live in the “pleeblands”,

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<sup>46</sup> See Howells (2006), p. 162.

Atwood's version of Piercy's "glop", whereas the former live in hermetically sealed compounds, connected to each other by sterile transport corridors.

The non-linear narrative of two boys growing up in a world exclusively functioning according to the logic of profit maximization, is told by one of them, Jimmy, who, after the apocalypse, changes his name to Snowman. His childhood friend Glenn, is, for reasons to be explained later, referred to as Crake throughout most of the novel. Unlike Jimmy, whose talents lie more in the arts and humanities, Crake is a highly gifted scientist. In the materialist global society of the novel, the latter's talents are valuable assets, whereas Jimmy's are regarded as inferior and trivial. Consequently Crake enters the prestigious Watson-Crick Institute, which is "like going to Harvard before it was drowned", whereas Jimmy attends the underfunded and dilapidated Martha Graham Academy. Watson-Crick is a wealthy university for "brilliant weirdos, demi-autistic, track tunnel-vision minds" who are later literally auctioned off to multinational pharmaceutical companies like "HelthWyzer". One of the few careers open to Jimmy lies in advertising: "Window-dressing was what he'd be doing – decorating the cold, hard, numerical real world in flossy 2-D verbiage."<sup>47</sup>

Rather than serving the general utopian enlightenment goal of progress, and in the case of pharmaceutical companies specifically the progress in eradicating diseases, the pharmaceutical companies have turned into a wealth-producing machinery. Crake breaks the "cold, hard, numerical real world" down for Jimmy:

Now, suppose you're an outfit called HelthWyzer. Suppose you make your money out of drugs and procedures that cure sick people, or else – better – that make it impossible for them to get sick in the first place. [...] So what are you going to need, sooner or later?" [...] After you've cured everything going. [...] So, you'd need more sick people. Or else – and it might be the same thing – more diseases. [...] There's a whole secret unit working on nothing else. They put the hostile bioforms into their vitamin pills – their HelthWyzer over-the-counter premium brand, you know? [...] Naturally they develop the antidotes at the same time as they're customizing the bugs, but they hold those in reserve, they practise the economics of scarcity, so they're guaranteed high profits.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (London, 2003), pp. 203, 228, 221.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246ff.

In accord with Dumouchel's hypothesis, scarcity is a social construct rather than a natural fact. Sickness increases the divide between rich and poor and in Crake's words, thus causes "wealth to flow from the sick to the well. From patients to doctors, from clients to cure-peddlers. Money osmosis, you might call it."<sup>49</sup>

*Oryx* is also, as Shannon Hengen has pointed out, Atwood's reminder of the importance of the imagination and thus of the arts as companions to science.<sup>50</sup> Because of the separation of the former from the latter, the scientists are blind to the moral implications of their research. Watson-Crick is nicknamed "Asperger's U." because its students, as J. Brooks Bouson observes, evince symptoms similar to the "high-functioning type of autism sometimes called the 'little professor' syndrome, characterized by narrowly focused, obsessional interests and prodigious feats of memory, but also poor social skills and a lack of empathy."<sup>51</sup> In addition to constructing scarcity on the medication market, the pharmaceutical companies thus exploit the "borderline geniuses and polymaths"<sup>52</sup>, as Hengen further points out, in order to generate more turnover by feeding the human dream of extending life through technoscience.<sup>53</sup>

As a child Jimmy witnesses a quarrel between his parents, both scientists, about ethics and science:

"Don't you remember the way we used to talk, everything we wanted to do? Making life better for people – not just people with money. You used to be so . . . you had ideals, then." [...] "Be that as it may, there's research and there's research. What you're doing – this pig brain thing. You're interfering with the building blocks of life. It's immoral. It's . . . sacrilegious." [...] "It's just proteins, you know that! There's nothing sacred about cells and tissue, it's just ..." [...] "Take some pills if you're so fucking depressed!"<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 246.

<sup>50</sup> Shannon Hengen, "Margaret Atwood and Environmentalism". In Cora Ann Howells ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 75.

<sup>51</sup> J. Brooks Bouson, "It's Game Over Forever': Atwood's Satiric Vision of a Bioengineered Posthuman Future in *Oryx and Crake*", *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 39.3 (2004), p. 145.

<sup>52</sup> See Atwood (2003), p. 87.

<sup>53</sup> See Hengen (2006), p. 77.

<sup>54</sup> See Atwood (2003), p. 64f.

Jimmy's Mother Sharon still has some vague notion of the sacredness of life and of the ethical boundaries of science, whereas in his father's position of a reductionist scientific materialism the question of ethics has altogether disappeared. The disappearance of ethics from scientific research can be seen as the result of the postmodern loss of grand narratives formerly providing clear definitions of the human being and clear-cut ethical codes limiting scientific research. Bouson draws on Steven Best's and Douglas Kellner's *The Postmodern Adventure: Science, Technology, and Cultural Studies at the Third Millennium* (2001) to make that point<sup>55</sup>:

[T]he 'postmodern adventure' in science 'strives to overcome all known limits, subverting boundaries such as those that demarcate species[.]' [...] [T]he genetic sciences, write Best and Kellner, all too often exhibit 'a dangerous one-dimensional, reductionist mind-set that is blind to the social and historical context of science and the ethical and ecological implications of radical interventions into natural processes.'<sup>56</sup>

In *Oryx* the result of the loss of demarcation of species leads to the creation of hybrid ones such as the "pigoons" or the "wolfvogs". The formers' sole function is to provide replacement organs for humans, whereas the latter are vicious attack animals bred to look like dogs.<sup>57</sup> Both hybrid-animals are manifestations of human desires that have been identified before in the discussion: the former addresses the desire for immortality, the latter hints at the increase of conflictive desire and the need to protect oneself from potential enemies. The quarrel between Jimmy's parents about the boundaries of science is perpetuated in the relationship between Jimmy and Crake, as Bouson further notes:

Unlike Jimmy, who is concerned about whether something is 'real or fake' – that is, whether it occurs in nature or is a genetically modified human creation – to Crake such a question is misguided. Once creatures like the shocking pink butterflies with pancake-sized wings have been created, argues Crake, the 'process is no longer important', for the new bioengineered form is what the species now is 'in real time'<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> (London, 2001).

<sup>56</sup> See Bouson (2004), p. 139f.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

Both, Jimmy and Crake grow up in a world of virtual reality similar to the environment encountered in the discussion of Ballard's late fiction, where the real and the simulated are conflated into the Baudrillardian hyperreal. In the years between *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx* the internet replaced television as the main provider of the hyperreal. Trapped in their sterile compounds, the boys' perception of the outside world of the pleeblands is turned into digital simulation. When Jimmy remembers how the two of them watched an execution of a terrorist online, he recalls Crake's comment: "Crake said that with digital genalteration you couldn't tell whether any of these generals and whatnot existed any more, and if they did, whether they'd actually said what you'd heard. [...] 'Dou you think they're really being executed?' he said. 'A lot of them look like simulations.'"<sup>59</sup>

Another source of virtual reality is the world of violent video games. In one of them, called "Extinctathon", the goal is to extinguish as many species as possible: "*Adam named the animals. MaddAdam customizes them.*"<sup>60</sup> The game captures of course the logic of the postmodern science described above, where the rich variety of naturally emerging species is violently transformed to fit the needs of postmodern, capitalist techno-science. In the game the players have to choose as their name an extinct species. This is how Glenn becomes Crake, adopting the name of the rare red-necked Crake, an Australian bird. The latter's rarity is a good choice, as it matches Crake's semi-autistic character of the lonely scientific genius. The game also literalizes Girard's model of signification as being made possible through the killing of a victim: in order to exist in the simulation of the video game, the animals must be extinct in reality: the extinct animal is literally signifier and (dead) referent.

It is also in the virtual world of the internet that Jimmy and Crake meet Oryx, their mutual love interest. Oryx, whose name is also inspired by a species from

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<sup>59</sup> See Atwood (2003), p. 94f.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.

Extinctathon, an East-African herbivore, is a Thai child prostitute whom the two discover while consuming internet pornography. The latter is also a product of the reductionist materialist world both grow up in, as Jimmy reflects:

When did the body first set out on its own adventures? Snowman thinks; after having ditched its old traveling companions, the mind and the soul, for whom it had once been considered a mere corrupt vessel or else a puppet acting out their dramas for them, or else bad company, leading the other two astray. [...] But the body had its own cultural forms. It had its own art. Executions were its tragedies, pornography was its romance.<sup>61</sup>

The shift from Platonic idealism to positivist materialism produces pornography as a side-effect. But the flattening and deadening effect of the simulation, allowing a guilt-free “enjoyment” of child-pornography, is not complete. The victim’s humanness survives as a trace in the simulation:

This was how the two of them first saw Oryx. She was only about eight, or she looked eight. [...] Then she looked over her shoulder and right into the eyes of the viewer – right into Jimmy’s eyes, into the secret person inside him. ‘*I see you*’, that look said. *I see you watching. I know you. I know what you want.* [...] [F]or the first time he’d felt that what they’d been doing was wrong.<sup>62</sup>

This image of Oryx proves so haunting to Jimmy that he keeps a printout of this decisive moment and eventually traces her down as a young adult to make her part of his post-industrial, simulated world. Of course, when Jimmy finds Oryx, a decade already separates the print-out image from the real person and he cannot be sure that she actually is the girl he first saw on the internet: “Was there only one Oryx, or was she legion?”<sup>63</sup> The fact that there are many Oryxes already points to a multiplication of victims and an unresolved sacrificial crisis. But before the question of the sacrificial

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 97f.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 103f.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 362. J.B. Priestley’s play *An Inspector Calls* (Harlow, 1947) paradigmatically exemplifies this point. In the play, the implication of the upper class Birling family in the suicide of the working class girl Eva Smith is investigated. The Birlings all seem to have known the girl, until it is revealed that they all have exploited a different girl. The point of the play is of course that millions of Eva Smiths suffer from class oppression. In *Oryx and Crake* this pattern has simply gone global.

crisis in the novel can be addressed, the escalation of conflictive desire has to be discussed.

Shuli Barzilai, in “‘Tell My Story’: Remembrance and Revenge in Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* and Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*” has suggested that the crucial genre form of this novel is the revenge tragedy.<sup>64</sup> This, according to her argument, tends to be obscured by the multiple genre affiliations of the novel, from the dystopian, speculative and *Bildungsroman* traditions to the quest romance and the survivor story. If this is the case, then the apocalyptic effects of science and progress are but the surface consequence of a deep human antagonism on the level of desire. Barzilai’s reading thus opens the novel to a possible Girardian interpretation of revenge and conflictive imitation.

Jimmy’s mother, no longer able to reconcile her work with her conscience, leaves the family and joins the underground resistance against the current hegemony of corporate capitalism. After years on the run, she is finally caught by the ruling powers and executed. Jimmy is made to watch a recording of her death: again he cannot be sure if the execution is real or fake. Although Crake is perfectly assimilated to the competitive, positivist-materialist system of corporate techno-science capitalism, Barzilai argues that Crake goes through a similar experience of losing a parent due to corporate murder. But his is more muted in the narrative, “because the reader has a restricted view of Crake, imperfectly mediated via Jimmy.”<sup>65</sup> Officially, Crake’s father committed suicide, by jumping over a pleeblands overpass. Soon after his father’s death, Crake’s mother marries his uncle Pete. This is the obvious analogy to *Hamlet*. And like Hamlet, Crake too is visited by the ghost of his dead father, who reveals the murderer to him. Before uncle Pete can erase the hard-disk of his brother’s computer, Crake has a chance to access files that reveal his father’s objections to corporate policies

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<sup>64</sup> Shuli Barzilai, “‘Tell My Story’: Remembrance and Revenge in Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* and Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*”, *Critique* 50 (1) (2008).

<sup>65</sup> See Barzilai (2008), p. 99.

and Pete's implication in his death. "Through a transposition of the supernatural element in *Hamlet* into the hyperreality of cyber-communication, Atwood has the father return from the dead to tell his tale."<sup>66</sup>

The novel thus becomes the story of Crake's avenging of his father's death. But his revenge does not restrict itself to his uncle, the immediate culprit of his father's death: "The retribution Crake seeks [...] is not only for his father. Atwood expands the revenge plot she has adopted to encompass all the dead ones lost through carelessness, callousness, cruelty, venom, and greed[.]"<sup>67</sup> His rage extends to humanity itself as the responsible collective agent behind the destruction of the natural world. And thus, as in *Hamlet*, the novel ends with a stage full of corpses – with the only difference between the two lying in the dimensions of the stage: *Hamlet's* was originally limited to the confines of the Globe theatre, whereas *Oryx's* assumes global proportions.

On behalf of his employer HelthWyzer Crake engineers the "BlyssPluss" pill which "would provide an unlimited supply of libido and sexual prowess, coupled with a generalized sense of energy and well-being, thus reducing the frustration and blocked testosterone that led to jealousy and violence, and eliminating feelings of low self-worth."<sup>68</sup> The pill is also HelthWyzer's solution to the problem of overpopulation, as it gradually sterilizes its users. Crake explains: "Demand for resources has exceeded supply for decades in marginal geopolitical areas, hence the famines and droughts; but very soon, demand is going to exceed supply *for everyone*. With the BlyssPluss Pill the human race will have a better chance of swimming." Jimmy's objection unmasks the myth of scarcity and reveals that the real issue is not overpopulation but insatiable desire: "What if the fewer people are very greedy and wasteful?"<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>68</sup> See Atwood (2003), p. 346.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 347f.

But Crake does not actually believe in BlyssPluss. Long before Jimmy does, he understands the potentially conflictive nature of human desire. One of the sources revealing the escalation to extremes Girard describes in *Battling to the End* is “Blood and Roses”, another video game:

The Blood side played with human atrocities for the counters, atrocities on a large scale: individual rapes and murders didn't count, there had to have been a large number of people wiped out. Massacres, genocides, that sort of thing. The Roses side played with human achievements. Artworks, scientific breakthroughs, stellar works of architecture, helpful inventions. [...] If it was a Blood item, the Rose player had a chance to stop the atrocity from happening, but he had to put up a Rose item in exchange. The atrocities then vanish from history or at least the history recorded on the screen. [...] The exchange rates – one Mona Lisa equalled Bergen-Belsen, one Armenian genocide equalled the Ninth Symphony plus three Great Pyramids - were suggested. [...] That was the trouble with Blood and Roses: it was easier to remember the Blood stuff. [T]he Blood player usually won, but winning meant you inherited a Wasteland.<sup>70</sup>

This passage reveals the dependence of cultural achievements on atrocities and the progressing escalation of violence producing a growing toll of victims until only a wasteland remains. Most importantly for the purposes of the present discussion, there is also an awareness of the maiming of the victimage mechanism, as it is “easier to remember the Blood stuff”.

Because he sees how humanity is about to destroy itself in an escalation to extremes, destroying the natural world with it, for Crake humanity is beyond redemption. He therefore decides to wipe out the human race to at least save the natural world.<sup>71</sup> He deems the latter worth saving because, as it is restricted by instinct and dominance patterns and not by desire, it is not prone to the disastrous escalation of mimetic conflict. This is why he secretly engineers the pill to cause the delayed death of its users. With the global distribution of BlyssPluss fully underway, people begin to die en masse all around the world. At this stage Crake lures Jimmy into his “Paradise” compound, where he seals him in after first slitting Oryx’s throat and then killing

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 90ff.

<sup>71</sup> Crake’s vision resembles the visions of mass murder of “Green Anarchism” that Stewart Home criticizes in “Anarchism is Stupid” (1999), par. 21-24.

himself. This is how Jimmy becomes apparently the sole survivor of Crake's bioengineered apocalypse. The question is, of course, whether the quasi-extinction of the human race is the result of a single man's grudge against his own species and thus simply a variation on the mad scientist theme. Jimmy at least, in retrospect, seems doubtful: "If I'd killed Crake earlier [...] would it have made a difference?"<sup>72</sup>

An answer can be found when one examines the full extent of Crake's plan. Crake not only extinguishes an imperfect humanity but also engineers what he considers the perfect hominid successors to the human model: the Crakers. Furthermore, the latter are also the reason why Crake lets Jimmy survive, as the Crakers need a protector from any potential human survivors. As Barzilai has pointed out:

Jimmy leads the Children of Crake or "Crakers" out of a pastoral but unsustainable setting to a verdant park near the seashore where such gentle, peaceful, vegan creatures might flourish. He enables their adaptation to life after Paradise. As reluctantly as the legendary Moses, Snowman finds himself the leader and defender of a chosen tribe. That is, in case of an unforeseeable instance, Crake is also counting on Jimmy to protect the Crakers from harm's way.<sup>73</sup>

A closer look at the human characteristics which Crake erases from his "children's" genetic make up and at the ones he added, further reveals what he thinks is wrong with humanity.<sup>74</sup>

Because Crake thinks that aggression is hard-wired and because he sees war as "misplaced sexual energy"<sup>75</sup> he endows the Crakers with a sexual mechanism that evades sexual rivalry. Instead, when the female comes into heat, the bright-blue colour of her abdomen and the pheromones released by the blue tissue stimulate the males, turning their penises a matching bright blue, and they "do a sort of blue-dick dance number, erect members waving to and fro in unison"; then, when the female's abdomen

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 324

<sup>73</sup> See Barzilai (2008), p. 107f.

<sup>74</sup> The following two paragraphs paraphrase Bouson's (2004) concise description of the characteristic traits of the Crakers (p. 150f).

<sup>75</sup> See Atwood (2003), p. 345.

reaches its darkest shade, she and a chosen quartet of males “go at it” until she becomes pregnant and “that is that”. Sexuality is emptied of desire and reduced to a periodic mechanism.

The Crakers are also the incarnation of the current Western ideal of glossy beauty- magazines, as “each is sound of tooth, smooth of skin. No ripples of fat around their waists, no bulges, no dimpled orange-skin cellulite on their thighs. No body hair, no bushiness. They look like retouched fashion photos, or ads for a high-priced workout program.” Equipped with UV-resistant skin, a built-in citrus-smelling insect repellent, and an ability to digest unrefined plant material, they are designed for survival in their harsh globally warmed twenty-first century climate. And they eat their own dung. Crake also designs another animal feature into his hominids by having the men urinate to mark their territory, the chemicals in their urine offering protection against predators. “Crake allotted the special piss to men only; he said they’d need something important to do, something that didn’t involve childbearing, so they wouldn’t feel left out. Woodworking, hunting, high finance, war, and golf would no longer be options, he’d joked.”<sup>76</sup>

Crake’s purpose is to engineer the Crakers towards a utopian stability, excluding any form of conflict, danger or pain. In a sense the Crakers are the fulfilment of the quest for immortality already pointed to in the discussion of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, as they have no awareness of death: “‘Immortality,’ said Crake, ‘is a concept. If you take ‘mortality’ as being, not death, but the foreknowledge of it and the fear of it, then ‘immortality’ is the absence of such fear.’”<sup>77</sup>

It is of course highly ironic that in his attempt to eradicate humanity in its mould of Western materialist corporate capitalism, in creating the Crakers Crake fulfils some of its goals. Not only do the Crakers represent, as mentioned above, the epitome of the

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 356.

Western search for beauty and immortality but the project is born out of and remains within a materialist-reductionist paradigm of the human being as exemplified by the pharmaceutical companies. In his blind revenge Crake thus becomes the mimetic double of the very humanity he is trying to extinguish. “[H]is revenge is the rational extension of the civilization that has un-fathered him.”<sup>78</sup>

Crake is thus perpetuating the reduction of the human to biological materiality already underway, as represented by the marginalization of the Arts and Humanities in the novel. “*Watch out for art, Crake used to say. As soon as they start doing art we’re in trouble. Symbolic thinking of any kind would signal downfall, in Crake’s view. Next they’d be inventing idols, and funerals, and grave goods, and the alien-life, and sin, and Linear B, and kings, and then slavery and war.*”<sup>79</sup> From the perspective of mimetic theory Crake is not wrong to see the root of human conflict in symbolic thinking, as hominization is precisely the invention of symbolic thinking through the originary expulsion and deification of a scapegoat. But he is wrong in thinking that symbolic thinking can be eradicated on the material, genetic level. He reduces the idea of God, for example, to “*a cluster of neurons*”.<sup>80</sup> By extension he thinks that by eradicating the gene for God, he can eradicate religion. Crake thus falls, as Girard claims in *Evolution*, into the trap of overlooking

the emergence of symbolicity as the force behind the discontinuity between animals and humans. Usually, evolutionists minimize symbolicity or try to derive it from purely physiological origins. [They] try to explain language purely from the evolution of the brain[.] In order to have symbolical power you must have an origin of it, and to me that is the scapegoat mechanism. In this way, one can explain how the increase in symbolical power is tied to ritual.<sup>81</sup>

Crake believes he has edited out religion but, while still in Paradise, Oryx, who teaches the Crakers, observes: “Well, actually they did ask[.] Today they asked who

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<sup>78</sup> See Barzilai (2008), p. 103.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 419f.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>81</sup> See Girard et al. (2007), p. 103f.

made them.”<sup>82</sup> Jimmy becomes their ancestor who has to tell them the story of their origins. The dead Oryx and Crake become their gods in the sky. “At first he’d improvised, but now they’re demanding dogma: he would deviate from orthodoxy at his peril.”<sup>83</sup> As Howells points out, the fact that the Crakers love Jimmy’s stories make us wonder “if the primitive human brain is hard-wired not just for screaming and singing, as Crake had discovered, but for narrative as well.”<sup>84</sup> More importantly in the present context, however, is the fact that the growing interest in (foundational) narrative is tied to the gradual development of primitive religion and religious rites, as Jimmy leads the Crakers out of Paradise.

The development of religious rituals and by implication of narrative and symbolism is also tied to a growing need for a scapegoat in the form of a dying and resurrected god. Bouson recognises that in his role as storyteller, Jimmy is gradually deified. The more he is deified, however, the more he is also prone to becoming a victim. Snowman, as Howells recognises, becomes a monster.<sup>85</sup> She further describes him as the ultimate outsider.<sup>86</sup> Eleonora Rao, who also sees him as the “ultimate outcast, observes that Jimmy feels as if he is on the border of a cliff.<sup>87</sup> All these descriptions summon Girard’s stereotypes of victimization. Jimmy’s excursion back to the Paradise compound is partly motivated by his fear of becoming the sacrificial victim of the Crakers: “All they’ll have to do is get him out in the open, encircle him, close for the kill. There’s only so much you can do with stones and pointed sticks. He really needs to find another spraygun.”<sup>88</sup>

Interestingly, the Crakers’ behaviour is partly learned. Watching Jimmy kill a fish, the Crakers also start killing fish as gifts of reverence for their god Jimmy. Thus

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<sup>82</sup> See Atwood (2003), p. 366.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>84</sup> See Howells (2007), p. 171.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>87</sup> Eleonora Rao “Home and Nation in Margaret Atwood’s Later Fiction”. In Cora Ann Howells ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 108, 111.

<sup>88</sup> See Atwood (2003), p. 126.

essentially, what Crake has not been able to edit out of the Crakers' genetic make-up is their very mimetic beings – simply because mimesis is grounded in reciprocal relations on a social level of interindividuals and not just on a genetic-biological level of solipsistic, hard-wired brains. The only possibility of erasing imitation would be through total autistic isolation. As soon as the Crakers interact, mimesis comes into play. Through Jimmy's example, the Crakers discover the efficiency of scapegoating violence to keep their potentially conflictive mimesis in check: "Then they point it out, and the men kill it with rocks and sticks. That way the unpleasantness is shared among them and no single person is guilty of shedding the fish's blood."<sup>89</sup> Jimmy's fear is of course that the ritualistic killing of fish will at some point no longer be enough and the demand will be created for Jimmy to serve as a bigger sacrifice and subsequently to keep mimetic rivalries in check by providing a rigid system of primitive religion as a resurrected god. This fear is rooted in his earliest complete memory, the witnessing of the burning of an enormous pile of cows and sheep and pigs.<sup>90</sup> The latter had to be burnt due to the breakout of foot and mouth disease. The experience shapes his perception of the world and his narrative and explains why he fears that even the countless animals will not appease the sacrificial hunger of the Crakers. When he returns from the compound, the Crakers destroy the idol they have made in the image of Jimmy in his absence: "now that the real Snowman is among them once more, there is no reason for the other, the less satisfactory one." But "Snowman finds it odd to see his erstwhile beard, his erstwhile head, travelling away piecemeal in the hands of the children. It's as if he himself has been torn apart and scattered."<sup>91</sup> Jimmy has the dark premonition that he will become the victim of Dionysiac sparagmos: the tearing apart of a hero.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>90</sup> See Atwood (2003), p. 18.

<sup>91</sup> See Atwood (2003), p. 422.

<sup>92</sup> See Girard (1977), p. 246.

In “Margaret Atwood and Environmentalism” Hengen has argued that such primitive faith might in fact be one of our saving graces. Against the implied belief of current techno-science that we can extend life indefinitely with prostheses of various kinds the constant cycle of death and renewal that we witness in nature is a more trustworthy guide. Hengen falls into the trap of reading the Crakers through a romantic, Rousseauian lens and concludes that Atwood does not refuse to imagine what genetically modified humans might become and dares to look beyond her own repeated belief that human nature cannot change.<sup>93</sup> Thus she fails to see the irony implied in the outcome of Crake’s project. Despite Crake’s efforts the Crakers are precisely returned to the human situation of the search for a model and the problem of conflictive imitation and violent expulsion. Her romanticized view of primitive religion also clouds her reading of greed. Since everything is part of the cyclical dance, according to her argument, even human greed is redeemed and to deny it would be to lessen the whole. This means to neglect Atwood’s moral lesson that it is precisely humanity’s excessive greed that engenders the apocalypse. Atwood does neither ask the reader to deny nor to embrace greed but to face it and to make a moral decision against it. Ingersoll’s reading seems more to the point:

What if our species is doomed to extinction? If life can survive only in the form of the Children of Crake, doesn’t that survival outweigh the loss of some of what readers are likely to consider their “humanity”?

No, in thunder! Atwood seems to be shouting. If traditional human qualities have to be sacrificed in order to survive, it may not be worth surviving.<sup>94</sup>

Furthermore, as Atwood seems to be saying, the bioengineered “lobotomised” humanity of the Crakers is a chimera, as human conflictivity cannot be reduced to a hard-wired biological mechanism but originates in interpersonal relationships. Primitive religion and corporate capitalist techno-science are simply two ways of channelling conflictive

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<sup>93</sup> See Hengen (2006), p. 77f, 73.

<sup>94</sup> See Ingersoll (2004), p.167.

mimesis. The decisive difference between the post-apocalyptic world of the Crakers and the pre-apocalyptic corporate capitalist world lies in the former's functionality and the latter's dysfunctionality of the scapegoat mechanism. These ways are also not as separate as they might seem, as the Crakers take Jimmy, a survivor of the capitalist world as their model and as traces of Oryx and Crake are incorporated into their mythology. Violence survives into the world of the Crakers because Crake in his function as world destroyer/creator uses violence, "a bioform to end all bioforms" as Barzilai has put it<sup>95</sup>, in his creation. Crake attempts to erase human conflictivity but what he achieves at best is a reinstatement of primitive religion based on a functioning scapegoat mechanism.

Having traced the origin of conflictivity to interpersonal, mimetic relations rather than to some hard-wired biological mechanism, Jimmy's question whether killing Crake would have made any difference can be finally answered. It has to be remembered that BlyssPluss promises the fulfilment of limitless desire and a sense of well-being, the very dream of the Western search for immortality. Crake's lethal manipulation of the pill can be read as a trope for the impossibility to still that desire. The pill then signifies "the governing ethos of aggressive egoism articulated through the craving for and acquisition of cash. He uses avarice to lure the world to its own destruction."<sup>96</sup> The warring egos are thus bound to clash, if the plague initiated through the promise of BlyssPluss can no longer displace their conflictive potential onto a scapegoat. It will be demonstrated that in comparison to *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Oryx* thus portrays a further progression of the sacrificial crisis.

The key to a reading of the epidemic caused by BlyssPluss as an unresolved sacrificial crisis is Jimmy's position as victim. The latter has already become clear in his relations to the Crakers. But it must be demonstrated that he is also the sacrificial victim

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<sup>95</sup> See Barzilai (2008), p. 106.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

of the globalized system of Western corporate capitalism for the proposed reading to be viable. The crucial hint is the name of “Snowman” which he is given by the Crakers because of his fair skin. In relation to *The Handmaid’s Tale* the designation of “Snowman” has also connotations to victimization as is clearly evident from the following passage, in which Offred describes Gilead’s executed victims on public display: “Though if you look and look, as we are doing, you can see the outlines of the features under the white cloth, like grey shadows. The heads are the heads of *snowmen*, with the coal eyes and the carrot noses fallen out. The heads are melting.”<sup>97</sup>

These snowmen-scapegoats form the (not so) secret heart of the totalitarian machinery of Gilead, which, as already argued, is continuous with Western consumerist capitalism rather than radically breaking with it. Because Jimmy is connected to the victims of Gilead via the label of snowman, his position as victim with respect to his own society can be examined. If Jimmy is the designated victim, then the BlyssPlus-infected crowds fulfil the role of the violent mob, as Jimmy recognizes, when he narrates a TV report about the spreading BlyssPlus epidemic: “*What we’ve just seen is a crazed mob* [.]” [...] Crowds packed the churches, mosques, synagogues, and temples to pray and repent, then poured out of them as the worshippers woke up to their increased risk of exposure.”<sup>98</sup> The BlyssPlus infection can be read as a trope for the creation of crowds, as discussed with respect to the novels of the “Crowds” chapter. In *Oryx* too people are brought together in isolation. To evade contagion they have to become “monks in desert hideaways.”<sup>99</sup> Beyond the immediate literal meaning of evading the BlyssPlus epidemic, the latter quotation can be seen as a trope of modernity. The novel, like Ballard’s late novels and Stewart Home’s novels probes the possible outcomes of a shattering of the brittle boundaries of separation between people and the subsequent formation of the violent mob.

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<sup>97</sup> See Atwood (1985), p. 42, emphasis added.

<sup>98</sup> See Atwood (2003), p. 397.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

In the case of *Oryx* Canetti's metaphor of the closed theatre extends itself to include the whole world. The violent crowd can no longer grow and is in danger of turning in on itself in a Hobbesian struggle of all against all. The crowd's only hope is the venting of its violent energies onto a scapegoat. Jimmy becomes that designated victim because he is sealed into his compound – the only place that is not contaminated by the contagion of the violent mob. It is the only place which allows for an inside/outside differentiation as it is clearly separated from the increasingly undifferentiated outside. Because Jimmy occupies this different space, he becomes the selected scapegoat.

But because he is sealed into his compound the mob cannot reach him. Jimmy's isolation from the crowd thus functions as a trope for the inaccessibility of the scapegoat victim for a restitution of the global societal order. Herein lies the difference from *The Handmaid's Tale*. While in the latter the mechanism is also maimed and the victims multiply because they are no longer deified, Gilead nevertheless manages to maintain itself at least for a time on an ever-growing pile of corpses. What remains in *Oryx* is precisely this pile of corpses. Violence and victims abound but the victims can no longer serve a sacrificial purpose as even the projection of guilt still functioning in Gilead is no longer possible.

Atwood's apocalypse also suggests a reading of the Book of Revelation similar to Girard's. In *Battling to the End* he writes:

The only Christians who still talk about the apocalypse are fundamentalists, but they have a completely mythological conception of it. They think that the violence of the end time will come from God himself. They cannot do without a cruel God. Strangely, they do not see that the violence we ourselves are in the process of amassing and that is looming over our own heads is entirely sufficient to trigger the worst.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> See Girard (2010), p. xvi.

In *Oryx* the apocalypse too is unleashed by the amassing of human violence, which leaves the millenarian, apocalyptic preachers confused: “Street preachers took to self-flagellation and ranting about the Apocalypse, though they seemed disappointed: where were the trumpets and angels, why hadn’t the moon turned to blood?”<sup>101</sup>

Discussing *Oryx*, Howells asks if it is possible that Atwood’s work, while as filled with puns, word play, parody, and comic irony as ever, is growing more pessimistic[.]”<sup>102</sup> Framing the question in this way, implies an emotional shift in Atwood’s perspective of the world rather than an objective development in the world. The present discussion suggests that it is not Atwood who becomes more pessimistic but that her data has changed: the world has grown more violent. As in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, so in *Oryx* Atwood simply projects the trajectories of certain trends in society.

In *Oryx* the sacrificial crisis has assumed global dimensions. It can no longer be imagined as an isolated condition of a totalitarian state which perishes like the Kaingang in *Violence*. The global dimensions of the sacrificial crisis also answer the question of a cyclical or linear progression of history. As long as the modern sacrificial crisis is limited as in the case of Gilead, history will appear circular. But as soon as there is no outside as in *Oryx*, the circularity will be revealed as a spiral escalating into linearity, simply because history comes to a violent end once the whole of the planet is involved in a sacrificial crisis no longer resolvable through scapegoat expulsion:

‘Once it’s flattened, it could never be rebuilt.’ [...] ‘Because all the available surface metals have already been coined,’ said Crake. ‘Without which, no iron age, no bronze age, no age of steel, and all the rest of it. There’s metals farther down, but the advanced technology we need for extracting those would have been obliterated.’<sup>103</sup>

Crake’s insight reveals Atwood’s realism. Even though Western consumerism is able to defer the escalation of conflictive mimesis into a full-blown sacrificial crisis for

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<sup>101</sup> See Atwood (2003), p. 397.

<sup>102</sup> See Howells (2006), p. 71.

<sup>103</sup> See Atwood (2003), p. 261.

a time through the deflection of desire to the consumption of objects as signs, the problem of reality will eventually return, precisely because objects are not signs. Having demonstrated that the attempts of postmodern techno-science to create a post-human world in which human aggressivity is erased on a biological level is a futile utopia, Atwood seems to suggest that reality has to be faced on the level of interpersonal relations. It is art that defines these relations: “When any civilization is dust and ashes,” as Jimmy once said to Crake, “art is all that’s left over. Images, words, music. Imaginative structures. Meaning – human meaning, that is – is defined by them.”<sup>104</sup>

The novel ends with Jimmy’s discovery of other human survivors and the uncertain outcome of their encounter. After the violent end of Western Civilization with its failure to isolate the individual from human contact in order to evade rivalry and Crake’s failure to bioengineer a way out of violence, Jimmy faces the choice of whether he wants to trust his fellow human beings or whether he wants to engage them in yet another cycle of violent reciprocity:

Images from old history flip through his head, sidebars from Blood and Roses: Ghenghis Khan’s skull pile, the heaps of shoes and eyeglasses from Dachau, the burning corpse-filled churches in Rwanda, the sack of Jerusalem by the Crusaders. The Arawak Indians, welcoming Christopher Columbus with garlands and gifts of fruit, smiling with delight, soon to be massacred, or tied up beneath the beds upon which their women were being raped.<sup>105</sup>

It is the inescapable question of the duel already discussed with respect to *Crash*. Atwood leaves the reader hanging as to the outcome. But one thing is clear. In agreement with Girard the only possibility for Jimmy’s survival and for the global society at the beginning of the twenty-first century is a radical foregoing of violence on the level of interpersonal, human relations. This entails the risk of being killed. Like the Arawak Indians in the above quotation and, as Girard would suggest and Atwood too

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 197.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 425.

implies, all the victims of history, Jimmy must choose the risk of being killed over retaliation to avoid apocalyptic consequences of violent reciprocity. And so must we.

### 5.3 Will Self

Although *The Book of Dave* is Will Self's first post-apocalyptic, dystopian novel proper, apocalyptic and millenarian themes abound in his previous fiction from the publication of his first collection of short stories, *The Quantity Theory of Insanity* (1991), onwards. Furthermore, through the use of the *roman fleuve* technique, many of the characters of Self's early short stories reappear in his later fiction. For a full appreciation of *The Book of Dave* it is therefore indispensable to discuss relevant examples from his previous fiction in the light of the present discussion's concerns. This preliminary discussion will also reveal the roots of the post-apocalyptic world in *The Book of Dave* in conflictive mimesis, leading to an irresolvable sacrificial crisis.

#### 5.3.1 Girardian Themes in Will Self's Fiction

Self's "dirty magical realism" has often been compared to Martin Amis' fiction and Amis himself has described Self as his successor. As Self acknowledges, he adopts Amis' project of applying Mandarin language, the language of the intellectual classes, to demotic and popular culture subjects. Conversely he applies demotic language and popular language to some of the concerns and ideas of the intellectual Mandarin classes. However, "Waiting", the concluding short story in *The Quantity Theory of Insanity*, the first one to concern the present discussion, is more indebted to Self's other *eminence grise*, J.G. Ballard.

"Waiting" opens with the narrator's description of an immense traffic jam and his friend Jim Stonehouse's abandonment of their car due to his tiredness of waiting. Self treats the car's utopian promise of transcendence through speed in similar ways to Ballard and reveals its dystopian underside in the form of the traffic jam. Subsequently

Jim becomes a disciple of Carlos, the *propheta* figure of the story. Carlos, the leader of a gang of motorcycle dispatch riders, apparently has the talent to navigate through the vortex of London traffic without ever having to wait, as the baffled narrator acknowledges: “He could not possibly know what he seemed to know – the only way he could have seen the route we took was from the air and even then he would have had to have made constant trigonometric calculations to figure out the angles we seemed to have followed intuitively.”<sup>1</sup> Because, as the narrator claims, dispatch riders have one of the highest occupational death rates, Carlos and his followers are constantly reminded of their existential, Heideggerian being unto death, their *dasein*. Their occupation fulfils the same function of affirming their reality as does the car crash for Vaughan in *Crash*.

In becoming Carlos’ disciple Jim enters a world of speed which reduces reality to a “two-dimensional scene”, a “flat pattern formed by car shapes”.<sup>2</sup> It is the already familiar world of the Baudrillardian simulation, offering the utopian promise of a free-flowing exchange of signs. The dawn of this new utopian era of free-flowing simulation is experienced in religious-millenarian terms by Jim, who sees Carlos’ miraculous gift as “some implosion of the numen”.<sup>3</sup> Jim starts frequenting lectures on the apocalypse and in one of them the lecturer asks his audience to imagine “an orderly phalanx of flagellants some four hundred in number march[ing] down off the Marylebone Flyover.”<sup>4</sup> Jim’s obsession with the arrival of a millenarian kingdom of speed and simulation also isolates him from his fellow human beings: “Jim was becoming a self-centred and destructive egotist.”<sup>5</sup> Jim thus already prefigures Dave’s isolation in his London cab in the parts of *The Book of Dave* which are set in contemporary London.

Eventually Jim has to appear in court, facing charges over deliberately bumping into a van in a traffic jam and for subsequently assaulting a police officer. Once again,

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<sup>1</sup> Will Self, “Waiting”, *The Quantity Theory of Insanity* (London, 1991), p. 198.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 177, 186.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

as the utopian promise of speed fails and the human individual is liberated from the isolation of the car, the danger of interpersonal conflict looms large. Jim is spared a prison sentence because he is declared mentally ill by the psychiatrist Zack Busner, one of the most prominent characters in Self's fiction. Busner's diagnosis is of interest for the present discussion:

“Is it your view, therefore Dr Busner, that Mr Stonehouse was in full possession of his faculties when he committed these crimes?”

It's difficult to say; either he's right in what he says, in which case he was fully *compos mentis*, or else he is the victim of an extremely complex delusionary state, in which case he is clearly not morally responsible for his actions.”<sup>6</sup>

The above passage hints at the difficulty of defining insanity objectively, as Jim's delusion of an imminent millennium by car is logically coherent. It also forms an example of one of the themes at the heart of Self's fiction: mental illnesses and their treatment in contemporary psychiatry. Self's interest is at least partly biographically motivated, as he was diagnosed with schizophrenia in his late teens.

Jim reappears as a patient in “Ward 9”, another story of *The Quantum Theory of Insanity*, portraying the workings of Busner's psychiatric methods. Busner rebels against “the narrow drive to reduce mental illness to a chemical formula”. From the perspective of mimetic theory it is noteworthy that Busner's epiphany comes after sitting up “night after night, reading Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Dostoevsky and Sartre”, as, except for Schopenhauer, these are all authors that have influenced Girard in formulating the mimetic theory. Busner realizes that “all the categories of psychopathology are just that; dry, empty categories, devoid of real content, representing only the taxonomic, psychic fascism of twisted old men.”<sup>7</sup>

At Busner's Ward 9 at Heath Hospital, therefore, mental illness is regarded as a product of human relations. According to Busner, the therapist does not occupy an objective position outside the patient's illness and is therefore always implicated in the

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>7</sup> Will Self, “The Quantum Theory of Insanity”, *The Quantum Theory of Insanity* (London, 1991), p. 119.

illness. This is Self's exemplification of Gödel's incompleteness theorem and the observer's paradox. At Ward 9, as Busner tells the new art therapist Misha Gurney, "it hardly matters whether we are Doctors or patients[.]"<sup>8</sup> In Busner's ward there is a move from external to internal mediation. In the former case the cure for mental illness consists of unilateral imitation by the patients of the model of sanity defined by "the twisted old men", while in the latter the boundaries between doctors and patients, and sanity and insanity become blurred as the imitation becomes bilateral. The result is a "strange symmetry between the sartorial sense of the psychiatric staff and that of their patients."<sup>9</sup> Through their interaction with the patients the staff become subject to the latter's mimetic influence: "If you empathised to closely with the insane you became insane yourself."<sup>10</sup> This definition of mental illness as a product of mimetic relations is corroborated by the presence of Tom, a "mimetic psychotic" patient at Ward 9, who "literally mimics the symptoms of all sorts of other mental illnesses, at least those that have any kind of defined pathology."<sup>11</sup> His is the meta-madness that comes to define the whole population of ward 9, both doctors and patients as Gurney recognizes: "Was it true that they genuinely caricatured the recorded pathologies, all of them, not just Tom [...]?"<sup>12</sup> In similar ways as Girard, Self thus dismisses the bric-a-brac of psychiatric terms and uncovers the root of mental illnesses in mimesis.

Gurney eventually is declared a patient by Busner because he repeatedly has sex with a nurse, Mimi, who also makes him take psychotropic drugs. Busner's decision is based on Gurney's transgression of a professional code and thus resembles a ritual punishment rather than a medical diagnosis. It is also noteworthy that Gurney's relation to reality becomes gradually distorted only after he starts taking Mimi's pills. Thus his mental illness is produced by the medication.

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<sup>8</sup> Will Self, "Ward 9", *The Quantity Theory of Insanity* (London, 1991), p. 66.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

Self's thesis that mental illness is socially determined is made even more explicit in the eponymous story of the collection. Harold Ford, the disillusioned narrator of the story, reviews the success of his own "Quantity Theory of Insanity". Self through Ford skilfully delays revealing to the reader an actual definition of the theory but when he eventually does, the reader is struck by its simplicity: "What if there is only a fixed proportion of sanity available in any given society at any given time?"<sup>13</sup> Like Piexoto in *The Handmaid's Tale* he does not quite recognize the significance of his find with respect to social relations. What follows is a parody of the tendency of the academic world in general and of psychiatry in particular to quantify human relations and to reduce the human to materiality. Ford and his former student friends, among them Busner, conduct a double blind trial that should substantiate the theory and result in a general, mathematical formula for insanity. Significantly, as often in Self's fiction, the scientists publish their results in *BJE*, the *British Journal of Ephemera*.

Ford's formula for the theory remains of interest though for reasons not perceived by Ford and his colleagues. When, at a special conference on the theory in Denver, a bitter Ford reflects on how his theory, despite its success, has been misunderstood, he has the following epiphany: " $Q(><[Q]) = Q(><[Q])$ "<sup>14</sup>. While the content of the equation is irrelevant, it is significant that both sides of the equation are mirror images of each other. What Ford has discovered is the law of mimetic rivalry at the root of his theory. It explains both the success of the theory, as well as why the theory has been taken into various directions by Ford's colleagues and competitors. Once Ford and his theory have become the model, imitators run wild, jumping on the bandwagon of his success with their own versions of the theory such as "the

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<sup>13</sup> See Self (1991), p. 126.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

Exclusionist Therapy Movement” or the “Psychic Field Disruptionists”, making him wonder whether the theory has become a cult or a religion.<sup>15</sup>

Ford recognizes that explanations of “the abnormal mind”, which only consider the patient, regardless whether they be materialist explanations relying on genetic inheritance or immaterial ones rooted in models of the mind, are necessarily inadequate because they neglect the social context. While he thus sees the relative nature of normality, by positing a fixed quantity of available sanity that can be calculated, he fails to grasp that quantity too is relative. What he posits, is in a sense a theory of scarcity of the social psyche. What Dumouchel and Dupuy formulate for economic scarcity is also true for the social psyche: scarcity is a relative concept. In a community of true solidarity it would be always the whole community that survives or perishes.<sup>16</sup>

What Ford has thus discovered without being aware of it is the mechanism of exclusion that produces the fixed sanity quotients and the difference between sanity and insanity. An undifferentiated state is, according to Girard always a state of crisis. In *The Quantity Theory of Insanity* undifferentiation is represented by the great leveller insanity.<sup>17</sup> The examples provided in the story are clear instances of expulsion of insanity by the means of one or several scapegoats, which restore the differences and define societal normality. Thus these examples are structurally similar to the story of the demon-possessed man in Gerasa Girard discusses in *The Scapegoat*: “The surface of the collective psyche was like the worn, stripy ticking of an old mattress. If you punched into its coiled hide at any point, another part would spring up[.]”<sup>18</sup> It is thus adequate to describe the “Radical field disruptionists as “shamans” rather than psychiatrists.<sup>19</sup> When in Australia, Ford realizes how “constant rates of sanity had been achieved by the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>16</sup> Dumouchel and Dupuy (1979), p. 162f: “Il n’y a pas d’expérience possible de la rareté dans les sociétés primitives, la chose n’y existe pas. En règle générale, la diminution des ressources augmente la solidarité.” (The experience of scarcity is not possible in primitive societies, the thing does not exist there. As a general rule, the diminution of resources augments the solidarity (author’s translation)).

<sup>17</sup> See Self (1991), p. 28.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

creation of a racial underclass which was killing itself with alcoholism.” In *Dorian* (2002), Self’s adaptation of Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), Dorian laughs off his college love’s suggestion that he might need a psychiatrist, recognising the archaic religious nature of his derangement: “A psychiatrist wouldn’t know where to begin – you’d be better off getting me a witch doctor.”<sup>20</sup>

Adam Harley, one of Ford’s colleagues organises meetings where people can trade sanity for insanity. A woman from one of the groups explains: “My son, John [...] enjoys his little manic phases. He’s quite happy to trade an extended manic phase off against a neurosis-free period for me.”<sup>21</sup> This example can be seen as an act of sacrificial substitution, as John literally takes his mother’s neurosis onto himself. What seems “a therapeutic practice designed to palliate the idle sorrows of the moneyed”<sup>22</sup> turns out to have serious consequences. John dies of a heart attack, brought on by asthma during one of his manic phases and his mother, as Ford comments “is now safely institutionalised.”<sup>23</sup>

There are two insights to be gleaned from this latter example as to the functionality of the scapegoat mechanism. First, the mechanism works for the woman, as long as her son remains alive. Like in the example of the demon-possessed man this is a “soft” scapegoating mechanism. But as soon as her son dies, insanity migrates back to her normality, it becomes a great leveller again and returns society to an unresolved crisis of undifferentiation. The mechanism does not work because the mother is aware of her guilt in her son’s death. Awareness of the mechanism is in this case too the prime reason for its dysfunctioning.

In “Understanding the Ur-Bororo”, the anthropologist Janner studies the life of the eponymous Amazonian tribe of the story, only to find that its people are truly boring

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<sup>20</sup> Will Self, *Dorian* (London, 2002), p. 251.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139

and indifferent. The story is not only an allegory of contemporary English society but also Self's post-structural parody of Lévi-Strauss' investigation on the Bororo in *Tristes Tropiques* (1965). The state of indifference, in the sense of undifferentiation, is "ur", i.e. precedes the structuralist Bororo. English society is thus not only boring and indifferent but finds itself in the state of undifferentiation in the anthropological sense of the Girardian sacrificial crisis.

In "Inclusion®", a story from Self's second collection *Grey Area* (1994), Self connects the theme of archaic sacrificial expulsion with Wildian *Fin-de Siècle* decadence and his concern with contemporary psychiatry. The story of the psychotropic drug "Inclusion®" is told by an investigator, reviewing the files on Inclusion, after a trial with the drug under Busner's control went horribly wrong. From the file, which includes Busner's trial notes, the reader learns that Inclusion is made from "a cadaverous and faecal matter of an obscure insect parasite."<sup>24</sup> It has been used for centuries in rituals of another archaic, fictitious tribe, the Maeterlincki.

The latter is of course an obvious allusion to the French symbolist Maurice Maeterlinck and indirectly also to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, as Dorian is given a symbolist novel to read by his mentor Henry Wotton.<sup>25</sup> Self, as a dirty magic realist, is critical of symbolism, as the latter's move away from realism neglects the harsh and violent physical reality of the period. Symbolism in Self's fiction is also, as will be later discussed, a forerunner of the move away from the referent in the Baudrillardian simulation.

For the moment it is enough to notice that the Maeterlincki's social stability and structure depend on the expulsion and killing of an insect parasite and thus on death itself. There is a hint at a sign of the victim as the bees whose mites are killed are "cliff-

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<sup>24</sup> Will Self, "Inclusion", *Grey Area* (London, 1994), p. 210.

<sup>25</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Oxford, 1998), p. 125.

dwelling”.<sup>26</sup> The deaths of the mites are furthermore described in ritual language as “entombed cadavers”.

In the story, Busner and the pharmaceutical company “Cryborg”, which is financing the trial, hope that Inclusion will prove to be a panacea for all mental illnesses. The effect of the drug is actually to enhance the patients’ interest in anything they turn their attention to. At first the results are promising. But when Simon Dykes, a painter struggling for inspiration and another of Self’s recurring characters, joins the trial, things start to go wrong. Dykes, who joined the trial because he could not focus long enough on his work, now cannot focus on his work because Inclusion creates interest in everything.

For the purposes of the present discussion it is important to point out that Inclusion works like the mediator of desire in Girardian theory. With Inclusion interests are not intrinsic choices but mediated by the drug. The object is irrelevant as anything can be interesting. This becomes clearer when Dykes develops the curious capacity to know everything about a person only by focusing his mind on that person. It is then that he exchanges the abstract mediator Inclusion for Busner, the prime model at Heath hospital, as the reader learns from Dykes’ journal: “Busner is the Hierophant. He oversees the auguries, decocts potions, presides over rituals[.] I knew that he was interested in curling [.] I’ve ordered some curling equipment through a sports mail-order catalogue.”<sup>27</sup> The title of another story in *Grey Area* corroborates the reading of the drug as mediator. In the appendix to the “Incubus or The Impossibility of Self-Determination as to Desire” the reader is given the protagonist’s “Truth Table” with the following explanation: “Peter is a man. All men want to fuck June. Therefore Peter wants to fuck June.” The title of the story suggests a reading of the latter as an insight into the mimetic structure of desire rather than as a simple syllogism.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 245.

At this point a short digression on *Dorian* will further illuminate Self's insights into the workings of mimetic desire. The novel's subheading states that it is an "An Imitation", indicating its debt to Oscar Wilde's novel. But imitation in *Dorian* goes beyond artistic homage. Self adapts the theme of decadence to the late twentieth century but leaves the mimetic configurations of the original intact. Self's *Dorian*, just as Wilde's, is as much filled with wild desire by his model Henry Wotton.<sup>28</sup> He is repeatedly referred to as a social chameleon and subsequently becomes the model to all the *Dorian* clones and the epitome of the sense of gay liberation in the "few short years between the Stonewall Riots and the arrival of AIDS."<sup>29</sup>

While Self's graphic portrayal of the mid-1980s sense of doom created by the AIDS epidemic in the gay community borders on the homophobic, the novel is much more than about the getting out of control of HIV due to "the ever lengthening conga line of sodomy."<sup>30</sup> As in Wilde's original, *Dorian* is the one man "who could live his life fully" justifying the misery of the rest of the world.

Thus while *Dorian* as in the original does not age, the world around him is dying. *Dorian* embodies the wish for immortality of his imitators that in Wilde's world is represented by the "penny-newspaper".<sup>31</sup> In *Dorian*'s 1980s the promises of simulated immortality are much further progressed than in Wilde's time and *Dorian* can free himself from the claims of the body in the Baudrillardian hyperreality of late-capitalist mass-media.

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<sup>28</sup> See Wilde (1998), p. 47.

<sup>29</sup> See Self (2002), p. 94.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94. That Self's concern is not so much about "gayness" as an essence is already evident in his novella *Cock & Bull* (London, 1992), comprising two stories, one about a woman growing a penis and the other about a man growing a vagina on his knee. Self sees gender and sexuality as social constructions, as is further clarified in the following passage from *Dorian* in which Self's authorial voice is made heard through the writer Cal Devenish in an act of ventriloquism: "If I were in gaol, doubtless I'd become a sodomite, but as it stands I prefer invagination." (see Self (2002), p. 210). The question of social environment as a factor for sexual orientation is of course closely tied to that of mediation and imitative desire. However, Wotton by responding that "not everyone knows fuck all about Foucault" (p. 213), returns the physical referent to Devenish's post-structuralist argument. While the social environment thus plays an important role in the construction of sexual orientation, the signifiers are not detached from the referent, as the very physicality of Wotton's suffering from AIDS bears witness.

<sup>31</sup> See Wilde (1998), p. 7.

Self is writing from the position of novelistic conversion as Girard defines it in “Conversion in Literature and Christianity”:

The writers that seem the greatest to me do not consider what we call their genius a natural gift with which they were born. They view it as a belated acquisition, the result of a personal transformation not of their own doing, which resembles a conversion. [...]The first perspective is the deceptive perspective of desire, which is full of illusions regarding the possibility of the hero to fulfill himself through desire.<sup>32</sup>

In Self’s case the first perspective is occasioned by his imitation of his teenage idol William Burroughs, as reported in his non-fiction collection *Junk Mail* (1995):

As far as I was concerned, Burroughs demonstrated that you could have it all: live outside the law, get stoned the whole time, and still be hailed by Norman Mailer as “the only living American writer conceivably possessed of genius.” When I awoke from this delusion, aged twenty, diagnosed by a psychiatrist as a “borderline personality,” and with a heroin habit, I was appalled to discover that I wasn’t a famous underground writer. Indeed, far from being a writer at all, I was simply underground.<sup>33</sup>

Self turns Burroughs into a prefiguration of his Dorian when he asks: “Why did the Great Junksmen survive, while so many of his confrères fell by the wayside?”<sup>34</sup> From the moment of his disillusionment with his great model onwards, Self would write from the position of novelistic conversion. This is, however, not a position of moral indignation, which, as Girard observes with respect to Proust, “may simply be one snob’s way of expressing his resentment against other snobs who happen to stand in his way”, but rather a position of insight from the inside of the workings of the mimetic mechanism.

This can be seen as a reason why, as M. Hunter Hayes notes, some critics have accused Self of treating drugs lightly in his fiction and have seen his graphic depictions of violence as the outpouring of a frivolous and puerile writer.<sup>35</sup> But all Self can really

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<sup>32</sup> René Girard, “Conversion in Literature and Christianity”, in *Mimesis and Theory*, Robert Doran ed. (2008), pp. 268f.

<sup>33</sup> See Self (1995), p. 59.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>35</sup> See Hayes (2007), p. 91.

do from his position of conversion is report the story of his own disillusionment and to continue to describe his implications in the webs of desire. Like Ballard, he throws the whole burden of moral thought back on the audience: "I'm not trying to convert people to anything but thinking seriously."<sup>36</sup>

This conversion involves the Proustian recognition that nothing human can satisfy mimetic desire.<sup>37</sup> Like the Proustian snob who searches for his pleasure in the gutter the moment society crouches at his feet,<sup>38</sup> so do Wilde's and Self's Dorians and Wottons "search for sensations that would be at once new and delightful, and possess that element of strangeness that is so essential to romance."<sup>39</sup> These sensations come attached with the promise of achieving "a bit of fucking transcendence."<sup>40</sup> It is with the search for transcendence through the imitation of a model that the various themes of Self's fiction are revealed to have the same source: "Fixing coke is the perfect modern pleasure, because even as you do it you want to do it again."<sup>41</sup> In other words drugs defer the possession of an object and thus the necessary disappointment involved in the appropriation of the object. As Hayes observes concerning Self's *My Idea of Fun* (1993), "as disparate as the heroin addicts and marketing executives might initially seem 'fundamentally they're all engaged in the same activity.'" Behind the addictive consumerism of late capitalism<sup>42</sup>, drug addiction, writing<sup>43</sup> and even the structure of the motorway system<sup>44</sup> that creates the virtual reality of the Baudrillardian simulation lingers the same "primum mobile", as Ian Wharton puts it in *My Idea of Fun*.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>37</sup> See Girard (2008), p. 58.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>39</sup> See Wilde (1998), p. 132.

<sup>40</sup> See Self (2002), p. 51.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>42</sup> See Self (1995), p. 62.

<sup>43</sup> See Hayes (2007), p. 20.

<sup>44</sup> See Self (1994), p. 95.

<sup>45</sup> See Self (1993), p. 256. In *How the Dead Live*, the two daughters of protagonist Molly lead apparently very different lives: Charlotte with her Husband Richard Elvers seemingly enjoys Thatcherite bourgeois success, whereas Natasha is mired in her drug-addiction. Significantly, however, both their foetuses die on the same day, indicating the barrenness of both lifestyles. While Charlotte seeks meaning in consumerism, Natasha tries to become the person she would've liked to be through drugs. In fact they are

In the latter, Wharton laments a chronic lack of role models<sup>46</sup>. Wharton, growing up in the Thatcherite 80s imitates three models: his mother, his psychiatrist Dr Gyggle and the imaginary “Fat Controller” who is inspired by the elusive Satan figure Gil-Martin from James Hogg’s *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824).<sup>47</sup> The “Fat Controller” stirs Ian to commit several murders. The latter can be traced to the same source in a desire eluding satisfaction, when the words of Wilde’s Wotton are taken into account: “Crime [is] to them what art is to us, simply a method of procuring extraordinary sensations.”<sup>48</sup> Self, writing after the postmodern collapse of high and low culture, adapts it accordingly: “Murder shouldn’t be considered one of the fine arts; rather it’s one of the wilder forms of popular entertainments.”<sup>49</sup> When Ian discovers that Gyggle, who is supposed to treat him for his hallucination, is in cahoots with The Fat Controller, he realizes that there is no escape from mediation and desire.

There are possibly again autobiographical echoes in *My Idea of Fun*, as Self’s brother writes: “Far from discouraging Will’s passion for drugs, my mother had actively promoted it.”<sup>50</sup> More important than a lack of role models, however, is the shrinking distance to the mediator. What promotes any addiction is a lack of ritual inhibitors of desire. As Self, adopting the theories of the anti-psychiatrist Thomas Szasz, observes: “intoxication in our society is becoming increasingly decoupled from any meaningful ritual.”<sup>51</sup> Self is talking about ritual in the anthropological sense as the immediate mention of Lévi-Strauss and the Bororo makes clear. If addiction, as the last few paragraphs suggest, functions indeed as a metaphor for limitless desire, then this means that the modern Western world lacks the archaic protection from limitless desire

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both parodies of each other: “Natty and Russ [...] with their lunatic swaggering parodied the comfortable wealth of the Elverses. [...] Yes, it was really the Elverses who parodied Russ and Natty, what with their sniffing and shooting up drugs[.]” (see Self (2000), pp. 369f.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>47</sup> James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (Edinburgh, 1824).

<sup>48</sup> See Wilde (1998), p. 213.

<sup>49</sup> See Self (2002), p. 217.

<sup>50</sup> Qtd. in Hayes (2007), p. 12.

<sup>51</sup> See Self (1995), p. 28.

provided by rituals based on the scapegoat mechanism. *Dorian* accordingly portrays mimetic desire out of control culminating in a quasi sacrificial crisis. Dorian absorbs the escalation in his body and makes the correct connection between desire out of bounds and archaic rituals: “I do regard my body as a temple. It just happens to be one where the ceremonies are orgiastic.”<sup>52</sup> AIDS as a plague signifies the loss of differences and Dorian because of his immunity to the disease is designated as victim: “Despite being rich, beautiful and seemingly eternally youthful, he became a pariah. [H]is name became associated with all the guilt and shame surrounding the old bath-house scene.”<sup>53</sup>

But there is no sacrificial release in *Dorian*. The discussion can finally return to *Inclusion*®, which probes the possible consequences for desire in a situation where the sacrificial crisis cannot be resolved through scapegoat expulsion. Dykes imitates Busner’s desire and, in accordance with Girard’s claim in *Deceit* that the imitator’s desire is always for the model’s being and not the object, Dykes eventually “includes” Busner into his own mind. Thus while for the Maeterlincki the scapegoat mechanism still regulates mimetic desire, this is no longer true in the case of Busner’s and Dykes’ world. Inclusion, a metaphor for the scapegoat mechanism, cannot hold Dykes’ desire for his mediator’s being in check. Interestingly, the drug is first tested on “a few isolated individuals”<sup>54</sup>, indicating that at the root of the modern malaise there is the problem of potentially conflictive, mediated desire and its avoidance in absolute isolation. Busner corroborates this view: “Catatonic despair [...] was quite a reasonable response to living in the Thame area.”<sup>55</sup>

Inclusion can thus be read as a subtle metaphor for the attempt to free modern individuals from their isolation through the formation of an archaic tribal community through rites of expulsion, as already discussed with respect to Ballard’s late novels.

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<sup>52</sup> See Self (2002), p. 107.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 219.

Self makes the same point as Ballard: while scapegoat violence frees individuals from their isolation and temporarily revives a sense of community, human relations cannot be restored sacrificially anymore. In “The End of the Relationship” the protagonist comments on human relations:

[T]hese Mexican stand-offs of trust and commitment, were somehow in the air. It wasn't down to individuals: It was a contagion that was getting all of us; a germ of insecurity [...] was now fissioning frantically, creating a domino effect as relationship after relationship collapsed in a rubble of mistrust and acrimony.<sup>56</sup>

The choice, as will become clear with the *Book of Dave*, lies between the isolation and death of the referential human being in the simulated world of signs, and the restoration of human relationships through an abdication of mimetic rivalries.

A further hint at a crisis of undifferentiation no longer resolvable through scapegoat violence, is the representation of crowds in Self's fiction. In “Grey Area”, a story about the crippling forces of technological modernity, the narrator observes: “That so many people could believe themselves different from one another only made them appear more the same.” The story is set at “the time of year when seasons change rapidly”, i.e. in between seasons. But strangely “events tirelessly repeat themselves”. Society remains trapped in the in-between state of the irresolvable modern sacrificial crisis. The narrator asks herself if it is possible that it has been getting light at the same time for over a month.<sup>57</sup> The in-between state is furthermore signified by the failure of the narrator's menstrual period to arrive. It can be read as an indirect hint at the absence of a working expulsion if the following observation from *Violence* on the taboo surrounding menstrual blood is taken into account: “Menstrual blood is regarded as impure; menstruating women are segregated from the community.”<sup>58</sup> The absence of

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 259.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., pp. 174, 176, 185, 175.

<sup>58</sup> See Girard (1977), p. 33.

menstrual blood signifies thus the absence of segregation, the absence of a functioning scapegoat mechanism.

In the absence of a working scapegoat mechanism the undifferentiated crowds are continuing to grow until they reach the globalized walls of the Canettian crowded theatre. In “A Short History of the English Novel”, a story told by a struggling writer, a giant doughnut of health facilities engulfs a town, containing the growing number of the isolated mad.<sup>59</sup> Jim Stonehouse is released into Busner’s care because of overcrowded prisons.<sup>60</sup> The dead, as in Sinclair’s writing, form another crowd in Self’s fiction that does not simply disappear. In “The North London Book of the Dead”, a story that Self would later expand into the novel *How the Dead Live* (2000), the narrator comments: “How come people don’t notice all the dead people clogging up the transport system?”<sup>61</sup> The visibility of the dead, the true inheritors of the modern, thus foreshadow a sense of entropy.<sup>62</sup>

A part of the growing tension of the crowd is absorbed by the structures of modern simulation, maintaining the isolation among people, for example when in “The End of the Relationship” “each fresh on screen outrage increased the distance between us”.<sup>63</sup> In “Scale” people also become entombed in a “continuous motorway culture”.<sup>64</sup> In “Waiting” post-it notes “further their own growth as a species.”<sup>65</sup> In *Psychogeography* (2007) Self makes clear that virtual reality function as an ersatz for a real sacrificial solution when he refers to the “sacred rituals of computer-banking and on-line shopping.”<sup>66</sup>

The loss of a sense of touch as a result of isolation in the modern structures of simulation is a major theme in *Great Apes*, as Jane Bowen observes in the sequel of

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<sup>59</sup> See Self (1994), p. 45.

<sup>60</sup> See Self (1991), p. 210.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>62</sup> See Self (2000), pp. 21 and 58.

<sup>63</sup> See Self (1994), p. 266.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>65</sup> See Self (1991), p. 182.

<sup>66</sup> Will Self, *Psychogeography* (London, 2007), p. 250.

sorts to “Inclusion”.<sup>67</sup> In the novel Simon Dykes wakes up into a world where apes and humans have changed positions on the evolutionary ladder and where his delusion consists of thinking he is human. Furthermore, Dykes’ paintings are of bodily disintegration, signifying the violent absorption of the referent into the simulation.<sup>68</sup> In the simian world of the novel, the apes do not suffer from a fear of touch because they are governed by dominance patterns and not mimetic desire.<sup>69</sup> But because the apes have evolved to occupy the modern position of the human, they are facing the human problem of a dissolution of dominance pattern, as Busner, this time as a chimp, suggests: “Misery, misery, all is misery and aggression[.] Perhaps it is as Lorenz suggestures, and the current woeful condition of chimpunity is a maladaptive response to overcrowding, to the loss of our natural lifestyles?”<sup>70</sup>

Just as in Sinclair’s example of the Siebel building, in Self’s fiction there exist two parallel worlds: the world of isolation of the individual in the self-exhausting Baudrillardian Simulation, particularly exemplified in Self’s *My Idea of Fun*, where the protagonist Ian Wharton, lacking touch, finds himself “inside [his] own representation”<sup>71</sup>, and the expelled world of the apocalyptic, potentially self-destructive Canettian theatre crowd, leading to entropic decay due to the impossibility of renewal through sacrificial expulsion. Both worlds are represented in *The Book of Dave*: the former in the chapters set in “the recent past” and the latter in the chapters of “the distant future”.

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<sup>67</sup> Will Self, *Great Apes* (London, 1997), p. 115.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. ix.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>71</sup> See Self (1994), pp. 114, 55.

### 5.3.2 *The Book of Dave*

The world of the *Book of Dave* is split between a social realist narrative, portraying the life of Dave Rudman, a London “Cabbie”, from 1987 to 2003, and the post-apocalyptic, magic-realist story of Symun and Carl Dévush, spanning 16 years, from 509 AD (After Dave) to 524 AD. Although separated by time, the narratives are united by being set in the same place. It is a reflection of Self’s psychogeographical concern and his belief, similar to Sinclair’s, that place preserves its past history.<sup>72</sup>

Each of the narratives is further divided into two strands. Each strand progresses linearly but is interspersed by chapters from the other strands. The novel opens with the first narrative thread of the distant future, which starts in 523 AD and ends in 524 AD. The second post-apocalyptic narrative tells the tale preceding these years from 509 to 522. The contemporary narrative also commences with its later strand beginning in 2001 and ending in 2003 and is followed by the narrative beginning in 1987 and ending in 2000. Each chapter “from the distant future” is followed by a chapter of “the recent past”. If one were to label the two future strands with “a” and “b” and the past ones with “c” and “d” then the following “rhyming pattern” emerges: The sixteen chapters are divided into three quartets of acbd followed by a quartet acac. This arrangement of the narrative forces the reader to reconstruct the linear narratives after the first reading, i.e. to reread the novel. In order to trace the connection between an irresolvable sacrificial

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<sup>72</sup>In *Psychogeography* (2007), Self explains the difference between his understanding of “psychogeography” and Peter Ackroyd’s and Iain Sinclair’s. According to Self, Ackroyd sees London as an eternal person, surviving the physical and political mutations of its structure, whereas Sinclair attempts to storm the concrete bastions of modernity “by catapulting great hunks of stony verbiage into them, so that the capitalists abandoned their cars and ran, screaming, tongues cleaved to the roofs of their mouths.” Self on the other hand is rather overwhelmed by the mammoth depression that tramples him when he thinks of taking a package tour to visit the Ituri pygmies of the Congolese rainforest, or of them visiting him due to the progression of a globalized economy. He recognizes that neither Ackroyd’s nor Sinclair’s understanding of psychogeography are adequate to stop the levelling of differences of economic globalization. This becomes obvious, when he realizes that Patrick Keiller’s melancholia in *London* and *Robinson in Space* is simply blown away by the forces of capitalism. *The Book of Dave* documents this erasure of previous structures by the forces of economic globalization. (pp. 11, 13, 28).

crisis in Dave's recent past to the post-apocalyptic entropy of the distant future, it is necessary that the following discussion proceeds chronologically.

### 5.3.2.1 Dave's Recent Past

Essentially, the chapters of the recent past portray Dave Rudman's life as a London cabbie and the development of his fraught relationship with his love interest Michelle, from its inception in an awkward one-night stand resulting in the conception of their son Carl, over their marriage due to Michelle's pregnancy, to their eventual divorce.

The abject failure of their relationship epitomizes the general insecurity between the sexes in the post-industrial era and particularly the theme of emasculation and blurring of gender boundaries, so common in Self's fiction. When Michelle rekindles an old affair with the TV-producer Cal Devenish, a name already familiar from *Dorian*, Dave hires a "skip tracer" to investigate Devenish. Dave's behaviour becomes increasingly paranoid, so much so that he begins to stalk his son outside the times of the custody agreement. This culminates in a restraining order to the effect that Dave cannot see his son at all. The frustrated Dave joins "Fighting Fathers", a self-support group for divorced dads. The group later evolves into a misogynistic, revolutionary movement of emasculated men, very much like the fight clubs and project mayhem in Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*.

As a reaction to his broken relationships Dave literally drives himself further and further into isolation in his cab. His taxi becomes a hearse, "a vibrating bloody coffin"<sup>73</sup>, where he can escape the real rivalry with Devenish. In Dave's case too, the car thus functions as the producer of the simulated world of speed detached from referential reality. But the conflictive reality continues to haunt him, primarily in his

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<sup>73</sup> Will Self, *The Book of Dave* (London, 2006), pp. 459, 37.

day-dreams. In one of them London statues come to life and start to fight one another. The dream displays a panoramic melting pot of violent human history in the form of “graven images” and “giant warmongers” from Buddhas to Christs to Marx and Thomas More revealing the violent underside of their respective ideologies: *“They didn’t mean to hurt the soft little people, but they were so big and hard that skins were split and skulls were crushed wherever they went.”*<sup>74</sup> Their latest incarnation enters Dave’s world in 2003 in the shape of the war in Iraq: *“Don’t look like they could turn out a bloody widget, let alone nuclear-bloody-weapons... Yet Dave could see, in this taut confrontation, a sinister evocation of his own troubled life.”*<sup>75</sup> The oil fuelling Dave’s escape into simulated isolation also fuels the conflict in Iraq. Dave’s evasion of reality represents thus the universal Western displacement of conflict from the spaces of Baudrillardian hyperreality to the hot spots Dumouchel has identified.

Dave’s isolation leads to outright insanity, as Jane Bernal, Zack Busner’s assistant recognizes, when, by coincidence, she takes Dave’s taxi: “He aspirates flat swear word, cunts and fucks, mixed with what? Is it religious stuff? – talk of a book, a prophet? but how could a schizophrenic drive a London cab? [...] He’s too old for a flamboyant psychotic breakdown, surely?”<sup>76</sup> But ironically, only a schizophrenic could drive a London cab: the Carlos-type of madness from “Waiting” is required to navigate the 320 routes of the cabbie Knowledge.

With Dave’s rage channelled into the mad circulation of the streets of London, a new symptom emerges. Dave begins to write a book for his son Carl. This “Book of Dave” is essentially a chauvinistic rant triggered by Dave’s helplessness regarding his divorce and custody settlement and intended by Dave as a guidebook for his son. Essentially, the book fantasizes a return to male domination over women, a

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<sup>74</sup> See Self (2006), p. 323.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 293.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

“comprehensive blueprint for a society” in which men no longer have “to shack up wiv’em in the first place. Knock’em up – then fuck off!”<sup>77</sup>

When Dave eventually recovers under Busner’s care and begins to work his way towards a normalization of his relations to his ex-wife and son, he discovers that during his period of mental illness he had ordered one copy of the book imprinted on metal plates for a total cost of £9,750. Significantly, when he takes a passenger to St Joseph’s College, he remembers that he buried the book in Michelle’s and Cal’s garden and recalls the “strange painted bust of Thomas More” outside the college. In this period of atonement and rebirth, which also witnesses Dave’s engagement in a nurturing, mellow and increasingly asexual relationship to Phyllis Vance, Dave writes a redaction of his first book.

Dave’s recovery is overshadowed by the revelation that Cal, with whom Michelle had already once been liaised just before she met Dave, is Carl’s biological father. Things get even worse, when the ghosts of Dave’s past catch up with him. It turns out that in order to pay the skip tracer, Dave borrowed money from the local Turkish mafia. During a visit from two mafia thugs whose purpose is to “put the frighteners on him”, Dave is accidentally killed by his own shotgun, after wrestling for it with one of the Turks. Subsequently Cal and Carl find Dave’s redacted version of his book and bury it – unaware of the first buried copy – in their garden. Despite this disillusioned ending to Dave’s story, irritating readers and some critics, there is nevertheless a reconciliatory sense of peace accompanying Dave’s last years. But in order to discuss the implications of Dave’s death on the wider context of the novel, it is first necessary to examine the narrative of “the distant future” in greater detail.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., pp. 348f.

### 5.3.2.2 *The Book of Dave's Distant Future*

Imagining the structures of technological modernity in ruins is a frequent feature of Self's writing. As early as *Junk Mail*, for example, he speculates:

It is my contention that the motorways of today are our pyramids, our ziggurats, our great collective earthworks. Perhaps 10,000 years from now, when they are grassed over, the archaeologists of this distant era will be puzzled by the harmony between the motorways, with their sweeping curves, banks and revetments[.] [...] Possibly they will advance the theory of the existence of a continuous motorway culture lasting some 7,000 years.<sup>78</sup>

Half a millennium after Dave's death, the forces of technological modernity have exhausted themselves and survive only as ruins in the world of "Ing". According to the founding myth of the Ingerlanders, their world came into being after a great deluge destroyed the preceding civilization. In the mythology of the Ingerlanders, the event is referred to as "The Made in China". The latter term has its origins in Dave's book. As the last chapter of the novel is called "Made in China," Self teases his readers into believing that it contains a grand apocalyptic event, explaining the downfall of Western society and the rise of Ingerland. But no such obvious explanation is given. While it will be argued later that a more subtle explanation for the apocalypse in the novel can actually be uncovered, at first the only link between Dave's world and Ingerland consists in the Book of Dave: in Ingerland the latter has become the sacred text of a religiously fundamentalist, totalitarian society very much resembling *The Handmaid's Tale's* Gilead.

Philip Tew suggests that the second narrative strand of *The Book of Dave* is representative of thoroughly British dystopias and their concern with the logic and economy of fundamentalism, of beliefs that constrain and narrow human possibilities

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<sup>78</sup> See Self (1995), p. 233.

through violence and coercion.<sup>79</sup> M. Hunter Hayes offers a similar reading: “Here then lies the textual genesis of Dave’s tirade. By taking the product of a rather ordinary fit of anger and depression, if not utter psychosis, and then transforming that text into a sacred document, Self slyly subverts the notion of divine authority in such revered texts.”<sup>80</sup> While Tew and Hayes are certainly right in identifying Self’s portrayal of the mechanics of fundamentalism in the future part of the novel, they do not discuss the secret collusion of fundamentalism with Western consumerism. As with *The Handmaid’s Tale* the case can be made that fundamentalism is the attempt to come to terms with the catastrophic consequences of consumerism.

The key to identifying this collusion is the sacred lingo in use in Ingerland. As Hayes remarks, “one of the most striking aspects of the novel is its argot, combining various ways of Received Pronunciation, Cockney and Mockney, a rural Essex dialect, Dave’s private vocabulary and cab-drivers’ slang, and the alpha-numerical substitutions of text messaging.”<sup>81</sup> A closer look at the glossary appended to the novel, introducing the most salient terms of the “Arpee-English” of Ingerland, reveals the origin of many of the lexemes in the culture of consumerism and Baudrillardian simulation. A “seeseeteveeman” is for example a “watchman” for the religious elite, the “PCO”, the priestly hierarchy of “Ing”. In its original context, The PCO refers to the “Public Carriage Office”, regulating London traffic. “Screen” refers to the sky, “headlight” to the moon and “lamp” to the sun. “Burgerkine” and “bugsbunnies” come to refer to ordinary cows and rabbits. A “travelodge” designates the estate of a member of the social elite of Ing.

The shift of meaning in all these terms is made possible through the loss of any physical reference in their original meaning. It is only once they have been reduced to their empty signifiers that new meanings and referents can be assigned to them. In other

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<sup>79</sup> See Tew (2007), p. 215.

<sup>80</sup> See Hayes (2007), p. 172.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

words, in the time of Ing, the Baudrillardian simulation of consumerism has reached its end state in nothingness. As in *He, She, and It* the simulation has been engulfed to extinction by the expelled referential reality and only survives as a trace in the signifier. The city, reduced to a verbal map in Dave's taxi-delirium of speed, is turned into a plan for the future, post-apocalyptic London.<sup>82</sup>

With the possibility of deflecting conflictive human desire into the isolating structures of Baudrillardian simulation no longer available to post-apocalyptic Ing, desire is regulated through the introduction of a rigid social hierarchy and the mechanism of sacrificial expulsion of archaic religion. The principal taboo of Ing concerns the wheel: "There were no wheels on Ham – save for symbols of them[.]"<sup>83</sup> It is a taboo against mobility, both in the narrow sense of the mobility of car culture that on a surface level caused the apocalypse through the pollution of the environment but more importantly of the mobility of desire underlying car culture. This becomes obvious, when Symun Dévush, in 509 AD discovers Dave's second book on the island of Ham, the post-apocalyptic remains of Hampstead. Symun proposes to abandon the rigid codes regulating the relations between men and women, resulting in "desperate and frenzied promiscuity".<sup>84</sup> Symun is eventually convicted as a "flyer" – a term originating in Dave's word for passengers travelling to London airports and referring to a heretic in Ing usage – and "broken on the wheel", i.e. executed by the Ing authorities.

In the tribal society of Ing, men and women live separated from each other and relations between them are reduced to sexual exploitation of the "mummies" by the "daddies": "It was then, in the dark months, when time lay heavy on their idle, lustful hands, that the worst depredations of the daddies occurred, the beatings and roastings, the rapes and circlefucks."<sup>85</sup> Dave's fantasies of revenge against women have become a

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<sup>82</sup> See Self (2006), p. 280.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 309

brutal reality in Ing. Shared custody of children has become the norm, regulated by the “changeover”, the time when children pass from daddies to mummies or vice versa. Furthermore a form of institutionalised child rape is practiced by “boilers”, women past child-bearing age.

While the rigid restrictions on sexual desire thus cause periodical venting in frenzied, sexually perverse and violent abuse of women and children, Ing relies on scapegoating violence to hold the dyonisiac tendencies of its inhabitants in check. On the island of Ham, sacrificial substitution is organised around the killing of “motos”. These large, mammalian creatures with the functional intelligence of a two-and-a-half-year-old human, are probably a product of biological engineering from the time of Dave. The moto is used by the hamsters “as a source of meat and oil alone” but its main function is to serve in what is actually a kind of child sacrifice. There is even a hint at deification of the moto victims “in the guilty work” of slaying them<sup>86</sup>: “Finally, in autumn the motos lay down willingly so that their throats could be cut, then sang beautifully as the lifeblood drained out of them. The Hamsters said: Az dävine az a moto.”<sup>87</sup> There is some evidence that moto sacrifice has its origin in a literalisation of a saying of Dave, when he reflects on his son: “He had been engineered only to be loved and then sacrificed, his corpse rendered down for whatever psychic balm it might provide.”<sup>88</sup>

When Carl Dévúsh, following in the footsteps of his father, arrives in Nu Lundun in 524 AD, in order to defend himself against the charges of “flying”, the structural dependence on scapegoating in Ing is revealed. The ritual killing of a heretic mummy that Symun witnesses, shows all the characteristics of scapegoat expulsion. There is the loss of differences displayed by the horde of “two or three hundred dads in uniform black T-shirts”, intent on some monstrous and predatory act. The mummy is

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 448.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 419.

burnt at the stake in a “barbeque”. Carl sees how “the mummy was still writhing – although tongues of white flame were shooting from her eye sockets and mouth. Carl shut his own eyes and resolved not to open them until they could escape this hell on earth.”<sup>89</sup>

Thus similar to Jimmy’s first memory of burnt cattle in *Oryx* the experience of witnessing the horrors of an expelled victim becomes foundational for Carl’s perception. While it seems that Nu Lundun has the potential to develop into the shape of its post-industrial Western precursor, thriving on expelled victims, Carl perceives a different truth as he and Anthonë Böm leave the city. Despite the printing explosion and the doubling of the number of vehicles in Nu Lundun, a repetition of the progress of Western modernity, Carl recognizes that “New London – with all its madness and cruelty – sank in their wake.” Carl’s subjective vision of a “sinking London” becomes a literalized prophecy of the city’s impending doom.

Carl’s insight is preceded by Dave’s concerning the London of his day. “Between the narrow feint the new Book whispered: the ice caps may melt, the jungles shrivel, the prairies frazzle, the family of humankind may have, at best, three or four more generations before the BREAKUP. [...] For there cannot be – not now, not ever – a new London.”<sup>90</sup> It is significant for the current argument that the passage is immediately followed by the “Moto Slaughter” chapter, relating Dave’s insight of the impossibility of utopian renewal to the inefficiency of scapegoat violence. Dave, from the sane perspective of his redacted book begins to understand the significance of his first book.

In the light of the discovery of the impossibility of renewal through violent expulsion Tew’s and Hayes’ arguments have to be further qualified. Dave’s first book is not just the product of an ordinary fit of anger and depression, nor is *The Book of Dave*

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 388.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 420f.

just portraying the logic and economy of fundamentalism. Dave's condition of schizophrenia and his first book are representative of a deeper malaise underlying both fundamentalism and Western consumerism. Dave realizes that "They're all worshipping sumffing...like those fucking nutters totalling themselves in Bagdad...It's only that they want a heaven here, on earth."<sup>91</sup> What both, Islamist fundamentalism and Western consumerism share, is the ideal of a utopian society that can be realized through violence – either through straight-forward terrorist violence or the structural violence of consumerism.

The Canettian insight that the schizophrenic internalizes the crowd is also true in the case of Dave: "When he looked in the rearview he saw that he had more passengers than he was licensed for. Far more – approximately seven million in fact. They're all back there, the whole population of the fucking city...it's gonna kick off...". The condition of Dave's London and Nu Lundun is the same: both persist at the crowd stage of a fully blown sacrificial crisis. It makes no difference whether it is the "*Prêt-a-fucking-Manger mob*" of Dave's London or the fundamentalist crowd of Nu Lundun. "As the narrator observes: All masses – no matter how pacific – contain within their sumps many thousands of litres of adrenalin the motor oil of rage."<sup>92</sup>

Once Dave is seen as representative of the universal crowd, his death acquires a new significance. Just as the latin *funus* can refer to an individual's death as well as to the end of the world, so does Dave's death not only signify his own mortality but the self-consummation of the crowd leading to the violentropic post-apocalypse. While for Dave, the world ends with a whimper, for the world in the novel it ends with a big bang. Paul Fiddes criticizes Frank Kermode's influential hypothesis proposed in *The Sense of an Ending* (1968):

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 463.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 390.

[W]e should challenge Kermode's general assumption that in our age an end to the cosmos is inconceivable, and so apocalypse must be totally demythologized into death and transition. [A] total end is conceivable [...] through such horsemen of the apocalypse as nuclear warfare, toxic poisoning, asteroid collision or destruction of the ozone layer.<sup>93</sup>

Self himself challenged Kermode's assumption in "Waiting". Whereas Kermode takes the position that the end is now immanent rather than imminent,<sup>94</sup> in "Waiting" the two great feelings left in the late twentieth century are immanence *and* imminence.<sup>95</sup> In *The Book of Dave* both Dave's personal apocalypse of his own death and global apocalypse are connected and stem from the same source: unresolved mimetic conflict. The loss of differences in the London crowd is a result of the imitation of the consumerist Gods: "Men stood on every street corner wearing England football shirts printed with the number 10: fat Beckhams, thin Beckhams, young Beckhams, black Beckhams. Scores of unsuitable substitutes for a never-ending game."<sup>96</sup> Dave's death is a direct consequence of a conflictive mimetic struggle with his assaulter reminiscent of St Augustine's example in the *Confessions* of the two boys fighting over milk: "When Rifak did manage to get hold of the shotgun, it was with that element of shocked surprise with which a younger brother wrests a toy from his older sibling."<sup>97</sup>

Throughout the future narrative, Carl discovers his secret "mummyself" and begins to seek a non-violent way out of the sacrificial crisis of his time. This should not be so much understood as another instance of gender confusion but rather as a redefinition of masculinity away from violence to forgiveness. It is significant that "it was with the motos that Carl was able to be himself and accept his secret mummyself."<sup>98</sup> Since the motos, in their infant stage, are clearly imitative beings, this means that the solution to the problem of conflictive imitation lies in the pre-double bind stage of imitated desire. In other words, the question of a model who does not

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<sup>93</sup> See Fiddes (2000), p. 13.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>95</sup> See Self (1991), p. 181.

<sup>96</sup> See Self (2006), p. 269.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 469.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

become a rival presents itself at the end of the novel as the one Self leaves his readers with. For Dave, despite his best reconciliatory efforts, there is no such model, as his world ends in the mimetic conflict with Rifak. Carl finds such a model in the second book of Dave. Dave thus becomes something of an external mediator. This second book is of course readily identifiable with the New Testament. By analogy to Girard's reading of Christ as the perfect, non-conflictive and transcendent mediator, the Dave of the second book can thus be seen as a redeeming Christ figure, opening the possibility of non-conflictive, transcendent imitation. Transcendent also because no such mediator actually exists in Self's fictional universe. The perfect, non-conflictive role model is thus only present as an absent necessity in Self's fiction.

## 6. Conclusion

Writers are always different in their coping with the mimetic mechanism. Every writer is part of a history that is both collective and individual. Each one demands an entirely different demonstration, although a critic who is interested in the mimetic mechanism knows that ultimately he or she will unveil the same mimetic principles.<sup>1</sup>

It is the hope of the author of the present discussion to have demonstrated that these mimetic principles are actually present in the discussed narratives and not just a straitjacket violently imposed onto the texts. But as in Girard's contention, the diversity of the narratives has demanded different demonstrations. The mimetic hypothesis is flexible enough to detect scapegoating violence behind the trope of Ballard's car crashes, Sinclair's psychogeographical quests and the escalation of mimetic rivalries in violent crowds, whether they be political-revolutionary as in *Home and Peace* or corporate-capitalist as in Ballard's late fiction.

All the narratives, in their own way, also show a distinct awareness of the growing inefficiency of violence to sustain and to achieve utopia. The question posed at the beginning of the discussion by "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" has thus been answered by the discussed narratives. Scapegoating is not only to be rejected on moral grounds but also on the grounds that it does no longer function in a world in which the Gospel truth of the victim has been revealed. The revelation of the maiming of the scapegoat mechanism comes in different forms: the irony of Vaughan missing the Baudrillardian simulation in *Crash*, the apocalyptic portrayal of Thatcherite politics and its "false dawns" in *Downriver* and *GB84* or through the explicitly post-apocalyptic environments discussed in the "Violentropy" chapter. In some cases, particularly in Sinclair's, there is even a much more nuanced understanding of the difference between scapegoating and genuine sacrifice than current criticism has been able to detect.

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<sup>1</sup> See Girard et al. (2007), p. 174.

In addition to the revelation of the innocence of the scapegoat in the Gospels, some narratives provide a further reason for the maiming of the scapegoat mechanism. Home's and Ballard's works in particular suggest a conflation of reality and simulation into Baudrillardian hyperreality impeding the cathartic effect of an originary expulsion which should be experienced as real. What all the narratives share is an awareness of the mythic veil that the hyperreal casts over the real violence.

Since the globalized sacrificial crisis cannot be resolved, no new ritual system of social regulation can be installed. The isolation of the car impedes the creation of "Crowds" for a time. Capitalism too succeeds in deflecting mimetic conflict to the pursuits of conflictive mimetic trade. But the connection between a loss of ritual inhibitions and addiction, suggested most strongly by Will Self, makes clear that this is no permanent solution. The theme of addiction as a condition of the West in its unresolved state of sacrificial crisis also features in Stewart Home's portrayal of bibliomania, Ballard's and Peace's reading of consumerism as addiction and Atwood's depiction of the consumption of pornography and violent video games.

The addictive world of isolation is the world of the achieved Baudrillardian utopia of signs and exists parallel to its expelled other of dystopic decay for a time. But the latter takes over both worlds, as soon as the world of signs has exhausted itself into nothingness. Neo-liberal economics is thus shown to be part of the entropic catastrophe, particularly in the narratives of the "Violentropy" chapter but also for example in *GB84* or *Downriver*.

Importantly, the religious fundamentalist regimes and the post-apocalyptic archaic societies in the novels of the "Violentropy" chapters are thus the logical heirs to the exhausted capitalist world based on competitive mimesis. Through a Girardian analysis it was possible to detect a secret collusion and continuity between Western

capitalism and consumerism, fundamentalism and neo-pagan archaic religion (particularly in *The Book of Dave*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx*).

Again in their own particular ways, the discussed texts portray mimetic conflict as the cause of the sacrificial crisis. Ballard does so by showing how individuals imitate objects due to the inaccessibility of the rival – and thus also rejects the Freudian hypothesis of the death drive. Sinclair in *Downriver* develops an alternate model of desire through S.L. Joblard's immunity to imitate the executives of the Corporation. Will Self uses the context of psychiatry to draw attention to the mimetic malaise, whereas Margaret Atwood portrays envy among the handmaids. The notion of the "occult" is used by Sinclair, Home and Peace to identify the secrets of mimetic conflict behind the project of neo-liberal economics. Peace writes mimetic history by portraying two utopian systems, Marxism and Neo-Liberalism, locked in a battle to the end and reveals how both depend on their respective scapegoats.

Some of the narratives also reveal the personal novelistic conversion of the author, as is the case with Sinclair's recognition that he had not seen Rodinsky as a human being or Self's disillusionment with his model William Burroughs. The lack of positive role models is also an important feature of all the narratives discussed. In Ballard's universe this absence is complete. That same absence is also felt in Peace's *Quartet* and is a deplored absence in Self's fiction. Only Sinclair creates a disinterested external mediator through his own evacuation out of *Downriver*. All the other texts discussed recognize that the solution to their respective sacrificial crises lies in an abdication of mimetic rivalries but they fail to provide the necessary models.

In that respect all the narratives are critical dystopias, as hope lies beyond their pages. They are all set in the space between the destructive self-consummation of violence without end and the Christian sur-transcendence of love. Girard's theory itself can be called a critical dystopia as it speaks so little about the alternative to conflictive

mimesis and scapegoating. Yet this does not mean that there is no hope either in the discussed narratives or in Girard's theory. In all the narratives a hopeful alternative is at least hinted at, as for example in the conversation between Maurice Jobson and John Piggot at the end of *1983*. For Girard this alternative lies in an imitation of Christ, the expelled Johannine Logos, as the perfect mediator of desire. While the necessity of this type of peaceful logos is recognised in some of the discussed narratives it is not directly represented. The final section of the present thesis shall be therefore devoted to Alfonso Cuarón's film version (2006) of P.D. James' critical dystopia *The Children of Men* (1991), since it contains the most powerful filmic portrayal of the Johannine Logos known to the author of the present discussion.

*The Children of Men* portrays a post-apocalyptic world in which, similar to the world of *The Handmaid's Tale*, humanity has become barren and is ruled by a totalitarian regime, fighting the descent into anarchy. While the world is thus approaching its violentropic end, in the film version a baby is born in a war-stricken refugee camp. In the scene following the birth of the child, mother, child and Faron, a formerly disillusioned academic turned protector of the pregnant mother, have to pass through a war zone. When the various fighting parties perceive the baby, they immediately cease to fight, overawed by the miracle of the birth of a child in this barren world. But their conflicts only cease for as long as mother and child are passing through their midst. As soon as they have passed, the violence resumes.

The birth of the baby is obviously inspired by the Nativity but it also captures the characteristics of the Johannine logos. Like the latter, the baby does not resist violence. If humanity chooses to continue its violence and expel the logos of peace, so be it – this path leads straight to the apocalypse. But the Johannine logos is shown to have the ultimate power to end all violent conflict, as long as human beings keep it in their midst.

This scene has been misread in a recent article on the film by Sarah Schwartzman. She claims that the film suggests that “we will be our own messiahs by sacrificing ourselves for a literal and figurative human rebirth.”<sup>2</sup> She further claims that the scene portrays “a transformation of Christian messianic theology about the Son of Man who is destined to save humanity from a cosmic apocalypse.”<sup>3</sup> What she completely ignores is that the transformation of the characters in the film is not self-induced. Their willingness to give their lives for the child in genuine Christian sacrifice, reminiscent of the woman willing to give her life in Solomon’s judgment, is a result of their exposure to the presence of the baby and their imitation of this peaceful, transcendent and powerless, yet powerful mediator of desire. Once again it is appropriate to quote Hölderlin: “But where danger threatens / That which saves from it also grows.”<sup>4</sup> But in the film that which saves grows on the basis of a Christ-figure as the perfect external mediator. And that is what the Girardian hypotheses, and their fictional analogues, would seem to suggest.

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<sup>2</sup> Sarah Schwartzman, “*Children of Men* and a Plural Messianism” *Journal of Religion and Film* 13.1 (2009), par. 23

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 4

<sup>4</sup> Qtd in Girard (2008), p. 17.

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