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THÈSE

Pour obtenir le grade de
Docteur

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Présentée par **Ben Staunton**

**The Aesthetics and Ethics of the Absent
Subject in the Novels of Tom McCarthy**

Soutenue le 16 novembre 2018 devant le jury composé de

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For Paige

In her infinite love and finite patience

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Introduction

The Cultural Context of the 21st Century

The contemporary moment is defined by its astounding breadth and depth of social interconnection through a network of digital communication and global capitalism. Within those networks it is the meaning of objects, symbols, performances as well as words that dominate. Franco Berardi and the Post-Workerists¹, taking cues from both Marx and critics of postmodernity like Jean Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson, focus in on the increasing immateriality of this systemic process of reproduction. Berardi describes the contemporary phenomenon of mass shootings in the light of the Aurora mass shooting perpetrated by James Holmes, which demonstrated “the metaphorical density of an act that could be interpreted as breaking the separation between spectacle and real life (or real death, which is the same)” (*Heroes* 1). Berardi identifies the will to unify fiction and reality (“Holmes, it struck me, wanted to eliminate the separation between the spectator and the movie; he wanted to be *in* the movie” [2]) as a kind of dematerialization of life that is synonymous with the dematerialized production of financial capitalism. James Holmes wanted to be a hero, Berardi argues, in a world where to be a hero is for one’s actions and existence to be dematerialized into an image and proliferated across the networks.

Berardi sees the contemporary moment as the

[...] age of nihilism and spectacular stupidity: the age of financial capitalism [...] In the second decade of the twenty-first century the post-bourgeois dilapidation took the form of a financial black hole. The new system started to swallow and destroy the product of two hundred years of industriousness and of collective intelligence, and transformed the concrete reality of social civilization into abstraction: figures, algorithms, mathematical ferocity and accumulation of nothing in the form of money. The seductive form of simulation transformed physical forms into vanishing images, submitted visual art to spam spreading, and subjected language to the fake regime of advertising. At the end of this process, real life disappeared into the black hole of financial accumulation. (6)

This description of the character of the contemporary cultural context by Berardi uses Jean Baudrillard’s notion of simulation to articulate the movement of all forms of representation (image, language, art, money) towards what Baudrillard calls the “degree zero of meaning” (*Simulacra and Simulation* 87): meaning at its most popular, that point of universal advertising appeal at which the object acquires the capacity for unfettered reproduction and distribution of the word or digital image, its sign. The ‘reality of

¹ The Post-Workerism is a political and philosophical movement inspired by Marxist critique and organized around the concept of a ‘Post-Fordist’ economy and subject. Some prominent contributors include Antonio Negri, Christian Marrazzi, Paolo Virno and Franco Berardi (Henninger and Mecchia 4-5)

social civilization' becomes accessible almost exclusively through the exhaustive production and distribution of information about reality via the avenues of image, language, art and money. Our contemporary faith in reality, which in the scope of this project defines the ethos of the contemporary subject, is grounded in the ease and continuity of its reproduction and distribution through our networks of information. This statement by Berardi echoes a provocative statement made by Jean Baudrillard in 1995:

[...] the main objection to reality is its propensity to submit unconditionally to every hypothesis you can make about it. With this its most abject conformism, it discourages the liveliest minds. You can subject it – and its principle (what do they get up to together, by the way, apart from dully copulating and begetting reams of obviousness?) – to the most cruel torments, the most obscene provocations, the most paradoxical insinuations. It submits to everything with unrelenting servility. Reality is a bitch. And that is hardly surprising, since it is the product of stupidity's fornication with the spirit of calculation – the dregs of the sacred illusion offered up to the jackals of science. (*The Perfect Crime* 3)

In this context the problem with reality is precisely that it unflinchingly takes on the appearance of that which describes it, making the acceptance of the total concept of reality indifferent to the diversity and particularity of the forms which convey it; not only indifferent to its blind spots, but dependent upon them. The self-evidence of reality becomes its own failing: a reality so easily manipulated from so many formal angles both empowers the individual and shatters any confidence in their capacity to distinguish between the fictional and the real. This Post-Workerist, postmodern understanding of contemporary reality laments the ease with which late-capitalist abstraction overcomes the basic inconsistency of material reality (absence, nothingness, death). And yet it is precisely that inconsistency which precludes the determination of the real by the avenues of image, language, art, money and information. Contemporary reality is a defensive position whose bulwarks are fictional representations arrayed specifically against the deconstructive logic of contemporary representation, against the capacity for these very representations to leave an irrevocable trace of their origins in fiction. In other words, reality is defended and produced through the very thing it seeks to eliminate: fiction.

Art and literature in this context are confronted by a system of representation which somehow exceeds the pleasures and creativity of art and the certainty of objectivity at once. This contemporary constellation of formal expressions of reality constitutes a universally accessible defensive position that harkens back to the process of reading described by Marcel Proust in *A la recherche du temps perdu* (de Man, *Allegories of Reading* 59-60), a process of pleasurable isolation whose pleasure is derived specifically from the dual experience of secure position and unfettered access to everything beyond the horizon of that position. The contemporary condition is defined by this double-posture occupied by the subject vis-

à-vis reality and fiction: the ontological security of reality acquired through a variety of fictions. This is the circular logic of deconstruction as it is understood here: the pursuit of reality requires the production of fiction, which in turn requires the further pursuit of reality, *ad infinitum*.

Tom McCarthy is an English author, artist and academic who described himself in a post-Brexit *Guardian* opinion piece as “thoroughly European” (“Don't call me a British artist”). He makes this claim after confidently defining the political position of the artist in the present post-Brexit, late-capitalist context: “Art does not take place in a vacuum [...] In our society, the artist may have no executive power whatsoever, but their ace-card lies in the fact that they command a means – perhaps the primal one – of putting value in the world: a means of making meaning. They can use this status to subvert, or to shore up, power – sometimes both at the same time – and they can do this well, badly or indifferently; but one thing they can never do is be politically neutral” (“Don't call me a British artist”). Two important lessons about both contemporary society and literature can be drawn from this statement. Firstly, art is described as deploying a “primal” means of value production (a means of production which transcends the particularities of form), a ritual form of repetition, repetition that creates value in both economic and semantic terms. This value (meaning) carries with it the capacity to alter subjective relations to power (and thus power itself).

The second lesson is alluded to through the tone of semantic inevitability; art is necessarily conditioned by the world within which it is produced. Art and artists in contemporary society can *try* to be political, but there is something to that primal means of value and meaning production that eludes the intentions of the artist. Art today is, in his own words, always already political. It is always political because it can only pretend to be outside of the scope of contemporary global hegemony. What does it mean to have no outside to refer to? Both Frederic Jameson and Jean Baudrillard have identified postmodernity or late capitalism as a context without the capacity for contextualization, a context within which criticism necessarily takes a moral or ethical form because there is no alternative against which to critique the world practically or historically. The condition of contemporary society that necessitates art's essential relation to the political is the same that instantiates information's relation to the political: mass communication. Art is always already political because it is produced by a subject locked within a network of information about the world; art is always already political because it is always already a form a meaningful information. The difficulty is that there is a human desire that this condition seems destined to satiate: that of social connection. There is in other words a desire to be as a node within a system of *shared* real time information relay, or in anthropological terms to be one marker in an endless ritual

production of meaning. For McCarthy the artist is already such a node, necessarily receiving and retransmitting the signals they confront in its materially inescapable place and time. McCarthy implies that art is something that cannot escape value or meaning. I would argue that information is an idea that expresses this same inevitability, though with an increased emphasis on value over meaning. They depend on the unpredictable act of reading, which itself depends on the undecidability of language. Though it may be *possible* (theoretically) to control those readings through strict manipulation of form or content, there always remains an element of the unpredictable reading in any text. This is an important and resonant statement coming from an author whose work has almost exclusively ignored both positive and critical illustrations of the political.

Our contemporary cultural context is one of globalized economics, politics, communication and representation. It is a moment that is caught on the edge of leaving things like colonialism, fascism and communism behind through an ethics of transparency applied to their historical transgressions, by their endless critique and undoing in information, and yet seems to always be in the process of reviving these ideas through the representation of the continued iteration of their social performance. This is the paradox of transparency: information produced about them places these traditions firmly in the past, while at the same time finding their basic ethos represented in image, text, action and performance. Fascism, for instance, is in general an historical concept; it occupies a seemingly fixed place in our history in that it had a beginning and end. And yet, through the interminable production of discourse and information, it finds itself revived and renewed, located wherever the necessary phrasing is committed to. That fascism is 'locked' into our historical consciousness (through television, film, novel, photograph, etc.) as started and ended is paradoxically what enables it to be identified everywhere; that, and the capacity for language to confront, label and address more of the world than it ever has before through the Internet.

Our Context is Reality

Our contemporary context can be described in terms of the problem of reality and its relation to fiction. Capitalism, the unquestionably dominant mode of production, consists of a total network of exchange; anything and everything has a value, and is exchangeable as such. There is nothing that escapes this exchangeability. This total network of exchange operates on the basis of the continuing circulation of performance and symbol: it is these meaning-makers which constitute both the fundamental engine of

contemporary capitalism and the horizon of its function. It can only continue to circulate; therefore, it is not only the network of exchange that is inescapable, but the semantic and performative conditions of that exchange as well. This restless surface of contemporary society rests on, paradoxically, an irresolvable dualism of fiction and reality. The subject is, in other words, forced to confront the semantics of symbol and performance through the very network of meaning they establish as real. The pursuit of meaning through interminable transmission and exchange can thus be understood as an ideological pursuit: the ethos of reality production. There are two perspectives that might be put into question in this context: the self-perspective and the world-perspective. The former can be considered the telos of an ethical pursuit in global society; through the immersion in the networks of information exchange, one can reasonably expect to learn the reality of who we are (as individual, as self). The same can be said of the world: through a committed immersion in the world of information, the world acquires the potential to become identical with itself. These are the spoken and unspoken goals of the ethos of reality production, an ethos which I consider central to our *ideological* totality (the virtual hegemony of globalisation). Thanks to the seemingly limitless expansion of communication technology, now is the moment when everything that the modern world has been seeking is closer than it has ever been, and as such, it reveals more of its ethical blind alleys, moral weak points and logical soft spots than ever before.

Today, we tend not to think of theory, literature or philosophy as the contemporary moderators of what we understand as culturally contextual reality. Simply put, these are all forms of reality-reading that had their heyday in the recent or not-so-recent past. Today, the dominant form of socially accepted reality is 'information': facts, data, binary code, statistics, measurements, observations. Bernard E. Harcourt describes this as the "expository society", one in which,

[...] the digital realm does not so much reveal truths about society and ourselves as produce them. Our desires and practices are constantly shaped, guided, pointed in particular directions. Netflix tells us which films we will like, Amazon which books we will read, Spotify which songs we will enjoy. As the monitoring and marketing of our private lives changes who we are, power circulates in a new way [...] Today we live, rather, in a society of exposure and exhibition. (Surveillance State? It's So Much Worse)

Harcourt describes an anti-Orwellian society, not bent on the erasure of pleasure but on its technological aestheticization through the irresistible positivity of the formalized, normalized access to it through the digital technology of 'liking', 'sharing', 'following', etc. (Surveillance State? It's So Much Worse). This formalized aesthetic of positivity becomes an experiential mode of the ideal it is meant to lead towards: "the idea that amassing large data sets and mining and analyzing them will reveal truths about our society and solutions to problems that we might never have discovered" (Surveillance State?

It's So Much Worse). The reading of novels is of course subsumed within this notion of the total reduction of the social to data; the novel reader and novel dissolve into the soup of numerical models grasping at the utopian resolution of all problems through data. There is thus a trace of difference in the novel form, a trace of what makes their reduction to information essential and at the same time impossible. What is thus perhaps smuggled within the dominance of information is the idea that there is (or was) a formal difference between 'information' and 'novel'. A recent piece in *The Guardian* blog argues on behalf of an application (app) that condenses non-fiction texts into roughly 20 pages of summary, stating that "[w]e have to get over the idea that spending hours in a mahogany chair, frowning over a leather-bound volume from 1623 is the best way to absorb information" (Shipley). In my opinion we have to get over the idea that information is there to be *absorbed* rather than *read*. Absorption implies a digestive process (the *automated* separation of good and bad elements; the former absorbed and the latter expelled by an unconscious agency), not an exchange but the receiving of a gift; an act which always implies two distinct power-positions. Information is given to us seemingly by the grace of the world itself (it appears as by magic on all the screens), information that we then employ as a means of controlling and actualizing the world it represents. The contemporary context obfuscates this paradox of an autonomous reality and the subjects whose meaning and performance alter it. It implies the desire that would see barriers which might obstruct the smooth accumulation or absorption of information by the subject be eliminated, such as in this blogger's view when, "some authors waffle on, whether because they were paid by the word or their agents were too polite to tell them to stop. Many more writers would benefit from being condensed – that's the long and the short of it" (Shipley). The unpredictable nature of authorship itself constitutes a barrier for the smooth accumulation and absorption of information. For the purposes of my analysis, this constitutes an example of what Jean Baudrillard calls the *art of disappearance*. Briefly, the art of disappearance is the dominant art form (poetics) of contemporary capitalist society; it is an art of producing reality by removing or distancing the subject from it (consuming the good and discreetly expelling the bad). Baudrillard describes the art of disappearance as the pursuit of our own disappearance into technical objects and through ideological performance (*Why Hasn't Everything Already Disappeared?* 10). It is, in effect, the art of disappearing behind the signs of ourselves, signs whose form is now dictated by information. This blog-entry demonstrates both the ethos of reality production and the practice of the art of disappearance; the application is the art in practice, as it seeks to eliminate the barriers to effective absorption of information, which in this case are defined as the uncontrolled (or poorly controlled) textual production of the author (typically vulnerable to flaws and undecidability). Absorbing information is one way to create distance between our subjectivity and our reality: information appears autonomous and

automatic, as if it grew like objective grass from the pages and screen of our subjective perception. The art of disappearance constitutes the collective side-stepping of our rhetorical or poetic relation to things, a permanent detour around the instability of the linguistic relation between self and object. Our cultural context is dominated by the expectation of and desire for information, for objective reality, and for some kind of ontological stability. What we perhaps are not yet fully conscious of is the fact that those goals are only possible in our absence, and hence the general momentum and energy of the West is invested in the simulation of our own disappearance, which is another way of saying that the energy and structure of the hegemonic system is invested in our deaths, in our beneficent disappearance into technologies of surveillance, projection, expression and storage.

Contemporary Literature in Late Capitalist Society

Our contemporary cultural context is distributed to us through a global network of visible and invisible lines, waves, movements and transmissions; it is a relentless and unavoidable communication. Hanna Meretoja describes our cultural context as the “age of storytelling” (2), a consequence of what she calls the ‘narrative turn’. In this age of storytelling the novel form cannot be singled out any longer as the paragon of narrative. Film, photography, radio, television and now the internet have all played a part in the usurpation of narrative power. Where Meretoja argues that “As literature plays a pivotal role in renewing and transforming these narrative models, this shift entails seeing literary narratives as crucial to the process by which we interpret our selves and our situation in the world” (2), I would argue that literature doubles the social and subjective value of narrative only once that value has been liberated from the novel-form by mass-production and mass-communication technology; once their implicit critique of its formal limits is complete. Hence, the return of the subject that comes with the return of the narrative is not a return as such but, as Meretoja argues, a re-thinking or re-envisioning of subjectivity which was begun by the post-war anti-narrative impetus of the *Nouveau Roman* (1). While McCarthy’s connection to Robbe-Grillet and the *Nouveau Roman* has been noted by both Dennis Duncan (15) and Arne De Boever (217), he analyses Robbe-Grillet in terms of the relation described above by Meretoja: literature as mode of relation to the world. However, rather than considering the *Nouveau Roman* in its negative or destructive sense, McCarthy describes it through Robbe-Grillet’s novels as “ultra-realist, shot through at every level with the sheer quiddity of the environments to which they attend so faithfully. What we see happening in them, again and again, is space and matter inscribing themselves on consciousness, whose task, reciprocally, is to accommodate space and matter” (*Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* 173).

Hence, while Meretoja understands the *Nouveau Roman* as negatively disruptive, McCarthy sees this disruption as a kind of ugly extension, a transgressing of realism as formal literary conceit by virtue of its unfettered pursuit (not restricted by the formalism of the realism the *Nouveau Roman* was meant to confront).

The cultural context described above is one beset by the idea of reality, and this obsession with reality leaves nothing behind (and only nothing); it plunges the value of literature into an endless stream of narratives contained and expressed by a variety of what will be considered below in terms of forms or formalisms. Within the confines of Western hegemony, the literary becomes something like one branch of the failed (or endlessly failing) reality-project; compared to the sphere of influence of the scientific method, to the ontological seduction of the digital image, to the practically incalculable ease with which text is reproduced and consumed digitally, the novel's place within the ethos of reality production can now only be understood in strictly dualistic terms. To understand the novel in dualistic terms is to understand it as a failed and hence potentially dangerous form of information, formally inferior to the screen but at the same time essential to it inasmuch as it lends value to the screen by virtue of its formal limitations. In one sense there is a return of the concept of the novel as being a kind of bourgeois feminine form; mindless commercial escapism for those who have the time for it. In another sense, the novel continues to be thought of in terms of a form that is inextricably linked to the ideological development and existence of the modern subject. However, in the contemporary moment this idea is complicated by the notion of the death or exhaustion of that formalist relation, and 21st-century novels (like those of Tom McCarthy) seek in certain ways to confront and expose the idealism, or ideology, behind this presumed relation. We might think of 21st-century literature primarily in terms of *writing*, and not necessarily afford literature the privilege of a particular form or formalism (the narrative) which many associate with the modern novel. As McCarthy acknowledges, the literary is challenged not by the specifics of its own development, but by the coordinated development of capital and communication technology ("The Death of Writing").

If we are limiting the notion of the 'contemporary' to the time span beginning in the 1980s and ending now, then I would argue that the contemporary literary context is characterised by two major concerns: 1) identity, self and subjectivity, and 2) exhaustion and death (failure). First, I'll explain briefly how these concerns are framed in discourse, and then I will connect these ideas to certain approaches to language and literature. What I intend to demonstrate here is that these concerns are actually in a sense universal and ahistorical human concerns; they are, in other words, theoretically immanent not just to

the novel form, but to the form of the modern subject and its relation to the world. The contemporary literary and social emphasis on these concepts demonstrates an ideologically positive mode of concern or confrontation. Literary concerns in postmodernity necessarily reflect the social, cultural and intellectual concerns of the individual born into an incredulity to cultural and political metanarratives (Lyotard xxiv); the subject is confronting their capacity to narrate reality. Literature in this sense might be said to have once again reached a stage of obscene and uncomfortable self-recognition; it can see in itself those bare, formless narratives of oral myths and cave paintings from which springs the human tradition of writing of all kinds, and which engender the most abstract and at the same time scientific analysis today. When reality was still understood as an ideologically-dependent illusion any self-reflection amounted to viewing oneself in a carnival mirror; one was by definition a distorted image (distorted by arguments over truth and representation). The contemporary or postmodern subject finds their reflection suddenly and perhaps traumatically straightened or aligned by information; even the literary character finds itself in the prison of the 'thing-in-itself'.

Real Self and Literary Self

Representation of the human experience in any form always bears that implicit threat that it will overcome or seduce the capacity for (free, individual, autonomous) creation or action with the appeal of the predictable and reproducible. In contemporary terms, springing from the 1980s and reverberating until now, the concept of identity in English literature seems to have superseded the idea of subjectivity by merging with the notion of an immutable self (the self-in-itself?). In other words, the political and historical potential of the subject was folded into the increasingly representable and hence secure notion of identity and selfhood; the subject and its potential became absorbed into the categories of identity inasmuch as identity is derived from particular historical conditions and performance. Identity becomes like an isolation chamber from which all the benefits of subjectivity can be seen and performed, as though the cells of Foucault's panopticon were now fitted with webcams and screens so that it is no longer the surveillance of the empty central tower that keeps prisoners in line, but their mutually competitive desire to be most self-identical.

Contemporary English literature confronts these concerns largely through the ideas of identity as they were shaped by the political and cultural impact of spectacular collapse: of the British Empire post-WWII and the eventual transition into neoliberalism in the form of Margaret Thatcher's Britain, as well as

the fall of the Twin Towers on September 11th, 2001, among other elements. Ideas of the minority, the majority, ideas of class and cosmopolitanism, of the break-down and build-up of identity in that period have stretched beyond the 1990s and 2000s in the form of more developed, varied and yet at the same time ideologically positive identity forms. These ideas are central to what I would call the mainstream of British fiction: they tend to occupy genres that are not classically realist or naturalist, but which nevertheless extend the generic and ideological tradition of a kind of mimetic writing (as confidence in that mimetic capacity was in the process of becoming technically enhanced). One way of putting it would be to say that the search for identity comes up against that which threatens its very existence as a socially coordinating desire: the technological reflection of that certainty. Hence, the concern with the self inevitably leads to the concern with death or exhaustion or vulnerability. Can the self (in contemporary literary and social relations) be thought of as an exhausted or dead form? And what does it mean to try and think the modern literary and social subject in terms of a thing that can die or become exhausted?

In post-WWII British literature, identity appeared confronted by a failure or collapse: that of the British Empire. The imperial subjects, ostensibly white, lost sight of the very thing which underpinned their supposed identity: the marks which differentiated them from the inferior other. As such, much of post-WWII English literature engaged with this historical disruption of the dominant identity (Tew 48-50). Thatcher, Thatcherism and the novels associated with this time period (1979-1990) tended to reverse that trend of illustrating and considering the break-up of the dominant identity. Phillip Tew, for instance, argues that the novel of this era tended to revolve around the problematic nature of identity and urban life in Thatcherite England, and marked a concerted effort at the resurgence of the middle-class English subject, once imperial, now neo-liberal Thatcherite. The imperial identity was being doubled in the form of a novel iteration separated from its historical (material) roots, becoming increasingly associated with the immateriality of the mechanisms of financial capitalism. The contemporary novel form, for Tew, starts in this post-war setting and moves from the attempts of the Middle-class English subjects to reconsider, retain or hold together some part of their identity (while a major anchor of that identity crumbles around them) to a resurgent attempt to prioritize a middle-class identity anchored by neo-liberal cultural rhetoric and political-economic policy. At the same time in France, we have the post-war rise of anti-narrative writing and theory, like that of Robbe-Grillet, Georges Bataille and Michel Foucault. This anti-narrative movement, rather than simply re-interpret identity and subjectivity in a post-war position, served to problematize the relationship between narrative forms and the form of the subject. While in England this period is not associated with any similarly salient literary movement, both traditions reflected a general loss of faith in established narratives and identities.

In the following lines addressing and describing a novel by Caryl Phillips, Tew intimates with increased specificity the major strategy of engaging with 'Britishness' in contemporary novels that is meant to reflect a similar strategy at play in culture as a whole:

Amidst this crisis of the emotive and somatic self, in its image of defamiliarization and alienation, Phillips describes thematically and structurally the fragmentation of identity and its persistence. This is resonant as it encapsulates a literary transformation in British fiction that had been in process for a time about the nature of its legitimate cultural identities. Determining the dynamic and focus of this metamorphosis is a complex and an elusive process because it charts a broader cultural transformation, and because specifying the range of cultural reference has become itself a ground of dispute. (30)

In other words, identity in Britain is in flux; yet, it is also permanent. It is a brand of double-knowledge; like the self-awareness of narrative, this self-awareness of identity necessitates fluctuation, and fluctuation gives artificial life (as a particularly linguistic and aesthetic type of movement) to that which the late capitalist system has nullified in a duality of reality and fiction (or reality through fiction). What is being said is that contemporary fiction is often illustrating what is essentially a culture-wide identity crisis. In other words, it is an identity crisis by which the concept of identity itself is secured and ontologically solidified, while the content of that identity is morally and ethically labelled and critiqued in a continuous circulation of information mixed with opinion. What McCarthy's work implicitly does is seek out and find the ready-made solution to this supposed crisis, ostensibly grounded in the truth of the matter: that this crisis is at best abstract, as it leaves out what tends to contradict or dismiss its authenticity. What is left out of much of the literary analysis of identity and subjectivity is what McCarthy leaves in: the (automated) easy-answer provided by the very culture that is supposedly in a state of identity-flux. It is in this sense that I want to problematize this notion of identity. Tew makes clear that he wants to move beyond the post-structuralism and textualism of postmodernity and in doing so facilitate a return to "apprehensible meaning" in the novel form (3-4). The same sentiment is attributed to fiction of the narrative turn by Meretoja, inasmuch as a return to narrative is a return to a sense of completion. To pose identity as a problem that needs to be solved in literary terms is to ignore the fact that this problem has instantly accessible, ready-made non-literary solutions there to be desired, believed-in and consumed.

The search for identity and individuality cannot be a true problem in contemporary society (which is why we have instead focused on having your individuality or identity *without negative consequence*, without excess or remainder which might disrupt its reality), because identity is everywhere, it is embedded in the social commodity system itself. Therefore, it is not the uncertainty or lack of identity that is the issue in culture and literature today, but rather the ease with which identity is simulated,

assumed and performed, i.e. the *excess* of identity. The problem, in other words, is the effort necessary to maintain a self aligned with its own image or reflection: there is always something more you must do to match the image you produce, always another movement to mimic. Excess always produces a problem for the example it transcends: by going beyond the controlling horizon of that mass, excess puts the objective reality of that mass in doubt. A resurgence in religiosity, nationalism, ethnic identity politics, combined with the emergence of what might be labelled 'alternative' gender-identities that have primarily emerged in Western Europe and North America (Cis, trans, etc.) represent not just a shift from the largely colonial and post-colonial literary discourse surrounding identity, but towards a generalised sense of the masses re-acquiring this power that has survived the many deaths of the novel through the technical forms of narrative and the symbolic.

Exhaustion and Death

In *Contemporary Literature and the End of the Novel* Pieter Vermeulen posits that certain contemporary authors of the 21st century, Tom McCarthy included, have engaged in an attempt to re-imagine the novel form and its dominant relation to the subject. He uses the concept of the 'novel genre' in order to approach and contrast the form of the 21st-century novel with that of its predecessor, something we might call the novel of the narrative turn as it is described above in terms of both the French and English tradition. Peter Boxall has focused primarily on the literary expression of exhaustion in the 21st-and late 20th-centuries in his critical introduction to 21st-century fiction. While Vermeulen points out the historical and repetitive nature of any claims about the death or exhaustion of the novel form (*Contemporary Literature* 19), Boxall offers an image of the 21st century which is simultaneously 'late' or exhausted *and* characterised by a novelty which he understands in terms of the rearranged subjective relation to time and space ("Fictional Time" 2-4).

Both however, come to similar ideas about the role of the novel and novel writer in this context of formal exhaustion and death. Vermeulen argues that "intimations of the end of the novel animate contemporary fiction and allow it to reconfigure relations between human life, affect and literary form" (*Contemporary Literature* 105); he describes McCarthy's novel *Remainder* as, "a protracted attempt to bury the novel that cannot help but reanimate it, and that ends up transmitting weak, dysphoric and uneasy affects" (*Contemporary Literature* 21). Boxall identifies in the 21st century novel, "a certain kind of novel thinking, a kind of literary thinking, that does not belong fully to the present, does not conform to

existing school of thought, but that opens the present up along its 'lines of fragility' (*Twenty-first-century Fiction* 18). What these two authors are effectively saying is that it is the novel itself which extends this form beyond its own death; its vulnerability to comparison with technically performed reality paradoxically constitutes the mode of its rebirth. I want to suggest that McCarthy, rather than, intentionally or otherwise, trying to create openings for new forms of subject or novel is in fact demonstrating that the death of the modern subject and novel form is best exemplified in their technological diffraction and usurpation; these forms are dead, not by virtue of their absence, but by virtue of their automated and ubiquitous presence outside of the traditional formalisms of realism or the modern novel.

Corpus

The corpus of this project is limited to McCarthy's four novels: *Remainder*, *Men in Space*, *C* and *Satin Island*. Although McCarthy began writing in the 1980s after graduating from Oxford university, his novel *Remainder* (which was written second after *Men in Space*), was his first novel to be published in 2005. Critics and readers reacted to the novels with a variety of feelings, with the spectrum running the gamut from dull and uninteresting to avant-garde and exciting. Although most regard McCarthy as a skilled novelist, complaints about his style, and about the repetitive structure of the narratives are not unknown in their critical reception. While most popular (newspaper, online) reviews tend to circulate around a core of common themes and ideas (communication, isolation, transmission, modernism, secrecy, codes) the academic reception of his work has produced a variety of perspectives ranging from the investigation of their relation to trauma literature, historical literature, the postmodern, modernism, communication theory, the tradition of the *Nouveau Roman*, realism, philosophy, late capitalism and the literature of the 21st century. In this section I will outline in more detail the basic plot of each novel, how they are received both popularly and academically, and how this reception can be understood in relation to what I argue the novels represent in both literary and cultural terms. Finally, I will attempt to situate McCarthy's novels within the literary context described above, by comparing them stylistically to certain dominant themes of discourse surrounding the contemporary novel form: exhaustion/death, identity/subjectivity, satire and the narrative form.

Men in Space

Though *Men in Space* was published after *Remainder*, it is technically the first novel McCarthy wrote. The novel consists of a collection of diverse characters and stories, all bound up initially in the space of Prague after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The primary focus of the narrative consists of a criminal plot to copy a famous Byzantine icon and to return the copy to the police; in effect, to accomplish a 'perfect crime'. Aesthetically, the icon is one of two images which repeat throughout and dominate the narrative, the other being the story of a cosmonaut who has been abandoned to eternal orbit since his ostensible point of origin (Soviet Russia) has ceased to exist. While the plot surrounding the icon seems to move things in the novel, that of the cosmonaut remains something like a floating allegory of every character's situation. *Men in Space* is perhaps the most traditional of McCarthy's novels, including as it does a variety of main characters, each with ostensibly independent stories and lives. In turn, it is at least partially based on McCarthy's own experiences in Prague after he left university, and hence offers readers expecting a typical realist novel at least some of the experiential and desire-conventions they might have been looking for.

Lee Rourke, writing for *The Guardian*, offered a generally positive review of the novel, pointing to one of the major themes of *Men in Space*, which in turn finds itself repeated in McCarthy's later novels: failed transcendence (Rourke). Alongside this major theme, performed allegorically in the novel by the imagery of the Byzantine Icon, Rourke points out the excess of "noise" which permeates the text, "a cacophony of voices, accents, languages and dialogue in myriad forms. It is a novel that practically rattles with noise" (Rourke). This noise is the sound track of the 'fragmented world' of post-Soviet, pre-break-up Czechoslovakia, a historical and real moment of dislocation and re-location; an in-between period in history allegorized by both the orbiting cosmonaut and by the image conjured by the title. Rourke praises McCarthy's ability to illustrate the fragmentary nature of our own world through this text, concluding that

Tom McCarthy leads the reader to a repeating series of ellipses that neither confirm nor deny; a feeling that humanity has been abandoned, and will be abandoned again and again. There is no 'divine mystery' to ascend towards, just a 'kind of Bermuda triangle'; a point of no return; an eternal repeating nothingness. McCarthy is fast revealing himself as a master craftsman who is steering the contemporary novel towards exciting territories. (Rourke)

Alfred Hickling, also writing for *The Guardian*, is slightly more cautious in his praise, stating, "One can never quite be sure if he's a serious writer who enjoys Situationist jokes, or the general secretary of a totalitarian administrative bureau who writes novels for a laugh" (Hickling). Like Rourke, he highlights the two most prominent illustrations of ideas in the novel: the cosmonaut and the icon "of a saint floating above a city on a strange ellipsis" (Hickling), without engaging too discreetly with the possibilities of their

meaning. His major criticism of the novel reflects an accurate assessment of one of McCarthy's more repetitive themes: "Yet the skittish, fractured nature of the composition leaves much that feels inadequately explained. There are too many characters whose significance remains unclear, a series of deaths left teasingly ambiguous, and a plethora of extremely similar party scenes which blur into a single hangover" (Hickling). With this criticism and his suspicions about McCarthy's intent, he reveals both the stated expectations (in the theoretical and critical literature) of the reader of modern novels, and the general ethos of reality production which guides both McCarthy's readers and his characters. This reviewer, like some others, notes the lack of resolution and clarity of purpose of both the narrative itself and the individual plotlines of each character. Stephen Burn describes this multiplicity in terms of "the fabulating mind's encounter with an ungraspable reality", suggesting that *Men in Space* "is constructed in such a way that the text is not a single story, but rather a field of multiple resonances, and instead of invoking the icon's geometry the meaning of any number of scenes might be similarly multiplied by invoking biology, mythology, cybernetics or literary theory" (Burn). It is precisely this undecidability that McCarthy deploys throughout his work, and which gives it its particular tone (of simultaneous repetition and novelty). Derek Attridge underlines this tone through an assessment that will come to echo Jean Baudrillard's concept of the art of disappearance: "The contrast between the mechanistic operation of systems and the escape onto another plane (symbolised by the mysterious ellipse in the painting) remains important, and the latter element begins to take the form of paranormal connections" (10). What is important to note when considering *Men in Space*, is how this tone that is both satirical and realistic relates not to literature as a self-contained autonomous space but rather to contemporary life as literary, as narrative, and as such as vulnerable to instances of doubling, of deconstruction and of doubt.

Remainder

Of all of McCarthy's novels, *Remainder* is by far the most referenced and engaged-with by the academic community. Writing for *The Nation*, Deresiewicz argues that,

[r]ather than inviting contingency into his work—the messy particulars of experience, those unpredictable remainders that disrupt our mental schemes (as Joyce, his chief artistic hero, makes a point of doing)—McCarthy seems intent on squeezing it out. In *Remainder*, the impulse is ironized. In *Men in Space*, eventually, and in *C* and *Satin Island*, unrestrainedly, it is simply indulged. For someone who insists that order is a fiction, McCarthy is quite the control freak. (40-41)

He is right in suggesting that contingency plays a big part in all of McCarthy's novels, however, the comments which follow reveal the same ideological impetus at play as with *The Guardian* writers above: he equates the literary representation of very limited characters seeking to control contingency to a *literal* representation of McCarthy himself as opposed to an expression of an overarching or social condition. Instead I would argue that this illustration of (often vain) attempts to control contingency is in fact an illustration of an essential illusion: the illusion of control and predictability, which is the illusion natural to the novel form (as authored) and to contemporary ideology.

Published in 2005 by Paris art-house publisher Metronome, *Remainder* was initially rejected by all of the major publishing houses it was shopped to. However, *Remainder* is by far the more academically engaged with, and despite not being nominated (as *C* and *Satin Island* were) for the Man Booker Prize, it has probably been the most well-received among average readers. Patrick Ness, writing for the *Guardian* website, called the novel "pleasingly off-kilter" and "refreshingly idiosyncratic" (Ness), sentiments which reflect the general sense of novelty with which the novel was received, the same kind of novelty that is described in Zadie Smith's article "Two Paths for the Novel", in which McCarthy's style is labelled avant-garde and contrasted with that of contemporary realism. While Ness praises *Remainder* simply for the novelty of reading it, Liesl Schillinger, writing for *The New York Times*, engages with the text not through its novelty but through the themes of confusion, humanism and science fiction. Schillinger notes the states of confusion and "perplexity and excessive focus" of the narrator, but in the end views him as a kind of "existential tyrant" (Schillinger), demonstrating the instructive and disquieting combinations or paradoxical yet inert doublings which I have suggested characterize McCarthy's work.

Academically the engagement with *Remainder* has been more varied. For instance Daniel Lea approaches the idea of contemporary authenticity through an analysis of *Remainder*, effectively arguing that, "While *Remainder's* narrator and Eric Sanderson express a deep-rooted desire for being and acting authentically, and although both locate their nebulous sense of the authentic within the 'heroic idea of coinciding with oneself and one's deepest needs or impulses' (Williams 184) that I am affiliating here with the biological tradition, the former locates it primarily as a spatial paradigm [...] Indeed, for McCarthy, the coincidence with self can only be articulated through the confluence of material and immaterial realms" (465), and as such re-iterates the notion that McCarthy's narratives both build, and occur within, a context defined by a late-capitalist coming together of the ideal and the material in the guise of what will come to be understood as the formalism. A similar suggestion is echoed and at the same time problematized by Derek Attridge when he asks, "are the re-enactments attempts to escape the drag of matter, or are they

attempts to fully inhabit its world? (Which of the two types of man in space is the model?) Perhaps these aren't opposites, but versions of the same thing: to become wholly one with matter is to shake off its hold on you" (20). *Remainder*, and his other novels, reflect the notion of the narrative turn described above, but in a sideways deconstructive fashion. Rather than expressing explicitly in the characters an awareness of the duality of narrative in human life, that awareness is already fallen from its theoretical ideal and gets diluted and transfigured and spread throughout the narratives; repetitive and innocuous scenes become a series of endless side-ways references to this self-awareness which is absent in the character and yet at the same time being incessantly alluded to. As C. Namwali Serpell puts it when discussing the mode of repetition in *Remainder*, "while readers 'see' and 'hear' all that takes place, we are denied the concision of summary, analysis, or explanation" (233), what we get instead is the sometimes compelling, sometimes banal and repetitious, often nebulous and referential thoughts of the narrator. Lea concludes that McCarthy believes in more than one form of authenticity and yet fails to "wholeheartedly assert the return of the subject from its deconstructive exile" (475). I believe this indicates one of two usual positions on McCarthy: the one which takes McCarthy seriously as a practitioner of the novel, and therefore a writer who works with the expression and continuity of that form in mind, which is to say that the contents of the novel are speaking *to* the history of the form. Though several of Lea's arguments are compelling, I would suggest that if we engage with his novels under the assumption of them being an attempt at literary progression we are beginning our travels with a step onto the wrong path.

Perhaps the most common way *Remainder* has been spoken about in academic discourse has been as, or in dialogue with, what has become known as trauma literature. Pieter Vermeulen prefaces his comments regarding McCarthy and trauma literature by suggesting that modernist literature has been categorized as the literature of the "traumatized self" ("The Critique of Trauma and the Afterlife of the Novel in Tom McCarthy's *Remainder*" 553-4), making some relation necessary between the concrete ontology of the modern subject and the social context of the 'traumatized self'. About McCarthy specifically he says the following: "*Remainder*'s challenge amounts to the charge that trauma fiction has failed to question this generic investment in psychological depth, social accommodation, and identification; it raises the question whether the uninvestigated attachment of trauma to individual subjectivity has not obscured the radical transitivity and mobility of trauma" ("The Critique of Trauma" 554-55). I would argue that it is the very "radical transitivity and mobility of trauma" which is illustrated through the largely side-ways and heavily mediated attempts of this narrator to return to an authentic state. However, I do not believe trauma in *Remainder* is meant to represent trauma-in-general or -in-literature, but rather the specifically technological trauma of capitalism and modernity.

Jim Byatt offers another example of thinking about trauma through *Remainder*, this time in comparison to J.G. Ballard's *Crash*. Byatt executes what I would argue is the most compelling reading of the novel, when he suggests that *Remainder*, like *Crash*, is a narrative of a "peritraumatic dissociation" (258). Peritraumatic dissociation is the fantasy created by the traumatized brain at the moment of death, or just prior to it, that defers the experience of death. His assertion is that the narrator in fact dies in the accident which he cannot really relay to the reader, and the narrative is his exploration of the fantasy his mind creates to distract itself from the trauma of dying. Though this argument is grounded in a scientific understanding of this phenomenon, it offers more than one reading. The first reading suggests that the novel is merely an expressive experiment with the capacity of the novel form to explore difficult ideas and experiences such as a 'peritraumatic dissociation' and trauma in general as a human experience. The second, which is my preference, is to read this assertion itself as a kind of metaphor for a 'peritraumatic dissociation' on a social scale.² In other words, when Byatt describes McCarthy's narrator as, "at least potentially, dead, but as long as they continue to imaginatively construct a space in which to exist, a simulacrum of the real world, they are able to maintain at least the illusion of indefinite longevity" (258), what I read is an allegorical structure which replicates a certain ideological quality of our own existence. What Byatt describes here as the *modus operandi* of a 'potentially dead' character, is precisely the ethical impetus of the contemporary subject according to Baudrillard, and I would argue McCarthy as well. Having passed some threshold, the subject is left only with the slow motion simulation of ascending that threshold again (stretching time out as far as possible so as to delay the inevitable face-plant).³ In McCarthy's work there is no overcoming, no transcendence, only the compulsive insistence on these things, a kind of erotic pulsing desire for them that diminishes the closer we get to them, and hence re-invigorates itself precisely through contact with the object of this desire.

C

McCarthy's third novel, named simply *C* (published in 2010), is the story of the life of Serge Carrefax, second child and eldest son of bourgeois landowners in southern England. The novel is split neatly into four numbered and named sections: 1. Caul, 2. Chute, 3. Crash, 4. Call. This arrangement offers us a signpost of the kind of deconstructive logic at play in the text: repetition in the form of re-iterated tropes

² This reading is supported by Merve Sarikaya-Şen, who argues that *Remainder* demonstrates a 'fight against consensus reality' (*Vulnerability and Monstrosity* 2).

³ A narrative in miniature represented by McCarthy's script, 'Agamemnon: A Play in Two Acts'

or allusions to a particular idea. Attridge notes something similar when he suggests that “The point-of-view shifts from Dr. Learmont to a more objective narrator and thence to young Serge, but my interest is in what’s happening textually more than in the individuals” (23). The novel begins with Caul (Serge is born with one), and ends with a kind of sideways allusion of a return, in the form of the word ‘Call’, a word that recalls the opening scene of birth while at the same time enacting a closing scene of death. Birth and death are arranged in a tropic loop; Serge is born with a caul, and dies thinking he is being ‘called’ once again. On the surface these opening and closing scenes could not be more different, and yet the action of ‘cauling’, of drawing an opaque and biological screen over one’s vision, is tripled in these scenes: first we read that Serge’s mother is fond of narcotics, her experience of his birth is shrouded by a drug-induced gauze. Serge is born with a caul, obscuring both his face and his vision. Finally, Serge experiences his death through the screen of a dream-scape manifestation of all his repressed and expressed desires: insect-subjectivity, incest, and limitless communication combined with the disappearance of the individual into the operational mass of indifferent machines and signals.

While certain critics extended into this novel some of the major themes of *Remainder* and *Men in Space* such as anti-humanism, lack of affect, and the depthlessness of the *Nouveau Roman* (Carty; Attridge), others have identified a relation to modernity and modernism as a dominant idea being worked through in the novel. As Boyd Tonkin puts it, writing for *The Independent*, “Speaking in 1924 about new means of portraying people in the novel, Virginia Woolf memorably announced that ‘On or about December 1910, human character changed’. The seemingly solid, in-depth, full-dress portraits of Victorian fiction and its inheritors told lies. On this view, the 20th-century personality demanded from its fictional investigators something more like an expressionist colour-field – or even a cubist collage” (Tonkin). Similarly, Charles Baxter has argued that McCarthy’s novels, “practice a form of modernist revival and are mostly traditional”, in that they contain straight-forward, dense but unproblematic description, a very apprehensible syntactic register, and provide characters which, “have names, attributes, and identities of a sort” (Baxter). And yet, he concludes this description with a somewhat paradoxical assertion that, “Nothing about his books is particularly challenging except for their hatred of liberal humanism and the way in which his characters prove to be absolutely unintelligible, particularly to themselves” (Baxter). This paradoxical doubling of the traditional novel form with a character who has a name, attributes and an identity and yet is ‘absolutely unintelligible’, is precisely the challenge posed by McCarthy’s text. To get back to Tonkin’s assertion, while modernism may have invested its energy into these newer forms of representation, with McCarthy, what you get is the subjective experience of flat images looking back at flat images; the creation and representation of a self-satisfied feed-back loop of reflection and

massification (giving mass or material actuality to ideals), or the already-dead subject finding its reflection in images as flat as it appears to be. This suggests that McCarthy is neither reviving nor merely paying homage to the modernist project, but saying something about it by virtue of the precise mode of its re-iteration, his precise mode of re-interpretation and representation. This is something that is actually alluded to by Tonkin, when he suggests that, “*C* presents individuals not as actors with free will, or even bundles of unconscious drives (another side of modernism), but as terminals or receivers who channel the messages that flow through [“]a vast sea of transmission[“]” (Tonkin). Serge himself may not be an Expressionist painting or Cubist collage in the modernist tradition, but he is in a sense confronting the *world-as-those-things* (a mode of perception reminiscent of our contemporary context of swirling information and incomplete pictures of the world), and he does so through the desire for and pursuit of height, distance and the mechanistic ontological detachment which guarantees access to these feelings of height and distance.

Jenny Turner’s review of *C* for the *London Review of Books* is perhaps the most complete and paradigmatic of the general sense with which *C* was popularly received. The following quotation demonstrates first that her reading is the ‘most’ paradigmatic of similar readings, and second that the issue of sustaining a double-vision of something is problematic even at the level of the author and his work: “As will, I think, be obvious, I had a whale of a time with this book, propped on my laptop, Wikipedia open in one window and in another, the *OED*. It was like being a guest at the dream-party of an extremely well-read host: things read a long time ago and more or less forgotten, things never read that I always meant to, things I certainly will read now, having seen how McCarthy can make them work. He sometimes talks about his job as a writer as being like that of a DJ or curator, plugging one set of material into another: the analogy is a good one, so long as it doesn’t suggest the work is unwriterly, because it’s not” (Turner). This statement is paradigmatic in the sense that it actually expands upon the dominant themes of signal, transmission, symbol and reference by focusing on her actions as reader; in other words, in expanding on precisely *how* she read this novel. In admitting that she read the novel with two internet windows open for quick reference to the meanings or etymology of the symbols, signals, references and language being used, she is performing the digitally (automatically) updated version of the modern reader who is seeking not only meaning from the text, not only some kind of relationship to the text through a shared sense of desire with the characters, but also with the writer and the molecular meaning of the words and references they use. She is performing the actions of the reader who knows that to be seduced by the referential and symbolic and intertextual is to operationally perform (and therefore obstruct the role of intuition and thought in) the search for meaning and shared experience that defines the subject of late

capitalist society as well as the bourgeois novel reader. In doing so, she is tacitly avoiding the very structure of literature that McCarthy highlights in his work of literary theory, that is: its absent center of meaning. In the digital, that absence is missing, because there is always a line on a reference, meaning is always already out there somewhere, if not in the novel itself. Similarly, Serge has been characterized repeatedly as a “coherer” (Tonkin; Turner; Lanone), as a kind of “lightning-conductor or sounding-board for the violent currents of his time” (Tonkin); when treated as such, Serge becomes nothing more than the point through which a view of these references, symbols and signs become possible, in other words, he is merely the subjective nexus connecting contemporary reader to ‘the violent currents’ of a past moment. If the repetitive and illustrative structure of this novel favours the reader who seeks to ‘de-code’ the encoding that the modernist novel performs, then reading represents only one half of the readerly potential described by Paul de Man and taken up by McCarthy in his critical work. This act of decoding is the act of the typical modern reader of the modern novel form. What McCarthy could be said to be doing, is re-arranging the modern subject, playing with the technical and literary excess of the modern narrative form, in order to seduce, not a different kind of subject-fiction (this is already present in the text in the form of machines and objects and images), or subject of the novel form, but a different kind of reader.

Speaking of the dream-delusion sequence which closes the novel and alludes both directly and indirectly to Serge’s death, Deresiewicz says the following:

The sequence, which goes on for pages, is admittedly cool. But finally, I thought, so what? Because Serge is a blank, because he’s not a character in any traditional sense (McCarthy abjures the creation of characters), he neither experiences emotions nor inspires them. And emotions are the difference between messages and meanings— between a radio and a novel. A meaning is a message that you feel something about. It is cognitized emotion, affective intellection. No feeling, no meaning. Otherwise you’re just creating illustrated manifestos. (42)

This sentiment highlights some of the major modes identified by other reviewers, namely, affectlessness and the general lack of emotion which is meant to create a connection between reader and character of the modern novel.

Justus Nieland expands this problematic of man and machine by focusing on McCarthy’s relation to avant-garde modernism, suggesting McCarthy’s novels (of which *C* is perhaps the most explicit example), “stand[s] not as the empty resuscitation of an avant-garde idiom but as its crypt, as a way of presiding over modernism’s death by re-enacting it traumatically, by lingering in the remains of its most fecund catastrophes, which are also those of the twentieth-century itself” (570). He follows this assertion with an explanation of how he views McCarthy’s understanding of modernism:

...not as a repertoire of forms, per se, or a utopian technopoetics, but as a series of mediations between the noble subjectivity of the human and inhuman media. McCarthy's picture of modernism is telluric—embedded in specific media environments, or ecologies, built fragily over traumatic voids. I understand McCarthy as a kind of forensic scientist of modernism— or more specifically, a media archaeologist compelled by modernist thought about technology, techne, and mediation to disinter modernism's catastrophic scenes, which have so often unfolded as political fantasies about media and technology. (570)

Nieland is echoing perhaps the most consistent reading of McCarthy's novels: as illustrative of a re-animated modernism (Downing; Partington; Blacklock; Weaver; Eve) or a characteristic preference for the modernist *over* the postmodernist (Groes). Framed in this way, McCarthy appears as a writer of novelistic post-mortem reports; someone who is re-investigating the causes of a purported death. Because there is so much that is 'literary' about McCarthy's novels, there is a general assumption of the author's interest in specifically *literary* modernism, and as such, in his novels as an autonomous zone of self-reflective representation. In other words, there is an assumption in much of the discourse surrounding McCarthy that he is writing novels about novels, novels which speak to literature about the form of literature. So, as was mentioned above, here we have a sentiment that was repeated in some other articles: McCarthy is interested in the mediation between the modern subject and modern communication technology or media. Catherine Lanone alludes to as much when she describes both *Serge* and the novel itself as 'coherers' (Lanone 5); she identifies clearly the theme of collusion or coalescence that persists through his oeuvre. There is certainly something to this; this relation between the two is central to any kind of writing that problematizes the sense of self that has come to define the contemporary subject, bound as it is to identity, in terms of both the novel form and the contemporary digital-discursive form.

Satin Island

As I mentioned earlier, McCarthy's latest novel, *Satin Island*, was published in 2015 by Jonathan Cape and was his second novel after *C* to be shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize. In discussing the reviews of the novel here what I want to consider primarily is the nature of the critical reaction, which was often negative, and how it continues to demonstrate the difficulty with which we as literary analysts approach the challenge of changing contemporary literature and challenging the dominant form.

It seems that by the time reviewers and readers had gone through McCarthy's first three novels, the themes and repetition had started to threaten boredom. *Satin Island*, for several reviewers, seemed to constitute a kind of attention-deficit breaking point, one which resulted in either an implicit or explicit longing for precisely that which McCarthy denied his readers: expressive, lyrical, emotive human experience of identification and resolution. A chance for a connection, in other words, through the novels

to precisely the way the reader thinks of themselves and others. As Deresiewicz puts it, “[u]nderneath the novel’s verbal pyrotechnics, sad to say, we mainly find the same old deconstructive tropes, the familiar McCarthyan talking points. Repetition, mediation, failed transcendence (there’s a parachutist, much pondered, who plummets to his death), the inaccessibility of the Real” (42). Whether he is talking about the Lacanian Real, or a more materialist idea of reality, this assertion is tinged with the modern desire to ridicule what presents itself as outside of reality or ‘the way things are’. What I will try to show here is that it is not a matter of the ‘inaccessibility’ of reality (or the real) that is played out in the novels, but rather the natural ease with which it is accessed or confronted, through any number of forms of fiction or narrative or irruption of the accidental or incomprehensible (be they mechanical, literary, artistic or otherwise). His dissatisfaction with the novel extends all the way to the final scene, stating that when U. rejects the chance to confront, to actually arrive on the shores of a powerful symbol of death and disruption in the form of Staten Island, “we might suspect we’ve come too far for nothing but a philosophical shaggydog story” (42). This quote again reiterates the contemporary position on literature and philosophy: the former fails as a shaggydog story, the latter is always one, so what is there to take from a story with no ending (no final instance of personal development, or plot development, or progression) that is replete with philosophical ideas and intertextual references? When one is limiting one’s perspective to literature and the literary form, then it is easy to understand why McCarthy’s work can be both so compelling and irritating at once: his repetitive symbols offer access to a potential well-spring of intertextual and intra-literary meaning, but, they only ever lead to a ‘shaggy-dog’ type ending, where nothing is resolved, committed to or pronounced; they threaten the literary imagination with the possibility of intertextuality and reference *for its own sake*, or for the sake of *appearing like* a novel. This is perhaps exactly the point: literature written for literature’s sake is nothing more than a shaggy-dog story, because the very form itself contains the seeds of the undoing of its ideal purpose or aesthetic. Further reviews reiterate the presence of themes in *Satin Island* that have been identified as central to his previous works.

We have, for instance, once again a reference to the intellectual flatness of McCarthy’s characters and scenes, through the review of James Lasdun, when he suggests that “McCarthy dispenses with all but the most austere diagrammatic renderings of setting, character and action, leaving us with little more than the thought-flow of his narrator as he contemplates the aforementioned totality of modern existence. It’s a bold move, staking everything on pure intellect, but it is also extremely risky” (Lasdun). Once again, this quality of McCarthy’s prose is thought of as centering around the flat, the immaterial, the intellectual at the expense of the traditional novelistic subject.

Leyla Sanai summarizes this persistent and understandable apprehension when she states that:

Certain themes recur. Purity versus illusion/masquerades is one. U wrote a book about clubbing. He didn't write it as a detached observer but as someone immersed in the scene. Does this taint his work, render it less objective? Masquerades crop up again in a discussion about coffee shops in Seattle (home to Starbucks) which are ostensibly not Starbucks, but are owned by them. Elsewhere, the Hawthorne effect is mentioned: the way people who know they're being observed alter their behaviour – another form of façade. In one of McCarthy's many stunning images, worshippers at Mecca take on the illusory appearance of water circling down a plug. (Sanai)

I would argue that the dominant theme is not purity *versus* masquerades, but purity *as* masquerade, and the irrevocable looping revolutions which occur and are necessary within this dualistic relation that defines the human relation to the idea of reality. A conflictual relation is apparent in the text on occasion, such as his sudden interest in sabotaging the Project by feeding into it fictional or false information, and yet his ultimate refusal to do so demonstrates precisely the duality of fiction and reality. He leaves that fantasy behind at least partially because of how his lover, Madison, responds to his sharing of this desire to bring the Project down from the inside:

I knew a boy like you once, she said when I'd finished [...] But the thing is, she continued, turning from me in the bed, it won't be you doing the wreaking and the vandalizing. Oh? I said. Who *will* it be then? She turned half-back again, sat up, lit a cigarette and said: it isn't revolutionaries and terrorists who make nuclear power plants melt and blow their tops, or electricity grids crash, or automated trading systems go all higgledy-piggledy and write their billions down to pennies in ten minutes – they do that all on their own. You boys, she said, as once again I felt a double-pang of compliment and slight, are sweet. You all want to be the hero in the film who runs away in slo-mo from the villain's factory that he's just mined, throwing himself to the ground as it explodes. But the explosion's taking place already – its always been taking place. You just didn't notice... (*Satin Island* 129)

This logic that Madison explains to U. is precisely the logic of the system that Serge seems to confront in *C* through his exam-taking revelry.⁴ With Serge it appears as the denial not of the destructive, but of the protective: he realizes upon performing a microscopic version of widening his perceptual scope that the system of fail-safes and precautions actually contains and perhaps even organizes the form a catastrophe might take. It does not, however, offer the chance of resolving or eliminating the presence or potential of catastrophe. Madison is explaining the equal opposite: even if the 'boys' want to be the ones

⁴ "He moves his head back, hoping that the extra surface view created by this action will reveal a switch, branch-line or siding into which one of the trains could be diverted – or, if not, at least a signal further back to warn each of the other's presence. Yet even as these things take shape in his imagination he realises that not only will they fail to prevent the collision, but it was they *themselves*, in their amalgam, who caused it in the first place: the catastrophe was hatched within the network, from among its nodes and relays, in its miles and miles of track, splitting and expanding as they run on beyond the scope of any one controlling vision; it was hatched by the network, at some distant point no longer capable of being pinned down but nonetheless decisive, so much so that ever since this point was passed – hours, days or even years ago – the collision's been inevitable, just a matter of time" (*C* 149).

to heroically disable the evil machinery of villainous and ubiquitous capital, it is no longer up to them (if it ever was). Only that machinery itself contains the potential to disrupt or destroy it. As such, the relation between illusion and reality is presented as only superficially and ideally conflictual: reality cannot defeat the unpredictability of fiction, they are mutual and dualistic concepts, which is to say that they each operate on the basis of a deconstructive logic that both threatens their stability and nurtures their growth. Through this we may understand why it is perhaps problematic to think of McCarthy's style as consisting of intentional 'moves'. Like the nuclear reactor, McCarthy's vision of the literary form is a vision so expansive and ubiquitous that only the form itself might serve to undermine it. This is at once a denial of the protective and destructive will of the individual in the contemporary context; even if he wanted to reinvigorate, revitalize, destroy, bury or sabotage the novel, this would be nothing but the inevitably failing fantasy of the avant-garde hero diving to the ground in the midst of an explosion of literary formalism. As McCarthy well knows, Robbe-Grillet and the disciples of the *Nouveau Roman* already detonated that bomb; and the proof of their heroic failure consists in the resurgence of narrative and the dominance of the "Oprah Literature" (Lasdun) of the present day.

Theoretical Poetics and the Fiction of Reality

In order to develop an investigative paradigm that might approach both an understanding of the dominant forms of contemporary literature and a concept of how these forms are treated in the novels of Tom McCarthy (and what that treatment might mean in literary and social terms), I have attempted to arrange a constellation of theorists whose work (including the theoretical work of McCarthy) seems to gravitate around a fundamentally irresolvable dualism of fiction and reality. Though there no doubt remains room in this arrangement for additional voices, I have chosen to focus on the work of Paul de Man, Walter Benjamin, Jean Baudrillard, Georges Bataille and Tom McCarthy himself⁵. I will attempt a synthesis of these theories under certain categories or terms which connect literature as form or object to a fundamental problematic which I call anthropological. In other words, these theories speak both to the potential and difficulty of literature in an advanced technological age, as well as to the very basic anthropological necessity of fiction as a cipher of reality. Baudrillard and Bataille in particular represent an idiosyncratic style of theoretical investigation which bears on literature and the universal human

⁵ As will become clear, my interest is exclusively in McCarthy's literature and literary theory, hence I have largely avoided engaging with his theorization of art and the artist that comes out of the productions of the International Necronautical Society.

condition simultaneously; an anthropological style of self analysis which displays, in the words of McCarthy describing the work of French ethnographer Claude Lévi-Strauss (an important figure in *Satin Island*), “a richer, deeper literary sensibility than that of his ‘proper’ literary contemporaries” (“The Death of Writing”). In turn, all of these theorists, including McCarthy, deploy or engage with what I would call a logic of deconstruction, or a logic of internally organized antagonism, which links them together and links their work as a critique of the reality of totalization or the totalization of reality. While it might seem necessary then to engage with the seminal work of Jacques Derrida, I would suggest the following distinction which justifies his exclusion. While Derrida shows us the *practice* of textual deconstruction, these other writers, each in his/her own way and through particular objects, demonstrate that this practice is an almost automatic process at the heart of any apparently autonomous object, system or collections of formalisms like reality. What I mean by this is that Derrida’s work predominantly emphasizes, in my opinion, a *method* of reading which is primarily attuned to the critical and academic reader. On the other hand, the other theorists here all allude, each in a different way, to a kind of unconscious deconstruction, something nebulous and literary enough to be almost entirely figurative, yet more appreciable in its application outside of the literary text. First, I will briefly address certain key points made by McCarthy in his theoretical work, points which indicate an intellectual proximity to the theorists mentioned above as well as the gravitational pull of a fundamentally modern human problematic (the relationship between fiction and reality). Tom McCarthy has produced several works of theory, both on his own and in conjunction with his colleague, International Necronautical Society co-founder and philosopher Simon Critchley. I want to address here how McCarthy understands the position of the writer in contemporary society, what he understands to be the defining aspect of the literary form, and how these two ideas converge in the figure of the anthropological perspective of contemporary society.

Perhaps his best-known work of theory, *Tintin and the Secret of Literature* begins with an explanation of what McCarthy calls “the splitting-off of levels of reality” (5) common to both the *Tintin* comic strip and to the origins of the novel form. Because, as McCarthy argues, *Tintin* was one of the first cartoons to move beyond mere skits towards the establishment of a running adventure that, “laid claim to social and political insights” (4), it required an ontological shuffling of perspective, epitomized by the dubious claim made by the editor of the newspaper in which the comic-strip first appeared: “*Le Petit Vingtième* guarantees that all photographs – in the original French, *toutes ces photos*, ‘all these photographs’ – “are strictly authentic, taken by Tintin himself, aided by his faithful dog Snowy!” (3). Because of this new desire to represent social and political insights, the cartoon, McCarthy argues, “needed to undertake a set of twists and shuffles that would allow it to invoke notions of documentary

rigour while at the same time making no attempt to disguise the fact that it was all fictitious” (4). The twist McCarthy describes is the problematic suggestion that Tintin was in fact taking the photos in which he himself was the primary object; he was presumed to be both in front of and behind the camera at once, an obviously false claim given the nature of the action he is undertaking in the panels. He goes on to suggest that this twist or trick was not original to the cartoon format, but in fact could be found centuries before in some of the earliest examples of the novel form, all the way back to Cervantes. Through a brief citation of several examples of early modern novels, McCarthy shows how the novel form felt it necessary, like the Tintin creator Hergé, to deploy “fictional devices set in place to give the fiction itself the veneer of authenticity” (5). From this it becomes possible to suggest that McCarthy recognizes this necessary but paradoxical doubling (fiction as authentic, authenticity as fiction) as fundamental to the modern novel form. It represents the basic problematic of the human relation to reality, something I will consider through the work of Baudrillard as an emergent and dominant problematic of postmodern capitalist society. In simple terms, what this demonstrates is the dynamic and dualistic relationship which both the novel form and comic-image reveals between fiction and reality. This mobility or dynamism is precisely what is at play (though perhaps silently at times) in the theories of the subject of the modern novel; in the work of writers like Nancy Armstrong, Martha Nussbaum, Michael Mack and Pieter Vermeulen the connection between novel form and subject becomes enshrined and continuous. The enshrining of the modern subject in the modern novel form is enacting precisely this dualism of fiction and reality, by illustrating the seduction of the latter by the former. *The Secret of Literature* also offers a glimpse into McCarthy’s own theoretical forebears, citing Paul de Man, Georges Bataille, Roland Barthes and Henri Bergson in particular, suggesting in a rather clear way the potential influence of their thought on his fiction. Baudrillard and Benjamin, on the other hand, are not mentioned, though I will show below how their work perhaps constitutes a particular vision of late capitalist society that is played out in the pages of his novels.

The Contemporary Subject as Anthropologist

I now want to briefly address the figure of the anthropologist, the literal figure of which crops up in both *C* and *Satin Island*, through a *Guardian* article written by McCarthy around the time of *Satin Island*’s release. Put into context with the quote above regarding Lévi-Strauss, the anthropologist will come to represent an interesting but problematic modern epistemological model, but also a particular mode of

writing that is synonymous with both the position of the late-capitalist digitally connected subject, and with the theorists being deployed here.

This article, whose full title is “The death of writing – if James Joyce were alive today he’d be working for Google”, itself assumes a double form: that of socio-literary theory, as well as marketing tool for *Satin Island*. Much of what McCarthy approaches in this article, particularly Lévi-Strauss and anthropology, figures prominently in *Satin Island*. Of the anthropologist, McCarthy says the following: “As a novelist, I am fascinated by the figure of the anthropologist. What he or she embodies for me is a version of the writer minus all the bullshit, all the camouflage or obfuscation — embodies, that is, the function of the writer stripped down to its bare structural essentials. You look at the world and you report on it. That’s it” (“The Death of Writing”). The distinction he makes here is instructive: what he is saying is that ethnography, the narrative produced by the anthropologist, lacks the ‘bullshit’ of the literary trick, it does not try the bait and switch manoeuvre McCarthy sees as endemic to modern literature. This reveals McCarthy’s thoughts on writing in general and simultaneously on the contemporary subject who is living in the “age of data saturation” (“The Death of Writing”). We might even say that McCarthy sees Lévi-Strauss as transcending the trickery of the modern novel, and that this directness indicates an implicit knowledge of the fuzzy division between fiction and reality, or fiction and subjective experience. The figure of the anthropologist and the writing mode of ethnography can be thought of as a trope which, in the de Manian terms deployed by McCarthy in *Tintin*, unfolds and turns towards the tropes of the contemporary subject of digital communication. Much like the anthropologist, the contemporary subject and writer operate in a maelstrom of data and information-signals, a perfect storm of transmitted and coded reality whose sheer vastness precludes any simple dialectic or conflictual arrangement and therefore demands a kind of perpetual search for pattern and meaning by the subject who feels at once at home and hopelessly alien in this landscape. What is implicitly demanded of the Facebook profile if not the imperative of “You look at the world and you report on it. That’s it.”?

And yet, what this article is truly concerned with conveying is the present state of writing, as having been operationalized by digital software. Rather than turning to the individual genius of the writer or ethnographer, life in globalized society is surveilled and traced by the combination of hardware and software, a social phenomenon we can track critically from the early 20th-century work of Walter Benjamin to the postmodern theoretical anthropology of Jean Baudrillard. We might say that Benjamin and Baudrillard describe the usurpation of writing and narrative by the technological means of reality production and communication, making the modern novel form a kind of nostalgic-performative object

which represents the co-presence of past and present described by Benjamin as a mode of modernity and by writers such as Baudrillard and Jameson as a cultural characteristic of postmodernity. McCarthy suggests that both Lévi-Strauss and Mallarmé, “the father of modern literature” (“The Death of Writing”), believe their writing form (ethnography and literature) to be an idealistic attempt to write what he calls the ‘Great Report’, a term which he deploys as a central figure in *Satin Island*. His description of Lévi-Strauss’s endeavour to develop, “a sense of structure, pattern, system (the narrative of *Tristes Tropiques*, for example, zaps from culture to culture, continent to continent, as it remaps the entire globe along lines of association...)” (“The Death of Writing”) is yet another repeating trope. This imagery of cultural interconnection, with criss-crossing lines negating the obstacles of time and space to the end of an understanding of the universal in human society, is repeated in all of McCarthy’s novels as a desire or fantasy of the protagonists, lending a specifically anthropological bent to the narrative of desire in these novels.

McCarthy, in his novels and in this article, considers the terrain of this ‘great report’ to be that of capitalism in general, and late capitalism in particular: “The rise of corporate capitalism, and the astonishing, almost exponential rate of its recent acceleration, I would argue, present a huge challenge to the writer, forcing him or her to rethink their whole role and function, to remap their entire universe. There is no space outside this matrix, no virgin territory of pure “aesthetics” or neutral “reflection” on which it hasn’t impacted” (“The Death of Writing”). In other words, if modernity is understood as emerging alongside capital, then it can be understood as an attempt to produce a universal connection, some fundamental meaning for it all. The anthropological mode of ethnography as such becomes universalized in capitalist society; the desire for (paradoxically detached) connection which produces a coherent reality at the outset of the 20th century is one of the lessons we can take from Benjamin’s work on the artwork in the age of mechanical reproduction. However, McCarthy indicates: “The problem is, the anthropological model is fraught with problems; there’s an almost systematic unworkability inscribed within it...” (“The Death of Writing”). This is an example of the deconstructive logic to which I referred earlier. Anthropology has come to know this unworkability as the ‘double-bind’: “the very “purity” it [anthropology] craves is no more than a state in which all frames of comprehension, of interpretation or analysis, are lacking; once these frames are brought to bear, the mystery that drew the anthropologist towards his subject evaporates” (“The Death of Writing”). The anthropologist, like the contemporary subject and the protagonists of McCarthy’s novels, seeks an ideal form of detachment which here relates primarily to the objectivity of knowledge about reality (the art of disappearance). However, when observed (or sought out) in social and literary practice the pursuit of this desire demonstrates a certain

ideological and therefore ethical performance that extends beyond the knowing pursuit of objectivity, which in fact may obfuscate this desire for 'reality' behind the modern capitalist pursuit of individuality, authenticity and presence. The anthropological is therefore at the heart of the dematerialized, flattened characters of the novels, and yet, in order to grasp the meaning of its (sometimes silent, sometimes explicit) presence it must be considered in its tropic form; as shifting between indicating both a reliable mode of knowledge or reality production and at the same time indicating that this pursuit is always hindered by its own mechanisms (language, image, reading). McCarthy argues that in the age of digital communication and incessant information production, the Great Report is "here, there, everywhere", and as such "The issue has become one of automatic reading" ("The Death of Writing"). As such I want to demonstrate that McCarthy's poetics (defined in terms of the formalisms of repetition, flatness, affectlessness, connection, inhumanity, dualism and doubling) demonstrates a kinship with the anthropological poetics of evil in the work of Jean Baudrillard and Georges Bataille, the poetics of deconstruction in de Man, and the poetics of technology and the subject (or life) in the work of Benjamin and Henri Bergson.

Anthropological Evil and the Poetics of Excess

Georges Bataille approaches the relationship between evil (or excess) and society in 1949 through the aptly named and anthropologically-inflected text *The Accursed Share*. *The Accursed Share* is a three-volume exploration of the function of economy in a broad range of human cultures. The accursed share is a product of "economic activity in general" (*Accursed* 19). Bataille is explicit about the problem of any anthropological search for a unifying narrative when he says that, "Economic phenomena are not easy to isolate, and their general coordination is not easy to establish" (*Accursed* 20); in McCarthy's terms Bataille is avoiding the 'bullshit' of literary form by establishing at the outset, not a trick to cover up this form's ontological inadequacies, but rather the confession of them. We get a sense of what McCarthy means when he says anthropological writing exceeds the literariness of literature, when Bataille describes the economy as, "a peculiar aspect of terrestrial activity regarded as a cosmic phenomenon" (*Accursed* 20). The accursed share, therefore, is a product of both the cosmic phenomenon of movement "at this point in the universe", and of the human attempt to appropriate this movement (*Accursed* 21). It is specifically the excess energy any organism or society produces which exceeds its capacity for growth; in his terms, "if the excess cannot be completely absorbed in its growth, it must necessarily be lost without profit; it must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically" (*Accursed* 21).

We can see the connection between the poetics of evil and the accursed share in Bataille's earlier work, *Literature and Evil*. Like the accursed share, evil in this context constitutes a kind of irrevocable excess of 'the good'; an excess which cannot help but be expressed. 'Good' in Bataille's terms equates to an expression of will, will which is always aligned with the ethical pursuit of the 'good life', which is itself an ideal construct that is both socially and historically particular. Bataille pursues this sense of good and evil through an analysis of modern literature and poetry spanning from Emily Brontë to Jean Genet. It is in *Wuthering Heights* that Bataille sees literary evil in "its most perfect form" (*Literature* 11), through the duelling positions of the adult (concrete social structure) and the child (intentional irrationality).

Brontë, according to Bataille, "fathomed the very depths of Evil. This was the task of literature, imagination and dream" (*Literature* 9). As he puts it, "We cannot consider that actions performed for a material benefit express Evil. This benefit is, no doubt, selfish, but it loses its importance if we expect something from it other than evil itself – if, for example, we expect some advantage from it" (*Literature* 11). Bataille identifies art in general and literature/poetry in particular as a consistent form of this expression in modern society. Evil in this sense is a willing movement against 'will' itself, against the typical will to pursue the good life. The poetics of evil, therefore, have at least some formal connection to imagination and dreams (two literary themes which dominate the repetitive structure of McCarthy's novels), in their apparent opposition to operational social reality (their meaning and value is difficult to pin down). He considers the 'moral significance' of imagination and dreams as follows:

It is the revolt of Evil against Good. Formally it is irrational. What does the kingdom of childhood, which Heathcliff demoniacally refuses to give up, signify if not the *impossible* and ultimate death? There are two ways to revolt against the real world, dominated as it is by reason and based on the will to survive. The most common and relevant is the rejection of its rationality. It is easy to see that the underlying principle of the real world is not really reason, but reason which has come to terms with that arbitrary element born of the violence and puerile instincts of the past. (*Literature* 13)

The poetics of evil in this instance are the poetics of the irrational, of dreams, day-dreams and subjective fantasizing. McCarthy both shares and explodes this conception of evil by making them almost structurally ubiquitous, by establishing them to a certain extent as the very form of his narratives, dominated as they are by narration which consists of a kind of lolling contemplation, an endless stream of tangential thinking and the affectless and intellectual (and perhaps erotic) pursuit of what de Man calls tropic turns, not through texts, but in the lived experience of reality itself. In a world that describes itself to the subject through signs and symbols, the dream-form of consciousness threatens the distinction between waking and sleeping. Bataille establishes a series of iterations of this basic theme of evil through

the work of writers like Baudelaire and Michelet, whose poetics add to those of Brontë and find contemporary refuge in the work of McCarthy. In McCarthy's novels these themes of modern and artistic evil are returned to and at the same time expanded into the realm of Baudrillard's version of hegemonic capitalism.

Under Bataille's analysis Baudelaire and his poetry become an example of the postmodern at the genesis of the modern. Baudelaire is the poetic consumer stuck between one failing (religious/monarchic) and one emerging (scientific/democratic) social structure, and he represents the poetics of the consumption and production of the self in this in-between moment. "Admittedly he searched for himself, never lost or forgot himself, and watched himself watching. The recuperation of being was, as Sartre indicated, the object of his genius, his tension and his poetic impotence" (*Literature* 36). This is demonstrative of how, when engaging with this type of subject (an in-between, ontologically vulnerable one), character and narrative style are already merged into one. Baudelaire's poetics are reimagined in McCarthy's novels, through the form of narration as well as the characters around whom the plot revolves. This brief description offers us the basic foundation of McCarthy's characters, and the way they are engaged with by the narration of the novels (in *Remainder* and *Satin Island* in particular). Following a quotation from Sartre, in which Baudelaire is a figure who searches for what he never lost or forgot, who "watched himself seeing, he watched in order to see himself watching", Bataille makes the assertion that "There is no better or more precise way of representing the distance between poetic vision and everyday life" (*Literature* 36). Poetic vision in this sense is a solipsistic vision of one's self in a network of social relations (summed up above in terms of 'watching'). This is precisely the format of the narration in McCarthy's work: the narrator is a doubling of observer and observed, he is watching how he once watched something else. The pursuit of ontological confirmation, of being or existence (its poetic recuperation in terms of Baudelaire and the novel form, its technological expression in terms of contemporary society) is the individual goal put into play by the ethos of reality production.

On the same page, Bataille suggests that there is no denying that poetry is always in some way a form of re-producing the self. We could argue in this sense that the novel is no different; if mass communication technology becomes the means through which this recuperation picks up sufficient speed to the point of being able to perceptually pace the individuals themselves (to develop the persistent and *inescapable* feeling of being the *thing-in-itself*), that does not mean that the novel or poetry or poetics in general lose their power to do something similar. He conditions this observation however by wondering whether perception of existence itself corresponds to this feeling of uniqueness, making poetry and

poetics something above and beyond that uniqueness, a kind of excess: “We could thus say that the poet is the part taking itself for the whole, the individual behaving like the community” (*Literature* 36). Baudelaire’s poetics, like the mode of the narrator of *Remainder’s* search for authenticity, are the production of an excess meant to achieve, according to Bataille, a sense of control over perception of the self. Poetic vision as excess haunts the contemporary novel’s relationship with identity and at the same time is the shadow of McCarthy’s postmodern poetics of excess; McCarthy writes with this excess in mind, whereas contemporary English novels in the realistic tradition demonstrate the repression of this excess through the positive deployment of affect, depth and desires which seem natural as opposed to excessive. Whether seeking uniqueness or authenticity this is a paradoxical and ideological quest, precisely because the starting point is the same as the ostensible goal (making it something like a false goal of a false consciousness). If the goal of these quests is always-already accomplished, then we must ask ourselves: into what is this poetic energy actually invested? I want to argue that in the late-capitalist context this poetic energy (the energy of the modern individual) is invested into the perpetual circulation of formalised value and ideals; dead concepts which must be continuously re-animated in order to maintain the appearance of viability. There is, therefore, a productive relation to death and to the dead in the poetics of evil described by Bataille.

In his discussion of the work of Michelet, Bataille rearranges the metaphor of good and evil into a competition between the desire to preserve life and the desire to live it. Through Michelet Bataille expands on the notion of the arts as a vector of evil and death, arguing that while “Life sometimes fails to flee from the shades of death. It allows them to grow within it, to the point of exhaustion, to the point of death itself” (*Literature* 55). Speaking of the ‘shades of death’ as “abominated elements, the opposite of those of which the impulses of life are directed”, Bataille makes clear that their implicit presence in normal conditions does not prevent or deny the need for the individual to “revive them voluntarily” (*Literature* 55). This voluntary revival of the shades of death (images, symbols, allegories) is precisely artistic practice: “The arts – or at least some of the arts – incessantly evoke these derangements, these lacerations, this decline which our entire activity endeavours to avoid. Indeed, comic art itself confirms this theory” (*Literature* 55). The structure and plot of *Remainder* and *Satin Island* both confirm and reconfigure this theory along late-capitalist lines, moving from traditional art to technical performance. Serge in *C, U.* in *Satin Island* and the nameless narrator of *Remainder* are seduced and intrigued by these ‘lacerations’, and yet they are (almost) never in the form of the traditional art to which Bataille is referring. They are instead consumed by a fascination with the shades of death that emerge out of 20th-century mass communication, digital media and information, and the technical models of reproductions, respectively. These are the new

focal points of the individual seeking individuality through a technical poetics, a different kind of excess from that of Baudelaire; a technical excess particular to late capitalism and the work of Jean Baudrillard, an excess which is accessible through technology and no longer through a poet's perspective. Consider the fascination that is summoned in the audience by an excessively negative online review or critique of a book or a film: the very excess of energy put into the negative description draws the attention of the audience by virtue of the seemingly total absence of quality, substance, or value (goodness) in the thing under consideration. Every detail of the object's failure culminates in an opportunity to complete the puzzle, to experience the simultaneity of good and evil in a single space; the performance of this negative object is that of the most fundamental narrative conflict. There is an erotic element to this fascination, in the sense that what the audience (and the protagonists of the novels) want to connect with is precisely a sense (mental and affective in McCarthy's novels) of completion. The rigour with which we pursue the preservation of life leads us into a direct confrontation with death. McCarthy's novels demonstrate the refugee status of the shades of death in contemporary society: driven from the formal boundaries of art in Bataille's sense of the term, these shades find shelter anywhere they can while still maintaining that fundamental voluntary relation to the subject. No longer the exclusive realm of the artist, today we all participate in maintaining and reproducing the conditions of this mass-migration of death into whatever spaces are left for it in the world.

One way to contextualize both Bataille's theory and its object (the bourgeois poetics of evil) is to understand them as inherently evil where the emergent concept of information is concerned. Bataille's essays were originally published in French in 1957 (100 years after the publication of *Les Fleurs du Mal*). In 1959 the first integrated circuit was introduced by Jack Kilby, its revolutionary contribution to information technology being, "that most of the critical elements of an electronic circuit could be made as part of a single piece of semiconductor material. It was not only possible to make transistors, but also diodes, resistors, capacitors and interconnecting wire on this single piece of semiconductor" (Murray). The integrated circuit would provide the nascent personal computer with multiple functionality, subdividing and expanding on the power of the technology and taking the first steps towards the computational possibility we wield today. The integrated circuit demonstrates the accumulation of different parts under one structure and name, to the end of increasing ontological (in this case computational) power and control. Almost as soon as he published these essays on the poetics of paradoxical bourgeois subjectivity (as division, between work and leisure, good and evil, production and sacrifice, will and subconscious) there was a material and technological response from the world in the form of the integrated circuit and the potential it contained to confront the challenge of this irreconcilable

duality at the heart of the bourgeois subject. In no time at all (in historical terms) the world accepts the challenge of Bataille's theory and exceeds it, rearranges conditions just enough to problematize this theory by deproblematizing the conflict it depends upon (by integrating less material presence with more power of control; smaller chips, less material, more processing power). The power of technology to calculate and describe the world *increases* as its presence in space *decreases*; technology assumes the posture of evil (invisible, hidden from sight) in order to more effectively understand and control evil. The integrated circuit immediately usurps the capacity of art to represent or condition the emergence of evil; the processing capacity of the integrated circuit creates a condition in which the evil of the accident, or the malfunction (the targets of contemporary calculation) takes the place of the intentional evil in art. If literature and poetics offer the subject a chance for a sideways view of what is operationally but not totally hidden, the integrated circuit symbolizes the almost immediate return and eclipse of the challenge of this theory through what Jean Baudrillard calls "Integral Reality" (*The Intelligence of Evil or The Lucidity Pact* 17). Integral reality is a concept distinguished from objective reality by virtue of it being a process of technical realization and performance (as opposed to representation) without discernible end (*Intelligence* 18-19). We can also see in McCarthy's novels the repetitive and visual nature of these poetics, representing the inescapable (yet sometimes inscrutable) repetition of late capitalist life, or what Baudrillard calls the "Automatic Writing of the World" (*The Perfect Crime* 27).

Baudrillard's Orgy and the Late Capitalist Poetics of Evil

Throughout his oeuvre Jean Baudrillard makes continuous use of the terms 'accursed share' and 'evil', extending and critically banishing the former through a late-capitalist re-evaluation and re-positioning of the latter inside the mechanisms and territory of the 'good'. Baudrillard humanizes, or subjectivizes, this trick of the novel form, through his work on late capitalist simulation, which is at once a rejection and extension of the spectacle described by the work of the Situationists and Guy Debord. In his work, the voluntary evil of art and literature is threatened by the fatal and operational logic of the accident, the mechanical failure and the terrorist; that is, the dominant mode of preserving life (technical globalising models of efficiency) actually performs its own symbolism of death (machines break down and kill people, philosophical understandings demand sacrifice and murder, and the digital animates dead subjects in its attempts to transcend death). The management of these evils is what constitutes its ideological goal, both consciously and unconsciously in the subject. Baudrillard exemplifies the willing fictionalization of philosophy or theory; his later work (post 1980) relies heavily on a very particular poetics, a poetics which

borrowed terms and images from a variety of often un-cited philosophical and literary sources such as Elias Canetti, Jorge Luis Borges, Arthur C. Clarke, Georges Bataille and Friedrich Nietzsche. I want to think about two concepts in Baudrillard's work which serve to establish a poetics of late capitalism: 'the orgy' and the 'perfect crime'.

The liberation of markets, of democratic principles, of concepts, of value, of historical agency and of desire is what Baudrillard thinks of as the 'orgy' of 1968. The student revolts of 1968 were, for Baudrillard, the beginning and end of an orgy of liberation in the West and ultimately for the world (in the form of global capital). He posits what I consider an important ethical question in one of his texts from the early 1990s: "what do we do now the orgy is over?" (*The Transparency of Evil* 3). His answer, which is a product of anthropological observation, is deceptively simple: we simulate the orgy. This strategy which has been applied by the hegemonic system actually functions to appease both groups of advocates. Perform the liberation of what has already been liberated; liberate again (because after liberation what is left to condition desire?). Guy Debord and the Situationists, Jean Baudrillard, Georges Bataille, Tom McCarthy, Frederic Jameson and to a certain extent both Walter Benjamin and Paul de Man all relay different forms of this logic of repetition and excessiveness. What I want to demonstrate here is how this logic may in fact be the final step of a liberation-ideology, the ideology of the perfectly detached observer of objective reality, and that this is one way of thinking about the subject of the modern novel that we can draw out of McCarthy's style and work.

In forcing capital to absorb its own fantasies of excess, of liberation, of individuality, of unlimited circulation, the student movements inspired by Situationist art and propaganda initiate a cancerous or viral form of resistance which is not resistance as such but in fact comes closer to the idea of a Bataillean sacrifice of the excess of capitalist ideology. Guy Debord described this form of resistance when describing the Watt's Rebellion of 1965:

The Los Angeles rebellion was a rebellion against the commodity, against the world of the commodity in which worker-consumers are *hierarchically* subordinated to commodity standards. Like the young delinquents of all the advanced countries, but more radically because they are part of a class without a future, a sector of the proletariat unable to believe in any significant chance of integration or promotion, the Los Angeles blacks take modern capitalist propaganda, its publicity of abundance, *literally*. They want to possess *now* all the objects shown and abstractly accessible, because they want to *use* them. In this way they are challenging their exchange-value, the *commodity reality* which molds them and marshals them to its own ends, and which has *preselected everything*. Through theft and gift they rediscover a use that immediately refutes the oppressive rationality of the commodity, revealing its relations and even its production to be arbitrary and unnecessary. The looting of the Watts district was the most direct realization of the distorted principle: "To each according to their

false needs” — needs determined and produced by the economic system which the very act of looting rejects. (Debord)

It is a viral infection of sameness, the act of masses becoming a living mirror of what is demanded of them by mid-twentieth century control mechanisms, a living mirror of the system itself, a disturbing kind of symmetry (J. Baudrillard, *Forget Foucault* 29-33). This creates a kind of automated or algorithmic paranoia in the system and its mechanisms and forces them to confront their fallibility as the only way to determine whether this social symmetry is true or false, natural or performed. Our contemporary context is haunted by the logic which dictates that getting exactly what you want is sometimes the worst thing that can happen (it shatters the illusion of desire among other things). McCarthy’s novels are explicit and repetitive illustrations of this tragic logic, the tragi-comic consequences of the confrontation between the ideal and material; the characters are driven by desires that are always-already accomplished in the past, they are driven by the desire to re-enact the desires of their past. In *Satin Island* McCarthy lays an explicit reference beside a simultaneously sideways reference to the Paris revolts of 1968, to their personal and historical and ideological consequences, and to their relation to the mind, perception or thinking of his protagonist U..

Satin Island, published in 2015 by Jonathan Cape, is the story of U., an anthropologist working for a corporation called simply “The Company” (an intertextual reference to the company in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*) in modern day London. U. describes himself as being drawn to anthropology from a young age, and the story focuses exclusively on a portion of his life defined by this occupation. One of the primary magnets for thought in U.’s life is his responsibility for what is called the “Great Report”, a project encompassing the understanding of everything in the world, and the more banal (yet still practically inaccessible) Koob-Sassen project. His relationship to these abstract and problematic endeavours is emblematic of the ideological impasse being arrived at by the bourgeois subject of the contemporary novel in the early 21st century; he both desires their grandiose pursuits and secretly doubts his ability to achieve them (perhaps because they are already achieved; he is in the end given major credit for the success of Koob-Sassen without really knowing or understanding his own contribution). Infected by the idea (offered by a colleague while showing U. a film of roller-bladers on smooth Paris streets) that Paris had torn up its cobblestones and replaced them with black tarmac as a result of the ’68 students prying them up and using them as missiles against the police, U.’s historical context is allegorized by a post-sex (post-orgy?) daydream, over which the character seems to have at least some control; he is in other words somehow *invested* in this fantasy:

[...] instead of picturing oil as I fell asleep like I had last time, my mind drifted through black streets. They were the streets of Paris – not so much the real Paris I'd just visited as an imaginary Paris formed in my head through the repetition of the fifty or so feet of it that had made up the background of Daniel's roller-blading film. These streets, as I said, were black, all stripped of cobblestones and covered in a smooth, continuous tarmac coat. This coat was unrolling as I glided forward: unrolling more and more, decking the boulevards and avenues and alleyways in soft, black oblivion. Occasionally, as I passed such-and-such a spot, I'd be made half-aware that some historical event, some revolutionary episode, had taken place just there – but even as the knowledge flashed up it was extinguished, buried beneath the tarmac. This happened over and over again: whatever acts of insurrection, of defiance, or their markers and memorials, sprung up in an attempt to catch and trip the passing gaze, these were all smoothed out, muffled, drowned. The Tarmac ran on endlessly, running each street into the next as I advanced along them, heading nowhere in particular, just gliding, on and on; on either side, at the periphery of my vision, coffee-chain concessions ran together, like the tarmac, in a smooth unbroken blur. There was nothing dramatic about this; it wasn't a disaster. No one was complaining or even surprised: it was just the way it was. *That's just the way it is*, a voice inside my head, perhaps my own, said. I might even have said it out loud. Madison kind of grunted in her half-sleep. Then we were both gone. (61-62)

In *Satin Island* blackness takes the form of a substance, repeatedly embodying irruptive, automated and irrepressible movements. In this daydream scene the blackness of the streets is emphasized ('as I said'), in an excessive repetition which begs the question: why the focus on blackness? Blackness, as a substance, becomes a symbol for both evil (the uncontrollable, the accident, the unpredictable) and for continuity, for the apparent 'limitlessness' of the movements which fascinate U. Blackness assumes the double-posture of both the facilitator and the ultimate horizon of those movements. Blackness is the 21st-century Rube-Goldberg machine, a kind of sublime automation that exceeds even the automation of the production line or the scientific model. This form of excess is symbolic of the excess of reality spoken of by Baudrillard, of philosophy and method by Benjamin, of language by de Man, and of spectacle by Debord and it is present in allegorical form in all of McCarthy's novels. It is symbolic of the simultaneously seductive and comedic form of 'that which moves itself' (of life?), reminiscent of the appeal of the early forms of film (a simultaneously comedic and intellectual appeal). It moves itself, it moves U., and it gives everything in sight a coat of "soft, black oblivion" (62). It edits everything including the 1968 revolts and the French Revolution, by the speed which allows both the endless glimpsing and disappearance of those events (the speed of film applied to the form of the tropic turn). It creates a platform for the establishment of an acceptable 'way it is'. We might be tempted to assume that this illustration is a critical one, by virtue of the mere mention of history and revolutionary episodes as being edited, covered up and screened out by the ever-expanding tarmac or endless coffee-chain facades. However, it is this description of history that makes the uncritical assertion of 'just the way it is' possible. If U. as narrator is watching himself watch, what he sees is indifference as opposed to

critique. This is in a sense an illustration of a particular historical privilege, shared by those whose continuity of material comfort depends paradoxically on enforced historical stasis.

These historic events or episodes are traps for the smooth and endless movement offered by the tarmac as well as the expansion of the tarmac itself. That they are made into episodes (flashing up and being extinguished at the same pace) is precisely the doubling of their spatial configuration into both obstacle and vector of movement at once (television episodes, YouTube videos, online documentaries, the online Situationist archives, all of which relate the events of 1968, both reveal and obfuscate the actual events making the contemporary re-reading of these events a process of negotiating the convergence of reality and fiction). This doubling effect is evident when it comes not just to that which is covered by the tarmac but the tarmac itself. The tarmac is a context within which all movement is going 'nowhere in particular'; this is what Baudrillard calls movement in a void, movement without the restriction of ideals, principles or even time and space (post-orgy movement). This is the form of movement that defines a thing as 'dead'.

It is important to keep in mind what this scene is in the world of the novel itself: a post-coital fantasy set into context with a previous one that revolved around the eroticized figure of an oil spill. The daydream of the Paris streets above closes out chapter six, and the oil-spill fantasy, replete with reference to oil that is "spent and inert", that is covering the scene like "fetish gear" and dominated by the figure of a "sluttish Aphrodite frolicking in blackened foam, her face adorned with the look that reader's wives and models have in dirty magazines" (*Satin Island* 49), closes the previous chapter. The post-coital, 'after the orgy' clarity is experienced by this character as a chance to fantasize rhetorical figures of his historical situation into existence. These late-night day-dreams become his artistic expression of his place in the world, and as art and interpretation, they tacitly reject moral appraisals of that world. As an allegory for this historical context of the 'after-orgy', it makes clear the relationship between getting what you want and fantasy; fantasy replaces desire and dominates perception when desire is satiated in reality. In each instance, impotence and stasis are emphasized, along with figures of irrepressible movement (the oil, the tarmac, U. himself). The link between the two scenes of post-coital daydreaming is an allegorical and rhetorical one. They are linked by the concept of their timing (end of chapter, in a moment of refractory exhaustion) and by the relation they demonstrate between the erotic desire in the first instance (Aphrodite, eroticized language) and speed and repetition in the second. The first has obvious erotic connotations, lending it the appearance of a representation of the kind of guilty pleasure U. gets from watching videos of the oil spill. The second extends that eroticism by re-working it into a historical and

subject-oriented framework, where the pornographic elements of the first post-coital daydream find themselves refigured into a liberational but critically deadening experience of limitless movement. We might say that when we think of these two scenes together, what we get is a surreal image of post-coital exhaustion irrevocably co-dependent with ceaseless movement.

Finally, when we read that there is nothing 'dramatic' about this context for the protagonist, we get a brief glimpse into the moral and ethical position he, and the after-orgy subject, represents. The lack of drama is a moral and ethical judgement being made by a subject who experiences (throughout the novel) only the immaterial negativity of the 'way it is' often in the form of absent affect (and just as often encountering others who are experiencing or have experienced the physical negativity of the way it is, in the forms of political violence and cancer). Much of the novel's content rhetorically describes the variety of ways through which U. watches, but never comes into contact with, not just actual death but symbols and allegories of death. His relationship to death is both voyeuristic (erotic) and symbolically performative (the kind of performance designed for other voyeurs). Death in this sense is the ultimate form of liberation that is sought after in the after-orgy, because the ideal of its transcendence was part of the excess of the original orgy; it maintains a seductive quality even in the liberated world. It is both what we want to be liberated from, and what seduces away from us the desire for repeating liberation by being the one last, irretrievable, unknowable piece of any totalized vision of reality (and in this sense a space of calm, of stillness defied by the incessant reproduction of liberation). His ethics are the ethics of the bourgeois subject of the digital age, a subject who demands and of whom is demanded ceaseless movement and circulation, and yet whose most fundamental (and in many ways reasonable) desire is that stability and predictability accompany this global network of movement.

The Perfect Crime

Baudrillard uses the rhetorical figure of a 'perfect crime' in order to investigate what he calls 'the murder of reality'. One way to think about this poetics of murder and criminality is to consider it the further fictionalization of his concept of simulation. It simultaneously offers the reader an understanding of post-orgy aesthetics, arguing that,

Were it not for appearances, the world would be a perfect crime, that is, a crime without a criminal, without a victim and without a motive. And the truth would forever have withdrawn from it and its secret would never be revealed, for want of any clues [traces] being left behind.

But the fact is that the crime is never perfect, for the world betrays itself by appearances, which are the clues to its non-existence, the traces of the continuity of the nothing. (*Perfect Crime* 1)

There are several important aspects of this description which we can contextualize with the work of McCarthy: appearances, crime, and the notion of leaving traces of the 'nothing', of the unknowable or death. Though provocative, the notion of the world's non-existence is not so troubling if we take into account the logic of deconstruction. What is effectively being said here is that the world is the world of appearances (images, text, language, perceptions), and as such reveals its non-existence precisely through the mode of its existence; the world exists, but never truly *as itself*. We get a less ambiguous description of the perfect crime in question later on, when he describes it as, "that of an unconditional realization of the world by the actualization of all data, the transformation of all our acts and all events into pure information: in short, the final solution, the resolution of the world ahead of time by the cloning of reality and the extermination of the real by its double" (*Perfect Crime* 27). The name of the chapter which is opened by the above quote is *The Automatic Writing of the World* and it describes the moment beyond the Situationist revolts of 1968 (just as in U.'s tarmac-lined day-dream). The meaning of the shift from the spectacle to simulation (here called virtuality) is outlined as follows:

Virtuality is different from the spectacle, which still left room for a critical consciousness and demystification. The abstraction of the 'spectacle' was never irrevocable, even for the Situationists. Whereas unconditional realization is irrevocable, since we are no longer either alienated or dispossessed: we are in possession of all the information. We are no longer spectators, but actors in the performance, and actors increasingly integrated into the course of that performance. Whereas we could face up to the unreality of the world as spectacle, we are defenseless before the extreme reality of this world, before this virtual perfection. We are, in fact, beyond all disalienation. This is the new form of terror, by comparison with which the horrors of alienation were very small beer. (*Perfect Crime* 29)

McCarthy's second novel, *Men in Space*, revolves around exactly this type of crime: a crime of doubling, a doubling meant to eliminate the trace of perpetrator, victim and motive. The crime is the theft and copying of a priceless Byzantine icon, the plan is to return the perfect copy to the authorities and to sell the original on. In order to accomplish this crime, however, the artist must first replicate the calculations and measurements and ratios which make the piece what it is. What we have therefore is a scheme of copying and leaving no trace, copying facilitated by the reproducibility of an icon which is facilitated by the icon-makers' dependence upon codes, repeatable formulae and mathematic models (*Men in Space* 120). However, like Baudrillard's crime, the artist behind the illegal copying cannot help but leave a trace. This theme of doubling occurs throughout each of the novels in question under a variety of guises (models, re-enactments, memories, iterations, video clips, television news stories).

This is the doubling of desire for the copy and the original at once: the desire for a 'perfect crime'. The simultaneity and contradictory nature of these desires comes to a sort of head in *Satin Island* when U. finds himself confronting the very quality of the context which makes these kinds of contradictions and paradoxes endemic: the absence of authority and responsibility particular to late capitalist ideological automation. His confusion as to whether the voice in his head which whispers about 'the way it is' is his or not exemplifies this problem. This kind of character is one who is both unnerved and excited by this context, the ahistorical context of late capitalism and the drifting movement that it enforces. McCarthy's brand of poetic illustration in turn achieves this double-posture; U. thinks it is normal, which is one thing, but he also seems to not-quite-secretly love it. It is this double-posture that lays behind the bourgeois Western performance of guilt, shame and outrage, and of the strangely persistent desire for connection in an already-connected world; of awareness campaigns, the radical 'likes' and 'shares' and 'upvotes' and 'views' of contemporary digital activism (detached passive subjectivity in its historical mask as 'the conversation'). McCarthy's characters are particular in that these are the very emotional states from which they seem detached and towards which they show nothing except perhaps indifference.

Through much of the novel this double-posture is maintained; in literary terms this is an attempt not to illustrate the dual role of narrative to the subject, but rather to illustrate the undecidability of language (the spectrum of reading between the rhetorical and the literal) and a kind of mode of automated satirization, or self-satirization, which prevents the subject from attaining this ideal form of double-consciousness. However, there is one moment in particular in which the more critical and rhetorical reading of his cultural context manifests itself precisely in the desire for a form of resistance; a postmodern, post-orgy form of violence against the reality ethos which is, as Baudrillard explains, fatal to both the subject and the system it seeks to resist (U. secretly knows this, which is why he avoids death in the last instance: he chooses life and continuity and rejects intentional internal sabotage):

These ponderings had another consequence: around this time, my attitude not only to the Great Report but also towards Koob-Sassen underwent a sea change. I started seeing the Project as nefarious. Sinister. Dangerous. In fact, downright evil. Worming its way into each corner of the citizenry's lives, re-setting ("re-configuring") the systems lying behind and bearing on virtually their every action and experience, and doing this without even knowing it [...] I couldn't, at first, put my finger on a particular aspect or effect of it, nor on a specific instigator or beneficiary, that was itself inherently and unambiguously bad. But after a while I started telling myself that it was precisely this that made it evil: its very vagueness rendered it nefarious and sinister and dangerous. In not having a face, or even a body, the Project garnered for itself enormous and far-reaching capabilities, while at the same time reducing its accountability – and vulnerability – to almost zero [...]. The Project was supra-governmental, supra-national, supra-everything – and infra- too: that's what made it so effective, and so deadly. I continued to ponder these things even as I laboured on, week-in, week-out, to help usher the Project into

being, to help its first phase go live; and as I did, the more I pondered, ruminated, what you will, the more thoughts of this nature festered. (*Satin Island* 124-25)

What U. is describing is precisely the mode of death that is endemic to the literary and theoretical discussion of form, power and totality. He is confronting (implicitly) the literary investigation of a 'dead' form through the figure of an absent center or accountable authority. And yet in the same instance the double posture of McCarthy's style reveals the death of the subject along with that authority, i.e. U.'s own death as a willing human being. The end of this passage makes explicit the form of that subjective death: thinking one thing (that the Project is evil) and doing another (helping to "usher the Project into being"). In dying, in disappearing, the thing disappeared gains an insidious and internal presence in the life from which it was ostensibly exiled. For Baudrillard, this is exemplified by the concept of value after the orgy; value, liberated from its original modern Marxist premise, dead because of this, loses all the tethers which once determined its expression and nature. Once liberated as such, it loses, as U. suggests, all responsibility to its original (capitalist) meaning and vulnerability to the critique whose effectiveness depends upon some stable target to speak of (one which necessarily knows and expresses its own principles). This extract is indicative of the thought process of the subject who suddenly, due to being thrust inside the cultural and historical problem of excess information, is suspended between critical awareness and essential ignorance; this is an example of self-conscious rumination inside the walls of a self-regulated and automated program, inside the world writing itself. McCarthy develops characters who swing back and forth between contemplative insight and banal inert movement through the world.

The imperfect crime is perpetrated on the world by the automatic writing of the world itself (synonymous with the automated pursuit and preservation of the 'good life'). While McCarthy suggests that the acceleration of corporate capitalism presents a challenge to the writer, there is one particular aspect of this that concerns him, and which dominates each of his novels:

If this situation isn't entirely or categorically new (writers have been dependent on some kind of marketplace since time immemorial, of course), one aspect of it has (I'd suggest) reached tipping point: the issue of data saturation. Western literature may have more or less begun, in Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, with a lengthy account of a signal crossing space, and of the beacon network through whose nodes the signal's message (that of Troy's downfall) is relayed – but now, two and a half millennia later, that network, that regime of signals, is so omnipresent and insistent, so undeniably inserted or installed at every stratum of existence, that the notion that we might need some person, some skilled craftsman, to compose any messages, let alone incisive or "epiphanic" ones, seems hopelessly quaint. ("The Death of Writing")

This demonstrates precisely Baudrillard's point about moving beyond the spectacle and the hopeful philosophy of the Situationists into what he calls integral reality, and what he eventually labels a hegemonic system. McCarthy demonstrates the futility of 'reclaiming our narrative' (a popular mantra of

contemporary identity politics) in a world constantly in the process of writing itself. The poetics of evil, in all the forms mentioned here, are present throughout McCarty's narratives. They serve precisely as a poetic mode of a kind of writerly self-reflection which is not facing up to the challenges of previous novel forms, genres or styles, but rather to the ubiquity of information about those forms and about the world which Baudrillard understands as the attempt at a 'perfect crime'. I believe this justifies the preponderance of theories here which are not obviously or exclusively literary theory, and yet which I would argue are themselves 'literary'.

Traditional Satire

In order to demonstrate the difficulty of assigning genre or type to either McCarthy's novels or protagonists, I will now approach a specific aspect of Northrup Frye's literary theory, one which leads to the confounding influence of irony. The path I want to trace through Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* begins with his explanation of the literary figure of the hero. Moving past the divine hero and the romantic hero (each of which have exceptional powers or skills that set them apart from normal men) because the exceptional in McCarthy's novels maintains a paradoxical inseparability from the unexceptional, we get to the high and low mimetic modes, and the ironic one:

3. If superior in degree to other men but not to his natural environment, the hero is a leader. He has authority, passions, and powers of expression far greater than ours, but what he does is subject to both social criticism and to the order of nature. This is the hero of the *high mimetic* mode, of most epic and tragedy, and is primarily the kind of hero that Aristotle had in mind. 4. If superior neither to other men nor to his environment, the hero is one of us: we respond to a sense of his common humanity, and demand from the poet the same canons of probability that we find in our own experience. This gives us the hero of the *low mimetic* mode, of most comedy and of realistic fiction [...] On this level the difficulty in retaining the word 'hero,' which has a more limited meaning among the preceding modes, occasionally strikes an author. Thackeray thus feels obliged to call *Vanity Fair* a novel without a hero. 5. If inferior in power or intelligence to ourselves, so that we have the sense of looking down on a scene of bondage, frustration, or absurdity, the hero belongs to the *ironic* mode. This is still true when the reader feels that he is or might be in the same situation, as the situation is being judged by the norms of a greater freedom. (Frye 33-4)

The high and low mimetic modes have a clear connection to the narrator of *Remainder*, but at the same time to all the novels and their main characters. *Remainder's* character/narrator, however, is truly a combination of all three: leader (by virtue only of the accident of acquiring a large amount of capital), comedic 'everyman' (nameless, lost, seeking validation, limited by the horizon of matter) and ultimately

frustrated, absurd 'everyman' caught in a frustrating loop of re-enactment and failure, a very bourgeois and theoretical form of 'bondage'. However, most of McCarthy's characters fall into the low mimetic mode: one of (dark) comedy and realism. And yet at the same time, the affect and the ostensible guilt that structures the plots of these heroes take on a different appearance. The narrator of *Remainder's* quality of leadership is not born of passion so much as accident and a corresponding programming modelled after his recovery-process. He is also frustrated, but is not outside the 'norms of a greater freedom'; he is rich, he is as free as anyone can be in the world (in ideological terms this is unexceptional; in real terms, he is an exception). He is a passion-less leader, an unrelatable everyman, and a prisoner of a place which does not provoke much empathy in the reader. What is revealed here is the true duality of these mimetic modes that might be of use to both realism and satire. This is yet another instance of a paradoxical kind of doubling deployed by McCarthy which implicitly questions the autonomy of the literary form by expressing the simultaneity of generic formalisms within the undifferentiated space of late capitalism.

The "comic fictional mode" (43) for Frye relates to how the stories conclude. The comic mode is therefore less determined by the production of laughter and more by the end-result of happiness, or success, through life, achievement and social inclusion. This latter quality tends to define a difference for Frye: the tragic mode involves a fall, death; the comic mode involves the success of power (in the high mimetic) and rising rank-like achievement, such as a profitable marriage (in the low mimetic). Each result is encompassed one way or another by virtue of inclusion in society (whether such inclusion is already in place or whether it eventually gathers around the main characters is dependent upon the high or low). The narrator of *Remainder* certainly seems to primarily reflect that of the low mode: society only congeals around him after his recovery and settlement. Prior to this he was isolated away, either in coma or in the training which facilitates a return to the social fold (medical treatment and physiotherapy). His trauma is what integrates him into society; rather than pursuing a woman, and having to overcome the obstacles to a marriage, he eroticises a kind of authentic existence, only to stumble over the material in his pursuit of it. In the end, he eroticises the obstacle itself, the material. The final lines of the novel constitute a return to the beginning of the heroic mode:

I looked out of the window again. I felt really happy. We passed through a small cloud. The cloud, seen from inside like this, was gritty, like spilled earth or dust flakes in a stairwell. Eventually the sun would set for ever – burn out, *pop*, extinguish – and the universe would run down like a Fisher Price toy whose spring has unwound to its very end. Then there's be no more music, no more loops. Or maybe, before that, we'd just run out of fuel. For now, though, the clouds tilted and the weightlessness set in once more as we banked, turning, heading back, again. (*Remainder* 284)

These lines give us a sense of the mutability of these heroic modes, a sense of their late-capitalist co-presence which somehow eludes their particular historic and generic differences. We might say they are eluded by virtue of the solipsistic voyeurism of the narration itself. The narrator demonstrates both the rise in rank and, by invoking the final moments of the novel (and perhaps his life) as 'really happy', the success of power. And yet at the same time he can envision his (and our) ultimate fall. The narrator as an optimistic demi-god, circulating above the earth like a malfunctioning sun, waiting for death but positing that his ideal circulation will go on for a while yet. A god speculating on his fall: no longer tragic, this fall is simply real, and the comedic element comes in the form of the possibly perpetual circulation of his airplane, the possible perpetuity of circulation itself. Once again, we confront a paradoxical doubling that defies the distinctions between literary modes, and in doing so inculcates the literary into a world-system of representation, into the "automatic writing of the world" and the idealism of the individual that persists both because of and beyond that automaticity.

At this point in the analysis it seems clear that McCarthy is not a satirist in the traditional sense of the term; he denies the singularity of the comic, ironic and satirical modes described by Frye. And yet, as with so much in McCarthy's novels, the distinctions cannot be erased, but merely muddied and muddled by virtue of their simultaneity and combination within a realistic landscape. The accumulation of modes denies none of them, and at the same time denies them all.

Alluding to the possibility of generic convergence, Frye suggests that satire, "is militant irony: its moral norms are relatively clear, and it assumes standards against which the grotesque and absurd are measured. Sheer invective or name-calling [...] is satire in which there is relatively little irony: on the other hand, whenever a reader is not sure what the author's attitude is or what his own is supposed to be, we have irony with relatively little satire" (223). Clearly then, unless we can ascribe certain moral norms to the allegorizing of deconstructive logic, then McCarthy's work falls into the realm of the ironic. In fact, I will argue (in greater detail in chapters 7-9) that a set of moral and ethical norms are present, if not explicit, in McCarthy's work. They are represented by the series of formalisms analysed in the chapters that follow, in their attempt to write a protagonist into a world absent the subject. There is a sense of McCarthy's work being a self-satirical, or self-consuming, mode of writing which depends upon the logic of deconstruction, and not on a *conflict* between a certain set of standards and the absurd.

The Self-Consumption of the Hegemonic Subject

Baudrillard's later work of the early 21st century constitutes a kind of culmination of the problem of reality as he sees it, figured in the more philosophically coherent terms of a hegemonic global system. First, we get a sense of a perhaps more recognizable (though still ambiguous) origin of the problem of reality: "The disappearance of God has left us facing reality and the ideal prospect of transforming this real world. And we have found ourselves confronted with the undertaking of *realizing* the world, of making it become technically, integrally real. Now, the world freed from all illusion, does not lend itself at all to reality. The more we advance in this undertaking, the more ambiguous it becomes, the more it loses sight of itself. Reality has barely had time to exist and already it is disappearing" (*Intelligence* 17). If we think about the narrator of *Remainder*, we might better understand the significance of this passage. The key connection to McCarthy here is the implication that the world, the material base of human existence, "does not lend itself at all to reality", which is to say, it demands the inclusion of the absent, grotesque and absurd. This sense of reality refuses the resolution of an ideal form, and hence the possible object of satirical doubling. In *Remainder*, the narrator seeks a return to a very spectral or ambiguous sense of authenticity, a dominant desire which is confronted continuously with either the indifferent complicity or stubborn unpredictability of the world. And, just as for Baudrillard, the closer the narrator's pursuit of authenticity gets to its target the quicker it seems to somehow amplify a sense of ontological ambiguity. The narrator finds himself forced to *perform authenticity* while on his way to meet a friend:

It must have looked strange. I felt self-conscious, embarrassed. I made a decision to go and pick the flight details up after all, but remained standing on the pavement for a few more seconds while I pretended to weigh up several options and then come to an informed decision. I even brought my finger into it, the index finger of my right hand. It was a performance for the two men watching me, to make my movements come across as more authentic. (15)

What is performed, specifically, is a moment of thought, of calculation, of *choice*; it is the momentary performance of indecision that creates the appearance of subjective authenticity. What is troubling in this scene is that the performance of thought takes the *time and space* of thought; the decision is already made, what appears necessary for the narrator is to acquire the posture of a person on their way to a decision. The decision has already been made, and yet, it requires a formalism to draw it into the appearance of a shared reality. Though the connection has yet to be made by the narrator, this compulsion he feels is eventually translated in the expression of a religious mode of devotion to the repetition of his re-enactments. In my analysis this mode represents the current ideological devotion to consumerist repetition, and McCarthy in his essays identifies it with a particular brand of writerly temporality. Citing Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, McCarthy associates the temporality exhibited

by the formalism of medical repetition with the time of death and sickness, “a dimensionless present in which they eternally bring you the broth” (Mann, qtd. in *Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* 102). He then adds to this image the repetition of a religious variety offered to Conrad’s character James Wait, a sailor whose sickness compels his shipmates to, “become loyal yet dread-filled servants” to him in the ship’s forecastle that has assumed the aspect of a “church” (*Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* 107). However, when it is revealed that Wait had been deceiving the crew by faking his illness, events and the world conspire to describe what McCarthy calls the “interim” time of the novel, or of sickness and death. Firstly, even after admitting his ruse, the coughing that opens the account of his sickness (and deception) in the text⁶, continues unabated. As a result, when the Captain then accuses him of deception, Wait claims that he has recovered. The confusion this doubling of opposites produces emerges in the text ontologically and environmentally: “The whole ship teeters on the edge of an abysmal ambiguity; “nothing in her was real.” It drifts on the doldrums, which (since it is sail-powered) delays its onward passage – a hiatus that seems to affirm that “The universe conspired with James Wait” (*Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* 108). This temporality demonstrates a world in conspiracy with the individual, with the character who seems destined to simulate their death *to death*. Wait begins the story outside the roll call, his subsequent inclusion labels him as both a trouble maker and sick; his entrance into the story is an entrance and an exit at once, he enters as one who is already in the process of exiting. This is the nature of the interim or interval as it is understood here. In his own words, an interval or interim of this type is for McCarthy indicative of the “revolutionary” time ripe with the potential of “fiction” (*Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* 124). Shifting to a more theoretical register, McCarthy connects the temporal aesthetics of death and sickness to Conrad’s notion that writing should lead: “[...] not to a labour’s successful completion, but rather to its suspension: “To arrest, for the space of a breath, the hands busy about the work of the earth, and compel men entranced by the sight of distant goals to glance for a moment at the surrounding vision of form and color, of sunshine and shadows [...]” (*Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* 110). McCarthy then extends this notion of suspension forward through Blanchot’s analysis of Orpheus, identifying it not only with arrest but with the act of interrupting and vandalizing one’s own labour (*Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* 111). Hence, writing of this high-modernist type is identified by McCarthy with the inescapable present of sickness of Mann, which becomes the doldrums of simulating sickness in Conrad, and receives its final transmutation in this essay through the work of Mallarmé. McCarthy quotes

⁶ A “metallic, hollow, and tremendously loud” (Conrad, cited in *Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* 106) cough comes out of Wait as he describes his illness to the crew: the louder, more disruptive identification of “interim” time that is re-iterated in the opening scenes of *C*, where Dr. Learmont can hear laughter that, “doesn’t sound quite right [...] It sounds distorted, slightly warped – ventriloquised almost, as though piped in from somewhere else” (*C* 4)

Mallarmé's expression of a sentiment that he will later echo in contemporary terms in his article, "The Death of Writing": "In the final analysis, I consider the contemporary era to be a kind of interregnum for the poet, who has nothing to do with it: it is too fallen or too full of preparatory effervescence for him to do anything but keep working [...]" (Mallarmé, qtd. in *Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* 118-19). He describes a dead poet inside the medium of suspension, occasionally sending signals to the living. Inside this modernist notion of suspension, the interim or interval, is enacted a mode of timeless and spaceless repetition, a kind of devotion to that which the suspended quality of the interim or interval keeps in reserve: the non-repetitive event, what Gibson calls a "singularity" ("Speculative Realism" 237) and McCarthy describes as an event that, "cannot name itself, nor even find a solid time-platform to arise and stand on" (*Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* 120-21). The interval is both a modernist writerly conceit for McCarthy, and at the same time that which connects the poetics of his novels to the contemporary moment. By locating the interval in high modernism and its confrontation with the universalizing mode of colonialism, McCarthy demonstrates that this notion of suspension is not purely literary, but rather is the consequence of the writer confronting the power centers of modernity: technology, capital, and exchange. By bringing that same temporality, spatiality and suspension to his own poetics, I argue that McCarthy is not simply reiterating a critical modernist aesthetics, but rather identifying modernity itself as the mode of suspension that his novels share with Baudrillard's theory of contemporary hegemony.

All of the characteristics of the interval described by McCarthy can be located in Jean Baudrillard's conception of modernity. I read Baudrillard's conception of modernity in terms of a tri-partite deployment and disappearance: of authenticity into farce, of nomination into disintegration, and finally of reality into its troubled relation to fiction. "We may start out from Marx's famous saying about history occurring first as authentic event and then being repeated as farce. In this way, we may see modernity as the initial adventure of the European West, then as an immense farce repeating itself on a planetary scale, in all those latitudes to which Western religious, technical, economic and political values have been exported" (*Carnival and Cannibal* 3-4). Baudrillard seems to specifically avoid the use of the term 'tragedy' in his reference to Marx's famous saying; there is only farce, but a farce lacking in laughter or humour. This is the character of these concepts: they reflect the positivity of that which they seek to describe and in doing so enact its disappearance. The same conclusion can be drawn, in specific relation to writing, when Baudrillard suggests that, "By representing things to ourselves, by naming them and conceptualizing them, human beings call them into existence and at the same time hasten their doom, subtly detach them from their brute reality. For example, the class struggle exists from the moment Marx names it. But it no doubt exists in its greatest intensity only before being named" (*Why Hasn't Everything Already*

Disappeared? 11). When speaking of the *postmodern* in the context of my analysis, therefore, we are speaking of Baudrillard's conception of modernity (and its principles) as the beginning of its own end. In other words, 'postmodern' equates in this instance to a temporal meaning, specifically the extended moment, "when human beings, while setting about analysing and transforming the world, take their leave of it, while at the same time lending it force of reality. We may say, then, that the real world begins, paradoxically, to disappear at the very same time as it begins to exist" (*Why Hasn't Everything Already Disappeared?* 11). This Western project is farcical without being tragic or funny, because the project itself is understood as the relegation of human folly in the form of the realization of an ideal. It has been argued that Baudrillard demonstrates a complete lack of concern for the suffering of the oppressed in the totalizing world that he describes (Gilman-Opalsky 38), and yet in his 2004 essay *Carnival and Cannibal* he demonstrates the reversibility inherent in techniques of exaggeration and absence in such a way as to problematize the usefulness of this kind of ethical and moral critique of late capitalism. In simple terms, he reduces that critique to a kind of condescending *performance* of hegemonic subjectivity. Speaking of the West and the 'rest' in the provocative terms of the 'Whites' and 'Blacks' or 'whiteness' and 'blackness', he illustrates the positivity of this deluded division of people not just through the exaggerated use of these common-place yet absurd terms but through the logic of deconstruction which irrevocably links these two semantically separated groups together through their shared commitment to the performance of their reality and the extension of their suspension.

The Western project of the globalisation of its values (from which the project of colonialism is inextricable) produces for Baudrillard the following description of the 'blacks', "who, more even than being exploited or oppressed, are simply made a laughing stock and transfigured into caricatures of the Whites – like those monkeys that used to be dressed up in admiral's costumes and put on show in fairs" (*Carnival* 5). He calls this the "carnivalisation" of marginalized peoples: the insistence that they are different and ridiculous but that this difference can be transcended through the adoption of the manner, values and dress of the 'Whites'. However, he describes the opposite process of "cannibalisation" as "a stigmatization of domination using the very marks of that domination" (*Carnival* 6) by these peoples, the exaggerated performance of whiteness which serves in the end to produce these peoples as an image capable of mapping whiteness itself as nothing but an ideological delusion at the heart of which there lies an ultimate absence of authenticity (or a similarity that is dangerous for the dominant hierarchy). In the obviously racist overtones of this description, which I read as an absurd double of the racist overtones of colonialism and post-colonial discourse, Baudrillard identifies the seed of its own destruction, arguably

the only form of resistance capable of dismantling the hegemonic system perpetrated on the world. He describes this process, what I would call a materialized or realized logic of deconstruction, as follows:

If all peoples decked out in the signs of whiteness and with all the exotic technologies are at the same time the living parody of these things, a deriding of them, this is because these things are quite simply laughable, but *we* can no longer see it. It is when they extend to the global level that universal values are revealed as a swindle. If there was an original—historical and Western—event of modernity, we have exhausted all its consequences and it has taken a fatal, farcical turn for us ourselves. But the logic of modernity demanded that we impose it on the entire world, demanded that the *fatum* of the Whites should be that of the race of Cain, and that no one should escape this homogenization, this mystification of the species.

When the Blacks attempt to whiten themselves, they are merely the distorted mirror of the negrification of the Whites, self-mystified from the outset by their own mastery. So the whole décor of modern multiracial civilization is merely a *trompe-l'oeil* universe in which all particularities of race, sex, and culture can be said to have been falsified to the point of being parodies of themselves. (*Carnival* 8-9)

For Baudrillard, the subject disappears into parodic performances of themselves. Deconstructive logic can therefore be identified as a process of self-consumption in a world where the convergence of the literal and the rhetorical dominates in the form of data and information. The harder we push to realize and legitimize our sense of self and position in the world, the more that realisation threatens to reveal its dependence upon the rhetorical or fictional and therefore bring us face-to-face with the reality hidden behind McCarthy's undecidable aesthetics: that there is no fundamental self lying behind the screen of our home-spun individuality, that there is no master meaning being encoded by the texts we choose to wrap ourselves in. What we can understand through Baudrillard as the art of disappearance behind repetition, language and the aesthetics of reality, we can see in the theory of McCarthy as an interest in and dedication to the absence of the subject. Like Baudrillard, both Harcourt (*Political Disobedience*) and Irving Goh (*Touch Today: From Subject to Reject*) describe contemporary modes of resistance in terms of the refusal or abandoning of contemporary structures of (respectively) politics and subjectivity. Goh effectively argues that in the contemporary space of "contagion", of unavoidable "touch", the reject is not an aspiration so much as a reality that should be accepted and acted within. However, like Baudrillard's disappearing subject, the positive premise of *the reject* depends upon its capacity to detour around the potential negativity of touch, where touch constitutes the potential of power to coerce or manipulate:

The *reject* does not put any pre-eminence on his or her touch, as if it can achieve something that the touch of others cannot. It is this auto-rejection of any exceptional touch that gives the *reject* a tactful restraint in its relations with others, always refraining from initiating touch, and always letting the other be or go as he or she desires. Here, auto-rejection in the *reject* sidesteps both the excessive and negating touch of the Cartesian subject and the denigrating

caress of the Sartrean subject. It can be said that the *reject* is always thinking or experimenting anew how to touch with tact in relation to each different other in a different space and different time. (Goh 125)

Goh's *reject* employs tact in its coming into contact with others, in a mode meant to allow others the freedom to reject this touching, and to place no emphasis on one touch over the other. In effect, the *reject* seeks to touch, but to enact a mode of touching that both devalues and positivizes the act: by allowing the other to reject your touch *tout court*, the *reject* attempts to avoid the moral and ethical pitfalls of touch while maintaining it as an essential practice. Like Harcourt, who praises the Occupy Wall Street movement as an example of political disobedience⁷ in its attempts to avoid all stated goals, all benefits and drawbacks of leadership or charisma (Political Disobedience 38-40), the *reject* enacts the art of disappearance not through engagement with the problems of structure or leadership, but through the committed performance of alienation or detachment from them that are the results of strategies of aesthetic deferral or detour. The positive strategies of Goh and Harcourt, and the undecidable strategy of Baudrillard's art of disappearance, all demand the absence of the subject (and its irrevocable negativity) through modes of performative aesthetic replacement, a formalized mode of simulation we can identify with Baudrillard but which is perhaps also at play in certain forms of literature.

McCarthy, for instance, notes a particular kind of subjective absence both enacted and sought after in the work of Kathy Acker. He describes Acker's protagonists as "bodies": "Open, morphing, endlessly penetrating or being penetrated by the scenes around them, Acker's bodies channel and act as hubs or mainstays in a world of viscerally networked continuity – like jellyfish quivering as pulse-signals reach them through a viscous sea. Or, rather (lest we start getting holistic), they *both* anchor this world *and* serve as its disjuncta: more smack than bloom" (*Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* 257). This leads McCarthy to name an "impossible situation" in Acker's work that is re-iterated in his own novels: "that of identifying with non-identity" (*Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* 259). Acker's bodies are, according to McCarthy, "a space of technological mastery, like robots operated by remote control" (*Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* 271). It is through his interest in this subjective mode of presence/absence, and through the repeated reference in the critical literature to his antagonism towards the subject of contemporary realism that I propose McCarthy's connection to Baudrillard's art of disappearance. In order to contextualize and detail the relevance of this assertion, I will now briefly address what is perhaps the

⁷ In simple terms, the refusal or rejection of all current political structures and mechanisms.

most comprehensive text on McCarthy to date, *Tom McCarthy: Critical Essays*, particularly through the chapter by Andrew Gibson.

Like his assessment of Acker's characters, McCarthy's protagonists have also been read in terms of being robotic, inhuman, or even dead (Byatt; Gibson). What I will attempt to demonstrate in the chapters that follow is that McCarthy seeks revolt through conformity, violence through passivity, in the mode of the hegemonic art of disappearance. In other words, he invokes the logic of representation, realism and satire (their formalisms) in an excessive mode that ironically reduces these forms to their most basic constituent appeal: their capacity to reflect an absent and ontologically vulnerable subjectivity. McCarthy challenges the reader, along lines similar to those he attributes to the plagiarist style of Acker, to identify with a lack of identity. He accomplishes this challenge by offering, in the place of the traditional subject, a mode of representation of, and relation to, the formalism.

Gibson draws this concept out of *C*, describing a formalism as "a collection of units, elements or entities and their relations to which there are limits as precisely fixed as a frame, and as evidently defined as a line", but which, at the same time, "communicate, proliferate, cross one another, produce a palimpsest" ("Speculative Realism" 235). As such, the precise limits of the formalism and its internal relations are always transgressed by other formalisms. He provides the following list of formalisms that "obsess McCarthy": "repetitions, of course [...], but also mechanisms, systems, arrangements, networks, codes, processes, grids, layouts, matrices, wirings, webs, structures, geometries, patterns, diagrams, logics, mazes, zones, switchboards, nodes and relays, plans and orders, exchanges and connectivities, overlapping sequences, linking vectors and control lines, sets of principles, rules and instructions, intersections, formulae, mandalas . . ." ("Speculative Realism" 235). He later adds to this list the formalisms represented by "systems of language and literature", at which point the precision, definition and fixity of the formalism begins to come into question. The linguistic, theoretical and material formalisms are unified in the novels and in Gibson's description by the seriality of their erasure or disappearance behind the next formalism, their seemingly automatic disintegration through the tropic transmission of the values and meaning that made up the limits of the formalism. For example, Gibson locates formalisms throughout *C*, and yet points out that they are not disrupted by what he calls glitches or singularities, but are able to "overtake anything at all" ("Speculative Realism" 238). Formalisms are presented as irresistible and antecedent to the plot of the novel and characters, while singularities, described nebulously as "a presentation of that which appears once and once only, here and now and only here and now", such as when Serge's airplane paces an artillery shell in the sky, "becomes derisory,

comical" ("Speculative Realism" 237) in the novel. In other words, the formalism is capable of containing and overlaying even that which is meant to disrupt it, which leads Gibson to suggest that: "It might seem as though the eternal absorption of the singularity in McCarthy bespeaks the absolute absence of an outside. But something like the reverse is actually the case: what is at stake is rather the availability, everywhere, of the outside within the inside" ("Speculative Realism" 239). The endless series of formalisms absorb singularity and the event, the negativity of the outside, into the inside, in a mode that is synonymous with the ideology of Jean Baudrillard's Western hegemony.

This ideological domination of the negative by the aesthetic positivity of the formalism creates a situation in *C* where "Everything is dead already [...] in that formalism always precedes singularity [...] through its growing intimacy with the truth of the formalisms, animate human singularity incessantly returns to the inanimate domain which had always already captured it from the start" (Gibson, "Speculative Realism" 240). Comparing McCarthy's aesthetics to the philosophy of Speculative Realism, Gibson suggests both are vulnerable to the critique that they contain "no theory of the event" ("Speculative Realism" 241). While citing Alain Badiou's suggestion that the Speculative Realists do not go beyond a 'detachment from the present', Gibson attempts to defend that detachment to a certain extent:

They [speculative realists] think the present from its outside and think the outside within the present – as does McCarthy. That in itself is a significant endeavour at the current time, and is what McCarthy (1999) means when he writes of the necronautical task (admittedly reversing the vector) as 'bring[ing] death out into the world'. Nonetheless: the manifesto of the necronautical society declares that the 'processes and avatars' of death are 'active' in formalisms, like radio, television, the internet (McCarthy, 1999). Up to this point, I subscribe to the necronauts and am McCarthy's confederate. Beyond it, I part company with him, as Badiou does with the speculative realists. ("Speculative Realism" 241)

This is where I begin to depart from Gibson's reading of the absence of event and politics in McCarthy's work. Firstly, it should be noted that the intention of this research is not to elucidate or develop a connection between McCarthy the author and theorist and his novels, and as such, the works and transmissions of the International Necronautical Society do not feature prominently here. I would therefore begin by suggesting that the death identified by the Necronautical Society as needing to be brought into the world is precisely not the death contained in the technical formalisms of radio and the internet, but rather the death that is denied *by* those formalisms in the novel: the already accomplished death of the West and of the Western subject. As such, I will endeavour to demonstrate in what follows that the formalisms at play in the novels, which are always both poetic and technical, assume the space abandoned by the bourgeois subject in its art of disappearance. Where we might expect a portal into a subject's history, emotional depth, social field of relations, or political motivation, I argue we are instead

challenged by the novels to locate those missing elements inside what comes to appear as a vast, automated series of linguistic and technological formalisms.

These claims become increasingly significant as Gibson continues to expand upon his critique of McCarthy and the Speculative realists: "One way of thinking of both them and McCarthy is as the intellectual vanguard of a disabused generation which, at its best, starkly acknowledges the – at the current time, seemingly definitive – collapse of politics and austere refuses to take refuge from the collapse in implausible and finally complicit contemporary ethics, whilst also turning in superb indifference from contemporary Panglossianisms and ostrich theologies" ("Speculative Realism" 241-2). In other words, McCarthy is praised here for poetically signalling the ruin of politics, but without offering anything resolute or positive in its place. I would argue that Gibson's assessment of the positivity of McCarthy's style (its illustration of a ruined politics) is the very thing that necessitates Gibson's ultimate critique, the lack of a theory of the event. I agree that the novels illustrate a state of politics which we might consider 'collapsed', if what we are referring to is the political idealism of the subject that helps generate the novel with its "plot, characters, subjective perception, thematics, psychology, the drama of incident" ("Speculative Realism" 237-8). However, if McCarthy's novels refuse to escape this collapse, then the ruins of this collapse, its detritus, comes precisely in the guise of an endless series of formalisms and their contents, the literary expression of which becomes an alibi for the absence of the subject from the novels. Enclosed in the wreckage of the political, I argue here that McCarthy's characters enact a relation to the world that denies their political, ethical and historical responsibility as bourgeois western subjects, enacting in their place an ethics of indifferent collaboration and revolt, a secular theology of ritual repetition which promises both death and the resolution of the final event (the event that will end the need for repetition). While Gibson critiques McCarthy for lacking a "theory of the event", McCarthy in his analysis of Robbe-Grillet and Conrad offers another reading of this absence that extends the importance of the original absence, that of the subject.

The subject, I contend here, is precisely a narrative blind-spot of the novels, one that its obfuscated and overcome by the serial irresistibility of the formalism in late capitalist society (the ideology of the art of disappearance). As Gibson suggests, in McCarthy's novels (as in late capitalism), the formalism is all, is able to draw all into its shifting lines and borders; and yet, unlike Gibson, I argue in the chapters that follow that this does not mean McCarthy is able to avoid complicit ethics or secular theologies. Rather, the refusal of the ending or of resolution is precisely what McCarthy thinks of as the essence of his particular mode of writing.

Hence, irresolution may be a weakness when the novel is expected to create something *different*; however, when the novel understands itself as at the core of contemporary informatic and technological formalisms, novelty is tacitly rejected, along with resolution. No matter his efforts, McCarthy's novels were always going to be subsumable to the formalisms of genre; their irresolution denies certain generic attributions (those that require a particular form of ending or protagonist), while at the same time inviting the critique leveled by Gibson: if one is to deploy modernist aesthetics contra ideological realism, one is expected to illustrate the outcome, and not (as McCarthy does) leave it ambiguous. This ambiguity is, however, the point: McCarthy lays down his tools before completion, before his mode can be named and hence undone, and in this way locates the creativity of the bourgeois subject outside of the act of expressionistic novel-writing and inside the formalisms of ideological perception. What is filled with potential is always what comes *after* the conclusion of McCarthy's narratives, after the reader has finished with them. The absence of the traditional protagonist in the novels generates this absence of resolution that comes, not just at the end of the novels, but throughout in the form of circularity and duality; nothing in the novels is resolved, opposites blend into one another, the human metaphorically becomes insect and then machine, and then returns back into the body. I therefore contend that McCarthy's formalisms are not the resolution Gibson might be hoping for, not only because they interact and transgress each other's limits, but because they enact the deconstructive logic of the self-contained system: they structure their own dissolution or disappearance. Hence, what is left in the novels absent a subject is the undecidability of the world that is attempting to write itself; the box, in the absence of Schrödinger, describes the cat as both alive and dead at once, and objectively so.

What I mean here is that McCarthy employs in his novels the poetics of this hegemonic condition, in such a way as to reproduce simultaneously the indifference and the unspoken hopeful desire of the dominant ideology of both the novel form and hegemonic society. Both contemporary novel form and society are skewered by the demonstration (and creative reiteration or allegorization) of their continuous failed attempts at resolving the relation between sign and thing. The novels themselves constitute *stories about* the desire to transcend the human condition, without themselves being stories which seek to transcend that condition or illustrate the transcendence of that condition. The very universal desire (for completion, for the total picture) that is expressed in each of his novels is therefore necessarily obfuscated by the absence of the traditional modes of desire and affective experience that would usually constitute the relation between modern novel and reader. We might say that McCarthy's novels can be read as the stigmatization of this ideal modern and contemporary form of literature, more than say, an expression of affinity for re-staging the manoeuvres of the modernist avant-garde.

It may seem unusual to pursue the analysis of McCarthy's novels through the work of a theorist who is associated largely with the postmodern, when much of the critical work done on McCarthy has situated his work beside or in relation to modernism. It may seem equally unusual to pursue this angle of analysis when the author himself seems to have dismissed the relative importance of one of Baudrillard's most prevalent concepts, simulation:

Tom McCarthy: I mean, I am a traditionalist. I am quite conservative. I've read Baudrillard, but Plato said it all. The idea of the simulacra being a copy without an original, which is Baudrillard's big selling point—it's in the *Sophist* by Plato. Lots of people described *Remainder* as a very postmodern book, because there is this guy re-enacting very stylized moments in a bid for authenticity, and in the postmodern era, they say, we don't have authenticity. But I was thinking as much of *Don Quixote*, the first novel, or one of the first novels, which is exactly the same. It is about a guy feeling inauthentic in 1605 and in a bid to acquire, to accede to authenticity, he re-enacts moments from penny novels, the kind of TV of its day. So I think you have to be a bit careful about this cult of newness, the idea that somehow, post-about-1962, we're suddenly postmodern—It just ain't so. There's always a precedent. (Alizart)

These are the last words in an interview that goes over the prominent critical terrain of the typical McCarthy analysis: Cocteau, Robbe-Grillet, Mallarmé, Joyce, most of McCarthy's usual suspects. However, if we look closely at the language of this dismissal of Baudrillard's work, and compare it to the idea that McCarthy is re-enacting or re-animating a certain modernist aesthetics, then his relation to Baudrillard becomes less certain, and more open to interpretation. Firstly, McCarthy dismisses Baudrillard for doing with simulation precisely what he has done with modernism: returning to a previous moment in the tradition and re-enacting it through the specifics of their contemporary conditions. Secondly, this dismissal is followed by the suggestion that he was "thinking as much" of *Don Quixote* while writing *Remainder*, which is to say, as much about *Don Quixote* as Baudrillard. This is not a reading at cross purposes, the comparison in this context can only be with Baudrillard. It seems that McCarthy is dismissing Baudrillard then, while at the same time suggesting that his work was on his mind as much as Cervantes, which would place Baudrillard's work on simulation on an unexpected level with "the first novel", especially given the tone of the response. In turn, I believe that, particularly in his later works, Baudrillard no longer emphasized such a strict temporality of simulation, instead describing, as I quoted above, modernity and the concept of reality itself as heralding the age of simulation. Hence, in my reading, McCarthy's dismissal seems more like a deferral or detour around a theoretical or literary debt he cannot find a way to pay back. Simply put, to dismiss Baudrillard by virtue of the very concept you are dismissing, seems too obvious a contradiction to be unintentional, especially when it is coming from McCarthy's lips. As such, this analysis of the novels as making up an illustration of a self-consuming subject and society,

where performance, action, satire and their objects come to be one and the same thing, is partly motivated by the desire to explore the potential of this paradoxical statement by McCarthy.

In part one I will engage with the conditions of space in McCarthy's novels, investigating the nature of its illustration and presence, its effect on time, and its relation to the theories of hegemony that have been discussed here. I will demonstrate that the world of McCarthy's novels (and the text itself) is a web of illustrations and reflective surfaces, and that the inescapability of this network of surfaces allegorizes the prison of the 'thing-in-itself', the forever-elusive horizon of totality promised by total immersion in information. At the same time, space and time will be shown in relation to the permeability of Gibson's formalisms, as offering limits and lines that are only *potentially* stable. Part one concludes with a discussion of the destiny of the subject in a context where the formalisms of time and space converge and become indifferent to one another. Where movement is general and not particular, the destiny of the subject becomes bound up in their own excreta: signals, screens and surfaces of all kinds.

In part two I will attempt to show that McCarthy's literature is defined by an excessive, and yet intentional, deployment of symbols, signs, illustrations and marks of the celebrated modern individual and novel. McCarthy's novels show how the rigorous insistence or reproduction of a formalism, or a tradition, is in fact the only avenue the formalism knows towards its own end, towards a release from what limits it. The novels demonstrate that excessive repetition and reproduction can help convince or fascinate, but only up to a certain point; the point where the figure repeated comes to assume a comic and absurd, if not irrational and unknowable character. In this section, Symbolism, a-signification and melancholy are all investigated as literary and social formalisms that are prominent in the novels. Each of these formalisms will be shown in the manner through which they might undercut their own proposed endeavour or logic, descending instead into the dualism that defines the literary mode absent the subject. McCarthy's poetics will be shown to constitute an anthropological mirror, showing us the rituals of the contemporary (white, straight, male, bourgeois) subject in all their excessive banality. Repetition and iteration constitute the muscle of the capitalist ethos, and at the same time a regressive ritual performance alluding to a forthcoming but absent ideal subject-position. I want to demonstrate in this section that this process of ritual iteration and re-iteration constitutes a convergence (within the aforementioned hegemony) of self-expression, self-destruction and self-erasure. In this section, therefore, I want to demonstrate how the formalisms of symbol, a-signification and melancholy all point, in the novels, to the absence of the subject and to the destructive and violent potential of writing that subject into existence through the ritual performance of late capitalist society.

Part three considers the condition of the ethical in McCarthy's novels. Beginning with an investigation into the reversibility of the ethics of power in the novels in chapter 7, this section illustrates the ethical in the endless context of modernist aesthetic reiteration identified in *C* by Gibson. What is shown to be ethical from the position of power is shown to be ethical from the disempowered position in chapter 8: the production of a reality so defined it might permanently hide the messiness, undecidability and insubstantiality of the subject. It is, however, in this re-iteration of the ethics of power that the subject enacts a simultaneously negative and positive ethics: that of its own disappearance. This is shown to be an ethics motivated by the figure of irony and its potential for endless circularity. The neutrality and lack of affect demonstrated by McCarthy's characters exemplify the bourgeois privileged subject in their particular lack of tension, and this lack of tension is addressed in chapter 9 through the anthropological trickster figure. By identifying the formalism of the trickster figure in both contemporary Western society and in the poetics of the novels, I attempt to demonstrate (through Baudrillard's theory of challenge) the ethics of resistance to Western hegemony that might constitute the key to destabilizing Baudrillard's hegemony of simulation.

Section 1

Abstract

The following section investigates the nature of space and time in the novels, and indicates the literary mode of subjectivity that is necessitated by these conditions. Space in the novels is a textual field of constant passage, and as such constitutes an inalienable space, one which exerts a certain pressure on the subject of the novels paradoxically by its absence of “event”, its absence of historical and economic pressures. The space of the novels is not a conflictual space, but rather one of repetition and monotony. The time of the novels is a *post*-time, specifically, *post*-modern time in its literal and aesthetic sense. Situated after modernity’s emergence, each novel presents the same temporality: that of the (post)modern interim or interval. It is understood here through a poetics and aesthetics of movement and stillness, life and death, that time in the novels is the time of passage to nowhere; the time of a seemingly endless passage that is the time it takes for the Western subject to become identical with its simulation. The relation between space, time and the characters in the novels is subsumed into objects and signs. In the state of suspension of the interval, as of the novels, destiny is not an issue of character, but is rather embedded in the poetics and aesthetics of the textual relation to signs and objects that replace the presence of the character or the subject in the texts. Space and time in the novels serve to deny the fixity or certainty (we might also say permanence) of presence, and as such serve as formalisms describing the trace of the subject they once contained, a trace of an ideal novelistic consciousness where none such exists. The poetics of perception of objects and human excreta (gases, faeces, technology, language, etc.) in the novels are where the destiny of the absent subject is stored as potential. Its destiny is death, but knowledge of this destiny is endlessly confounded by the poetic mode of perception of the novels, the mode of aesthetics necessary to obfuscate the absence of the subject that gives all this symbolism, architecture and movement meaning. Destiny, like death in the novels, is both immanent in the aesthetics and yet permanently held in abeyance, ‘beyond’ the eyes of the absent subject, which is to say, beyond the eyes of the object world. Death as destiny is stored and obfuscated by the ubiquity and idealism of machinery and automation, and hence revealed by the idealism and automation of the body in the form of its impulses and excreta.

Chapter 1: The Space of the Novels

One is tempted to say that the idea of 'the West' today is no longer restricted in its application by territorial or spatial limits; to call something Western is not to say that it exists in a certain region, or originates there, but simply that it participates in a certain operational logic, which will be engaged with here and broadly understood in terms of an *ethos of reality production*. Western space, in other words, is ideologically and structurally bent towards the goal of producing an objective reality, which is to say, a reality not undone, not implicitly deconstructed, by the necessary actions of the subjects who undertake this ideological imperative. One might think, at first glance, that representational forms like narrative, myth, legend, symbol, and novel would be tacitly opposed to such an ethos, that their irrevocable relation to the fictional and to language would exclude them from the objective-reality-producing process. Far from it, what we find when investigating reality through its relation to 'fictional forms' like the novel, symbol, myth, etc., is that paradoxically, the further along the reality project pushes us, the closer total objectivity appears to be, the closer we get to a reactionary (liberal *and* conservative) re-investment in forms like myth, symbol and narrative. Simply put, Western space, dominated as it is by technologies of communication and information, consists of an endless, shifting mire of language, image and symbol. The subject in this context must therefore relate to this ubiquitous (yet constantly changing) information and communication, so as to avoid the nightmare experience of playing an endless game of catch-up with the world.

I would suggest that the readers of McCarthy's novels are presented with a similarly problematic situation. The repetition and circulation of images and imagery forces the reader to confront the meaning of this repetition; it forces the reader therefore to confront repetition itself as meaning-producing. The scattered network of intertextual references (to Ballard's *Crash* in *Remainder*, Hölderlin's poetry, Mann's *Magic Mountain* and Dickens' *David Copperfield* in *C*, and a variety of cultural theorists and anthropologists in *Satin Island*) throughout the novels creates the same problem: does a clear abundance of repetition and intertextual reference infer an excess of meaning, a lack of it, or both? The general relation of the subject to Western space (hegemonic representation) is defined by the problem of reading; if reality production is the production of information about the world (coming in various forms), then the subject for whom the world is always too big and too complex to envision all at once requires some kind of filter, something to help process this information and as such to avoid being overwhelmed by its sheer

mass and momentum. This is a defining aspect of the contemporary spatial condition: deproblematization (the deferral of all negative side-effects).

Deproblematization is in this context synonymous with reality-production. To gain an objective vantage point over all of creation is to essentially deproblematize our understanding of reality, and our position within it. Speaking in a moment after the turn of the 20th century, described in the introduction as a moment of “Dark Times”, “political tension”, “economic misère” and “eras of decline”, Walter Benjamin suggests that the problem confronting the West in this new century is that of representation:

The more clearly mathematics demonstrate that the total elimination of the problem of representation –which is boasted by every proper didactic system– is the sign of genuine knowledge, the more conclusively does it reveal its renunciation of the area of truth towards which language is directed. The methodological element in philosophical projects is not simply part of their didactic mechanism. This means quite simply that they possess a certain esoteric quality which they are unable to discard, forbidden to deny, and which they vaunt at their own peril. (*The Origin of German Tragic Drama* 27-28)

Benjamin, spurred on by the steady and subversive rise of fascism (itself a paradoxical combination of contemporary science and racial mythos) in Europe, seemed to arrive at the problem of representation, thought and their relation to technological reproducibility; in other words, he sought to confront the relation between mechanical reproductions of art and political or historical subjectivity. What he found was that certain forms demanded or contained particular avenues of consumption; there was a right and a wrong (or a common and uncommon) way of consuming these new kinds of media, these new kinds of information about the world.

We might summarize Benjamin’s thoughts from *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* as follows: The original art object had aura, it had material particularity and historical meaning. The reproduced artwork lost these things, lost its connection to religion, magic and ritual, and gained a connection to the political. How so? According to Benjamin, by being,

[...] exhibits in the trial that is history. That is what constitutes their [the photographs’] hidden political significance. They already call for a specific type of reception. Free-floating contemplation is no longer an appropriate reaction here. They unsettle the viewer; he feels obliged to find a specific way of approaching them. At the same time the illustrated journals start to erect signposts, suggesting that way. Right or wrong – no matter. (*The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* 14)

History in this sense begins to conform to the movement from the ‘cultic’ value of representations, to the ‘display’ value of information; it needs to be *seen* by humans in this context, not simply be present to the inhuman world of the Gods or spirits. An act of political significance becomes an act that depends on being actively viewed; the absent viewer (God) is no longer around to serve that role. As such, the emphasis is

on seeing, where sight becomes a one-way street, an operational process instead, as in reading, of a process which always contains the potential of producing both presence and absence.

McCarthy's work is defined by the co-presence of these values: the one-way street of sight offered by mechanical reproduction and the undecidability of all reading. The display value Benjamin is talking about is conveyed not by the content, but by the forms which engender this turn from the religious to the political: forms of mechanical reproduction. These forms, like captions, correspond as well to this idea of scientific deproblematization; they help direct the reader before contemplation commences, and as such help to obstruct (or temporarily defer) the confrontation with undecidability. There is a remainder left over in this attempt to fix the world under the microscope; the irrational enjoyment or thrill of leaps of faith. The vastness of political space is made miniature and seductive in the reproduced image; the audience is obliged to labour through their discomfort to discover the proper way to 'approach' these images. For Benjamin, these forms of representation constitute a media environment through which the subject can confront the world and the movements of history in a pleasingly alienated fashion; reading history constitutes a superior form of participation in it (the best of both the world of participation and the world of observation). The obfuscation of undecidability, the rabid pursuit of a deproblematized reality (which speaks to the superiority of our morality), is therefore defined by the essential guiding elements of science and technology, repetition and reproduction. Our contemporary context can be understood as a kind of extension of this early 20th-century space of political populism, xenophobia, and economic frailty; not only are we re-engaging with early 20th-century political and social issues like these, but this context is complicated further by the exponential expansion of the power of information technology over the past 100 years. The Western subject today is no longer able to 'approach' information about the world: we constitute and consume it continuously, it is inside and outside us at once.

The idea of criticizing the concept of reality itself in the face of new technologies and practices (such as sociology and anthropology), especially from a subjective position that could describe a critical distance between itself and its object, seems to have slowed down significantly in the years after Benjamin's death.⁸ The proponents of Postmodernity and its critics were perhaps some of the first to return to this problem of technical representation, and in their work we get an idea of a social world that

⁸ Frederic Jameson, for instance, states that the postmodern spatial condition is the result not of the exhaustion of the autonomy of the modern cultural sphere, but rather of its "explosion", or, "a prodigious expansion of culture throughout the social realm, to the point at which everything in our social life – from economic value and state power to practices and to the very structure of the psyche itself – can be said to have become cultural in some original and yet untheorized sense" (*Postmodernism* 48).

has eliminated (or sought to eliminate) its former oppositions (historical, political, etc.). Frederic Jameson makes clear the connection between postmodern space and the political when he argues that “[...] distance in general (including ‘critical distance’ in particular) has very precisely been abolished in the new space of postmodernism. We are submerged in its henceforth filled and suffused volumes to the point where our now postmodern bodies are bereft of spatial coordinates and practically (let alone theoretically) incapable of distantiation [...]” (*Postmodernism* 48-49). Questioning the nature of the relation between reality and representation in this framework does not portend a return to division and opposition, but instead the emergence of what will become a prominent figure in the work of postmodernists and Jean Baudrillard in particular: evil, absence, the negative, nothingness, the empty center, the lost original, etc. From the original mid-19th-century development of the photograph, to its self-consuming and farcical iteration in the form of the selfie and the digital image, we can trace the movement of our idea of space, moving as it did from a relation defined in terms of dialectical opposition and critical distance, to one of cultural hegemony, totality, and indifference.

The space of the novel is in one sense the space of the page: an example of a formalism, a flat plane, consisting of a combination of blankness and the various lines, curves and angles of text. It is the blankness that is vital for the reader, and yet it hides from his/her conscious thoughts behind the text and what it produces in him/her; it is both productive of, and definitively outside of, the reader’s consciousness of the page. The narrator of *Remainder*, after the traumatic accident which takes place in the void beyond the novel sends him into a coma, describes how a kind of blankness generates certain visual forms: “the no- space of complete oblivion stretched and contracted itself into gritty shapes and scenes in my unconscious head . . . over which a commentator’s voice was playing, inviting me to commentate along with him” (4). As on the page, it is out of this unifying blankness that shapes and scenes emerge in his unconscious; this blankness even generates both a narrator and the compulsion to self-narrate (the structure of reading: activating a detached narrative voice which encourages the production of its double in the form of the thoughts and meaning the reader derives from the narration). Without this material blankness, there would be no discernible text; nothing to narrate in concert with its emergence. What the narrator of *Remainder* is offering the reader is a metaphor of the imperative of contemporary space: to attend to the filling of the void through reception of the commentator’s voice and its relaying through your own compelled commentary. Without text, this blankness is still able,

somehow, to produce value and meaning in the contemporary world.⁹ We might say then that the remaining blankness of a page in a novel is what allows for meaning to move from text to reader, what allows and conditions any process of reading or decoding. I would suggest that the formalism of the page demands an approach that implies the repression of blankness, not only in favour of presence in general, but in order to produce a specifically literary space (space that must be activated by a reader).

Literary space, in this metaphor, depends upon a material blankness that subsequently recedes into the invisibility of the background that constitutes literary space, behind the confluence of meaning, text and reader. When this blankness appears in the novels, it does so under the guise of uncontrolled material (physical trace, oil, cancer, death); the blankness of the page finds itself repeated, reiterated and expressed endlessly along with everything else, despite the page having fallen behind the appeal and capacity of digital technology. I will try to demonstrate here that this repression of blankness (something I would connect to Baudrillard's notion of the elimination of evil [*Passwords* 33]) manifests itself through the repetitive *expression* of informatic formalisms (models, plans, data, codes, etc.). In McCarthy's novels, space is structured by repetitive iteration, by the repeated couching of similarity in disparate but equally banal objects, images and scenes. Space can also be understood as a function of distance, in terms of the medium of separation of objects. Space, in this sense, is a challenge to the desire for connection that is established in all the novels: it appears to be the condition of continuous connection, but the unfathomable vastness of its shifting presence denies the subject a clear horizon between self and other, a clear boundary beyond which is the empty space ripe with the potential of interpersonal connection. This desire for connection can be understood as a paradoxical consequence of the kind of proximity offered by mass communication. Space in the novel form can also be understood in terms of the historical conditions of the author, as expressed by McCarthy in two recent articles ("The Death of Writing"; "British Artist").

In another sense, the space of the novel is a space of simulation; a space that implies depth, detailed locations, personal histories, thoughts, actions and consequences. We might say that if a diary is an "assassins' cloak" (Taylor 212), the novel is the emperor's new clothes: it reveals a problematic and disciplinary connection between material performance and reality. This is true from the perspective of the novel reader and this is confirmed precisely by the perspective of the fictional characters in the texts

⁹ I'm thinking here of two examples, an empty notebook, and comedian Sheridan Simove's best-selling book *What Every Man Thinks About Apart From Sex*, which contains 200 blank pages, and sold over 100 000 copies as of April 2016 (<http://observer.com/2016/04/meet-the-man-who-sold-hundreds-of-thousands-of-books-with-blank-pages-in-them/>).

in question. However, the characters of the novels rarely come into contact with anything resembling literature (aside from Serge's encounter with the poetry of Hölderlin in C). The space of their reality is transcribed through machines and objects, and we get glimpses of the logic of this space through the expressions of machines, expressions that paradoxically almost always retain the same form (a repeatable function) and yet reveal their capacity to produce a variety of subjective consequences in the form of thoughts and narration. Machines become our source of revealed repression, at the same time as the means of repression; their lines, vectors and repetitive movements offer a formalism that might contain the dualistic relation of the subject to contemporary space. The steadfast predictability they confer to the movements of space around the subject, as well as their retention of the potential connection to a singular event, establishes the relation between the space of the novels and the absent subject. As is stated above, the formalisms of the machine seduce the thoughts and narration of the absent subject out into the open. Though sometimes revealing, for the most part machines serve as the medium of spatial and temporal fixity, the means of 'finding a position' within the flood of information, one means of receiving transmissions of narrative. Machines fix space in place temporarily, by making events simultaneous to their unfolding; by folding localized time and space into a shared universal time and space.¹⁰ When viewed through a screen (an actual screen or the screen of banal social practice), space and time seem to unify around the aesthetic value of stability and continuity (the paradoxical dual ideals of the capitalist system).

The Mirror of Late Capitalist Space

From the magical and enabling reflection of the Brother's Grimm fairy tale *Snow White*, Stendhal's *The Red and the Black*, Lewis Carroll's looking glass and Wilde's *Portrait of Dorian Gray* to the contemporary Netflix science fiction series *Black Mirror* (a reference to an inactive smart phone screen), the mirror is a commonplace allegory used in literature, film, television and theory to describe a certain relation between reality and fiction (or, a social relation to reality). *Black Mirror* is in a sense one of the latest developments of this literary allegory and it distinguishes itself by abandoning the traditional notion of reflection in favour of the *diffraction* of potential found in the screen, while maintaining similar themes and concerns expressed in literary examples (episodes almost always revolve around themes of social networking,

¹⁰ Described in the work of Frederic Jameson, Walter Benjamin and Alfred Sohn-Rethel. Alfred Sohn-Rethel describes how the act of exchange with money generates a socially cohesive illusion of time and space (*Intellectual Labour*). Both Benjamin (*Tragic Drama; Mechanical*) and Jameson (*Postmodernism*) have described their contemporary moment in terms of the technical capacity to summon the past and present and future together; time and space within this discursive and aesthetic condition stretch in every direction, linking past and future, bridging near and far, conditioning our relation to time and space by eliminating their limits and horizons.

reality television, smart phones, technologically enhanced memory, and a kind of narcissistic obsession with the self). In a sense the series abandons the territory of the allegory but leaves the map of its meaning behind. Jean Baudrillard discusses the notion of contemporary space in semi-literary terms through his discussion of a fable by Jorge Luiz Borges. In the "Fauna of the Mirrors", Borges describes two fantasy kingdoms:

In those days the world of mirrors and the world of men were not, as they are now, cut off from each other. They were, besides, quite different; neither being nor colours nor shapes were the same. Both kingdoms, the specular and the human, lived in harmony; you could come and go through mirrors. One night the mirror people invaded the earth. Their power was great, but at the end of bloody warfare the magic arts of the Yellow Emperor prevailed. He repulsed the invaders, imprisoned them in their mirrors, and forced on them the task of repeating, as though in a kind of dream, all the actions of men. He stripped them of their power and of their forms, and reduced them to mere slavish reflections. Nonetheless, a day will come when the magic spell will be shaken off...shapes will begin to stir. Little by little they will differ from us; little by little they will not imitate us. They will break through the barriers of glass or metal and this time will not be defeated. (qtd in *Perfect Crime* 149)

The key elements of the story emerge in Baudrillard's commentary as the notion of domination and control through images, a manipulation on a general scale that appears as a series of banal and microscopic movements in front of a mirror. Baudrillard's thoughts on this excerpt, which conclude *The Perfect Crime*, relate primarily to what he sees as the consequences of an enforced and invisible sameness which we might equate to the space created by the ethos of reality production. The world of *The Perfect Crime* is one that confronts the subject as an incessant and excessive stream of images, meanings and symbolic allusions. What this amounts to in real terms is the conditioning of the subject by an endless spatial confrontation with narrative information. In order to inject some semblance of stability into this undecidable framework, the narrative that emerges as dominant is that of the pursuit of the elimination of evil. This pursuit is itself an attempt to control and limit the presence of evil, death, accident and other forms of negativity. Baudrillard argues that images of negativity presented through the positivized formalism of information are what dominate the late capitalist space; in a paradoxical sense, it is the excessive presence of these images that represents the absorption of the negative, "condemned merely to be the Same" (*Perfect Crime* 150). McCarthy's affectless narrative style exemplifies this in several instances. In *Remainder* the narrator's attitude towards Africans is a specific kind of detached:

I wanted to feel some connection to these Africans. I tried to picture them putting up houses from her housing kits, or sitting around in schools, or generally doing African things, like maybe riding bicycles or singing. I didn't know: I'd never been to Africa, any more than I – or Greg – had ever taken cocaine. I tried to visualize a grid around the earth, a kind of ribbed wire cage like on the champagne bottle, with lines of latitude and longitude that ran all over, linking one place to another, weaving, weaving the whole terrain into one smooth, articulated network,

but I lost this image among disjoined escalator parts, the ones I'd seen at Green Park earlier. I wanted to feel genuinely warm towards these Africans, but I couldn't. Not that I felt cold or hostile. I just felt neutral. (36)

Africans begin and end this paragraph as images. The narrator has by now made clear his desire for connection, but any sense of connection is frustrated by the simplified nature of the images the narrator recognizes as Africans doing "African things". This denial of connection through recollected and media-standard images begins to be assuaged by his conjuring of an image of physical, technological connections bridging the distance between himself and these images of Africans. And yet it falls apart and is replaced by the image of an escalator reduced to its individuated parts. What we have is the acceleration of connection by the image turning back on itself and revealing the absence it is meant to obfuscate; the absence of connection implied by the seriality of sameness, a sense of isolation and vertigo, by the pre-existence of the other as image despite the networks of global connection. Through the immediate presence of a series of mental images (media tropes), the narrator encounters the affective barriers erected by the presence of a global network of connection; he turns to images of this network for affective inspiration, but that fails for the same reason that the images of Africans do. The familiarity of African tropes and his vision of physical connection cannot summon the *feelings* of connection and familiarity these images purport to represent, only a sense of indifference. The postmodern space of total pre-connection leaves all instances of connection feeling depleted, second-hand. He is left with an indifference that he wants to transcend, but which seems to be a product of the very means of helping him transcend that indifference. The Africans in the narrator's world have been lost behind the images and the narratives that describe them; the network of simulated spatial connections which gives the narrator access to those images and narratives is precisely an illustration of the magic spell put on the fauna of the mirror; they are as unremarkable to, and separate from us, as our own reflection in the mirror. The space of the mirror is in the first instance space conditioned by repression through mimetic expression. As Borges mentions, the movements of the defeated people were "as though in a kind of dream"; their images are banal and repetitive and yet become increasingly symbolically rich the more we consider the power relation at play and the unconsciousness of the thing doomed to imitate and repeat. Baudrillard articulates the return of the repressed in the fable as follows:

Behind every reflection, every resemblance, every representation, a defeated enemy lies concealed. The Other vanquished, and condemned merely to be the Same. This casts a singular light on the problem of representation and of all those mirrors which reflect us 'spontaneously' with an objective indulgence. None of that is true, and every representation is a servile image, the ghost of a once sovereign being whose singularity has been obliterated. But a being which will one day rebel, and then our whole system of representation and values is destined to perish in that revolt. This slavery of the same, the slavery of resemblance, will one day be smashed by

the violent resurgence of otherness [...] So, everywhere, objects, children, the dead, images, women everything which serves to provide a passive reflection in a world based on identity, is ready to go on to the counter-offensive. Already they resemble us less and less. . . (*Perfect Crime* 150)

A world of endless information production amounts in a metaphorical sense to living inside a hall of mirrors. The ethos of reality production constitutes the cumulative energy put towards the straightening of all the mirrors in the hall. *Remainder* is in this sense a story of the space of straightened mirrors, mirrors which seek to eliminate the difference between a thing and its reflection and to reiterate and circulate that lack of difference endlessly. After the accident, which is an external *a priori* condition of the novel, the narrator is forced into a coma thriving with dream-like images. As Byatt has argued ("Being Dead?"), the break between coma-experience and waking experience is potentially a false distinction in the novel; both unconscious and conscious space is marked by its dream-like quality. The narrator's process of recovery constitutes the re-embedding of his fractured and absent self into the dimensions demanded by a world of straightened mirrors. The narrator is taken along a path of (re)conditioning amounting to a re-acquisition of the universal rules of human movement; his path back to autonomous selfhood is the (re)constitution of his biological sameness. And yet, this process of reconstitution seems to have left something out: compassion, morality, ethics, the feelings that connect us to other human beings, that connects our *being* human to the being of others. The narrator of *Remainder* is numbed by this constant sameness, by his inability to conceive of or connect to Africans beyond their existence as images; this affectless indifference is a condition of the space of the novel, which is to say, of relating to space through the formalisms of connection. It is in the same instance a subconscious projection of his insecurities about his own (in)authenticity; earlier in the novel he sets the moving screen-image of Robert De Niro as his ideal of authentic being, and this projection establishes in his subconscious secret knowledge of the frailty of that position, as well as its tendency towards inescapable spatial isolation. In the later novels, *C* and *Satin Island*, this affectively disconnected image of Africans acquires the tone of the threat that is explicit in Baudrillard's description: the thing-in-itselfness of "Africans" for the narrator becomes the allegorical appearance of "blackness" for Serge and U. (and the experience of an indifferent intellectual detachment from affect). The specific presence of this blackness leads the reader further along the path of total reflection or total simulation; blackness, instead of alluding to an absence of affective connection, comes to identify with the unexpected and seductive return of the repressed. Instead of only denoting an intolerable sameness, blackness in these novels is equally the obverse side of that sameness in the form of an unpredictable and irresistible irruption or return of otherness. The fable of the fauna establishes a space of violent tension produced by the similarity of the

thing to itself, but a space also seemingly destined to contain that violence until it irrevocably bursts back through the mirror.

The tension between the copy and the original, or reality and fiction, fills the empty space between things in the novels, it exists as a kind of evenly distributed pressure keeping everything in place. It informs the space which is both operated by and put into operation by the endless and endlessly accelerating stream of code in the form of digital words and images. Space dominated and structured by a form of information is one way of understanding what Jean Baudrillard describes as “the virtual” (*Passwords* 41). The reality of this space is one of explanation, description, knowledge, understanding: language and image. Baudrillard describes the reality of the virtual in terms linking it back to its origins in modern rationality: “Reality, as we know, has not always existed. We have talked about it only since there has been a rationality to express it, parameters enabling us to represent it by coded and decodable signs” (*Passwords* 42-3). Reality, in this reading, is a formalism relying on the interpretable characteristics of both language and object. Virtual space connects all actions via the tendency towards normalization, mundanity and communicability; which is to say, virtual space is a space of ideas reduced to their most communicable form. Virtual space is the space of a consciousness seduced into linking all manner of disparate image, word and event together; forced into thinking and dreaming of a universal condition that might stabilize the disparity between information (outside) and self (inside). Marx spoke of the production process producing a “general intellect”¹¹, and there is precedent when thinking about spatial (historical) conditions to universalize through psychoanalytic models (I am thinking here in terms of the critical work of the Frankfurt School and other 20th-century Marxist critics, as well as the postmodern work of Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari, all of which rely on psychoanalytic structures to frame their theoretical narratives). We could also think of this unifying consciousness as an ideology linking people through their beliefs. However, I want to think about this unifying factor in terms of a spatial narrative structure. I think Baudrillard alludes to such a narrative consciousness when he uses terms like “The Automatic Writing of the World” (which evokes similar connotations as McCarthy’s article “The Death of Writing”), and when he states that,

¹¹ “Nature does not construct machines, locomotives, railways, **electric telegraphs, self-acting mules**, etc. They are products of human industry; natural material transformed into organs of man’s will over Nature, or of man’s activity in Nature. They are *organs of the human mind which are created by the human hand*, the objectified power of knowledge. The development of fixed capital shows the degree to which society’s general science, **knowledge**, has become an *immediate productive force*, and hence the degree to which the conditions of the social life process itself have been brought under the control of the **general intellect** and remoulded according to it. It shows the degree to which the social productive forces are produced not merely in the form of knowledge but as immediate organs of social praxis, of the actual life process [...]” (bold in original text. qtd. in *Marx and Modernity* 211)

At this point, it is the virtual that thinks us: no need now for a subject of thought, a subject of action; everything happens by technological mediation. But is the virtual that which puts an end, once and for all, to a world of the real and of play, or is it part of an experimentation with which we are playing? Are we not playing out the comedy of the virtual to ourselves, with a hint of irony, as in the comedy of power? In the end, isn't this immense installation of virtuality, this performance in the artistic sense, a new stage on which operators have replaced actors? (*Passwords* 42)

By way of reformulating this along the lines described in the introduction, the absence of the subject is obfuscated by the technological mediation of the *formalism*. All of Baudrillard's rhetoric of simulation and virtuality revolves around the "art of disappearance", an operational performance of what he describes here as the comedy of the virtual. His discussions of the virtual never lose contact with the semantics of art, narrative and representation. The space of late capitalism is effectively a narrative space, and it is this narrativity which necessarily puts into play, as integral and as ideal, the condition of the ending. In this section of *Passwords*, Baudrillard is thinking about the ending of the virtual through the fable of the Fauna in a tone and with a semantic edge that echoes throughout McCarthy's narration:

This time, says Borges, they will not be defeated. Can we suppose a catastrophe of this kind [...]? Personally, I am more inclined to imagine such a hypertrophy of the virtual that we would arrive at a form of implosion. What would take its place? It is difficult to say because, beyond the virtual, I see nothing but what Freud called 'nirvana', an exchange of molecular substance and nothing more. All that would remain would be a perfect wave system, which would join up with the system of particles in a purely physical universe that no longer had anything human, moral, or – obviously – metaphysical about it. In this way, we would have returned to a material stage, with a senseless circulation of elements. . . (*Passwords* 44)

The narrative structure revealed by Baudrillard's engagement with virtuality is regressive in its desire for disappearance, and this structure is woven throughout the novels in question. The space of the virtual is undermined by the necessity of an ending, of disappearance, death or catastrophe. All the protagonists in question, Baudrillard himself, and the readers of novels are driven by the desire for conclusion or completion, in one fashion or another. Each is forced to speculate and long for the ending of the universal narrative that never comes (the end of objective sameness in the radical otherness of death). Hence, if the space of the novels and contemporary space are material narrative structures, they are structures that are operationalized towards determining or conditioning an ending. Baudrillard assesses this idea of the ending of virtual space in terms that are echoed in the final lines of *Remainder*: "At the stage we are at, we do not know whether technology, having reached a point of extreme sophistication, will liberate us from technology itself – the optimistic viewpoint – or whether in fact we are heading for catastrophe. Even though catastrophes, in the dramaturgical sense of the term – that is to say, endings – may, depending on the protagonists, assume happy or unhappy forms" (*Passwords* 45). In other words, contrary to assertions made by Gilman-Opalsky (40), Baudrillard recognizes a persistent

social division within the virtual (the mirror people and their conquerors), to the point of producing the ending of the virtual as a happy ending for some, an unhappy ending for others. This narrative pressure to produce an ending that is exerted on the space of the novels produces allegorical irruptions in the surface of the world and in the mind of the narrator; attempts by this objective consciousness to seduce the attention of the subject with fleeting glimpses of the end. The character of the narration, its largely intellectual and non-affective description, might be argued to be the consequence of the nature of the space in which the novel takes place, in particular those novels using first-person narrators like *Satin Island* and *Remainder*.

I want to demonstrate that the world of McCarthy's novels is a web of illustrations and reflective surfaces. And that this series of illustrations are representations of ideas that can be found in the work of thinkers like Baudrillard, Debord, Bataille, Bergson and de Man.¹² They create a specific spatial context for the story that unfolds, a background that merges into the foreground. Within the context of this world the characters suffer from similar desires, and similar deficiencies. This world is what writes its characters, through the poetic relationships they form with the objects that define it. This is a world whose ethos is self-production; a world that is both the producer and the product, in a way that reflects the fundamental anthropological dualism that frames any technological society: we are both what *makes* and what *is made*. In this section I want to demonstrate the marks of this world as they exist in McCarthy's novels, what they mean in relation to the novel itself, and what relation they may illustrate to the 'reality' we live in and to the ethos of reality production. In the first chapter of this section I want to demonstrate that this world is ontologically dominated by textual and spatial representations, or what has been previously described as formalisms. In the second chapter I hope to extend these conclusions on space by demonstrating that time (or a sense of time) is weakened in this spatial context, losing its own capacity to separate and distinguish itself from reality or spatial representation. Finally, the third chapter will indicate how the subject of this temporal and spatial context is confronted with the imperative to consume and understand the sea of representation that surrounds it, and that this imperative drives the dissolution of the destiny of the subject.

¹² Guy Debord, Jacques Derrida, George Bataille and Paul de Man all feature extensively in McCarthy's work of theory, *Tintin and the Secret of Literature*, as well as some of his essays and articles on various subjects. Jean Baudrillard, on the other hand, is absent from *Tintin*, and as is mentioned in the introduction, was at one point dismissed by McCarthy. Baudrillard's connection to McCarthy is, from my perspective, both self-evident and essentially irresolvable at once. The frequency with which connections between their texts can be identified seems to suggest a familiarity or influence, one perhaps so central that it has receded completely into the background.

A World of Transparent Surfaces

Where does the object/world appear to be beyond the grasp of the character in McCarthy's novels? Where does it escape the reality-ethos of the observational, contemplative style of the narration? The answer is nowhere: no object or surface escapes from the detached intellection of McCarthy's narrators, and though it may not constitute real control (over oil spills or war, for instance) it does constitute the aesthetics of control offered by the formalism. What we will find is that depthless superficiality is precisely the mode of relating to the world that the characters all prefer; this is a relation to the world in terms of a specifically flat kind of space, that of contemporary 'reality' in an ideological and technological context. It is a detached kind of relation that produces depth in depthless images, and enjoys this capacity, as when the narrator of *Remainder* prefers the "absence" or "spectre" of his friend Catherine to her actual presence (37). This is an example of a dominant ideal whose power is based on the apparent *transparency* of the world seen through the flat depthless images of the screen: the nullifying and hence active power of the contemporary context. Transparency is the dominant mode of *acquiring* a sense of reality in the contemporary moment; it is in a sense the name of a passive relation to the world enjoyed by the subject of the reality ethos. It is how the real world presents itself to the subject for consumption. It is also a term with plenty of political capital to put into play. In online and popular discourse, it maintains its presence as a rallying cry for anti-globalization and anti-corruption activists. It indicates the valorization of information that is not biased by political factionalism, or moneyed interests who might bend information about the world in order to maximize their returns. However, there is a reifying impetus concealed behind the positivity of transparency. As Byung-Chul Han puts it,

As total communication and total networking run their course, it proves harder than ever to be an outsider, to hold a different opinion. Transparent communication is communication that has a smoothing and leveling effect. It leads to synchronization and uniformity. It eliminates Otherness. Compulsive conformity proceeds from transparency. In this way, transparency stabilizes the dominant system. (*Transparency Society* Preface)

Transparency in this sense is the politically-coloured name of the reality telos: a world where the meaning of information is self-evident and not threatened from the outside by 'interests' which exceed the desire for reality itself (political, economic, personal interests). The space of McCarthy's novels is conditioned by the ubiquitous presence of this transparency, and at the same time quite often by the desire to produce this transparency. The world as transparent offers the reader and the characters at least two distinct but inextricable perspectives: the first is the perspective performed by both the world and the character, that of indelible presence. The second perspective is that which encounters the accident, death, corruption; this is the perspective that is secretly designed by the ideology of transparency, and

yet at the same time the perspective that is possibly so unbearable that it necessitates a return to the worship of objective presence, of transparency in the form of a positive epistemology. In the work of Baudrillard, this state of affairs comes to be known as the 'transparency of evil'. He states that,

All 'transparency' immediately raises the question of its opposite, secrecy. [...] When everything tends towards the visible, as is the case in our world, what becomes of the things that were once kept secret? They become occult, clandestine, maleficent: what was merely secret – or, in other words, given to be exchanged in secrecy – becomes evil and must be abolished, exterminated. But these things cannot be destroyed: in a certain sense, secrecy is indestructible. It will then be diabolized, and come out through the very instruments used to eliminate it. Its energy is that of evil, the energy that comes from the non-unification of things – good being defined as the unification of things in a totalized world. From this point on, everything based on duality, on the dissociation of things, on negativity, on death, is regarded as evil. Our society works, then, to ensure that all is to the good, that there is a technology to meet every need. In this sense, all technology is on the side of good or, in other words, of the fulfilment of general desire in a unified state of things. (*Passwords* 33-34)

The space of transparency can be sought out in the novels in the formalism of technology, a form so ubiquitous throughout human society that in many ways it defines the spatial horizon of our relation to reality. The primary image it develops in the theory, and in the novels, is that of unification, of ritual unification through the repeated production of information on a variety of screens. For instance, *Satin Island* begins with U. waiting in an airport, eyes fixed on a series of screens, showing several news stories. However, the coverage of an oil-spill seems to fascinate him (6). The image of the oil spill persists in his mind and narration, recurring later when he decides in his capacity as anthropologist to compile a dossier on oil spills (34). Beginning with fascination and moving to social scientific inquiry, U. eventually attempts to develop an idea of the oil spill that he wants to present at an academic conference: "There's always an oil spill happening, I'd say. Which is why. That's the reason, gentlemen. Which, gentlemen, is the reason we can name it in the singular: *the* Oil Spill – an ongoing event whose discrete parts and moments, whatever their particular shapes and vicissitudes [...] have run together, merged into a continuum in which all plurals drown" (102-3). This perspective on the oil spill constitutes the result of an accumulation of information (transparency) and at the same time an obfuscating and total image; all distinctions, spatial and temporal, marking out each oil spill as different are erased. A distinct event and its particularities are folded into a singular experience of continuous space and time. This double-image of the oil spill is pornographic, in that its value is in what it exposes that was once 'secret' or invisible. We might therefore attribute to the image of oil the quality of the Freudian uncanny. According to Freud, the uncanny is "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (Freud, qtd. in Royle, *The Uncanny* 41). The uncanny therefore has a certain sense of temporal and hence spatial disorganization in the form of doubling: it combines and confuses past and present. There does seem to be a sense of

simultaneous foreignness and familiarity at play, elaborated by the historical depth of U.'s dossier (the oil spill is both heavily recorded and always revealing itself anew). However, I would suggest that the lack of emphasis placed on beginning or ending both in this concept of the oil spill, in other moments of fascination and in the tone of the novels in general, implies a different understanding of this image. There is little to suggest (beyond his obvious fascination) that U. thinks of an oil spill as in any way 'strange'; the historical and scientific record of his dossier is there to eliminate any strangeness and replace it with measurement and fact (the formalisms of scientific observation). Far from strange, the oil spill is banal to the point of being incessant. Cyclical continuity and ubiquity are the temporal and spatial conditions of U's fascination, or in other words, they are the marks of our particular postmodern *interval*; these qualities are both the context and the intellectual conclusions drawn by U. from this context. U's context for the development of his image of the oil spill is obscenity; in Baudrillard's terms the obscene is defined as "the becoming-real, the becoming-absolutely-real, of something which until then was treated metaphorically, or had a metaphorical dimension [...] It is a total 'acting out' of things that ought to be subject to a dramaturgy, a scene, a play between partners. Here [in the obscene] there is no play, no dialectic or separation, but a total collusion of the elements" (*Passwords* 29; [brackets added]). In the obscenity of transparency, the oil spill is both an image of the possible unification of things into a single understanding (the idealism of the Great Report and the dossier), and also the field of expression of death, disruption, failure, and accident (which remain silent but present in U.'s image). Rather than strange or uncanny, I would argue that images like that of the oil spill constitute more closely the concept of the abject,

[...] the reaction of horror, disgust, withdrawal, ambiguous fascination, and so on, triggered by objects or occurrences which undermine the clear distinction between 'myself' and reality 'out there'. Abject is definitely external to subject, but it is also more radically external to the very space within which the subject can distinguish itself from reality 'out there' [...] the abject is so thoroughly internal to the subject that this very overintimacy makes it external, uncanny, inadmissible. (Žižek 169)

While Žižek uses the uncanny to help establish the meaning of the abject, this is where the concept's relation to U.'s idea of the oil spill weakens. Rather than an experience of excessive intimacy (which is present *metaphorically* in the image of gushing oil, and other forms of concretions and excretions of the body that McCarthy makes use of in his novels, *C* in particular), or unsettling strangeness, what becomes dominant is the notion that links the uncanny, the obscene and the abject: ambiguous fascination. And yet, the form this fascination takes in McCarthy's novels is never truly ambiguous: *Remainder's* narrator's fascination with the crack in a bathroom leads to a mission of re-enactment and re-production; *C's* Serge is fascinated by the movements of machines, by transmissions and signal and

codes, which leads him to seek communion with machines and with death; U. is fascinated not just by the oil spill, but by video footage of roller-bladers, traffic patterns, the movements of religious throngs in Mecca, and that fascination is extended into a process of a *pursued* intellectual intimacy, the pursuit of the reality ethos in the form of the dossiers U. compiles. This fascination is expressed in actions that represent a certain understanding of the subject and the world it occupies. If the fascinating image is strange or disturbing, its realization or banalization by the formalism that contains it (often the screen in *Satin Island*) is the path undertaken by the character encountering this image. Hence, I think one way to understand this kind of materially passive but intellectual fascination is to consider it a paradoxically affectless eroticism of the obscene; an ethos of reality production only as energized as it is affectless, and only as affectless as it is external from the reality it pursues.

The negative or evil sits below the surface of unification and as such its reception is conditioned by the framing it receives from the value of transparency. It is, as Baudrillard says, ridiculed, targeted and pursued by the avenging light of information; presented as that which must be eliminated from the screen (the post-election fervour in America to eliminate “Fake news” stories from social media is a good example of the irony of this program in action). For Baudrillard, this ideology of transparency constitutes a paradoxical and symbiotic relationship between fiction and reality, or faith and reality. Space in this sense takes on the form of a loop, or what Baudrillard calls a “Moebius-strip system” (*Passwords* 34). What we will see is that the space of the novels is the space of semantic and ritual reproduction, a world whose relation to the subject is defined by the compulsion to ritually provoke the presence of reality in the absence of God. As the narrator of *Remainder* says right before the last (fatal) re-enactment of the novel, “I and the other re-enactors were like a set of devotees to a religion not yet founded: patient, waiting for our deity to appear, to manifest himself to us, redeem us; and our gestures were all votive ones, acts of anticipation” (259). Space in the novels is the space of information and the secret at once (what is secret and what is known), an amoral space whose fissures and failures are conditioned aesthetically and semantically by the functional limits of information.

McCarthy’s protagonists are characterized in much of the discourse by their callous indifference to classic modes of being in society; their affectless neutrality, spiked with moments of intense affective feeling or clarity that constitute the high-point of the self-actualized individual subject (almost always experienced through the formalism of a machine or systematic re-enactment). How do spatial conditions bring about or relate to this neutrality, this indifference? How is this neutrality or indifference expressed in the world beyond the thoughts of the character? How does it find itself in the object-subject relations

that are illustrated in the text? In this chapter I want to demonstrate that the spatial condition for this neutrality is the ubiquity of text, of image, of communication, of movement; ultimately of meaning in a world bent towards the completion of the reality project. This is a condition that creates the dual potential of negative creativity and ideological positivity; the dual potential of disruption and stasis. Daniel Lea reiterates the competition between stasis and movement when comparing McCarthy's *Remainder* with that of Steven Hall's *The Raw Shark Texts*: "Thus, in some ways, Hall's thinking is more radical than McCarthy's, for where the latter believes that the self can form itself from a space of stasis, the former understands the movement of self-formation as directed by the energy of informational transfer. Ultimately, where McCarthy believes that both models of authenticity are possible, Hall is convinced that neither is." (474-5). This is because McCarthy's work reflects the power of language in digital society (linguistic-objective formalisms) as both constitutive of ideological formations and as equally (or perhaps even more so) disruptive of those things. If Hall's thinking is more 'radical' it is only because its rejection of language (the building block of the digital) as 'real' or performative of authenticity flies in the face of common sense. For Hall, authenticity is non-existent because it depends on technology, or perhaps the novel. For McCarthy, it is precisely the ubiquitous digital "movement of self-formation" which provides the context for any form of stasis (real or imaginary). The duality of stasis and movement is the formative spatial condition of contemporary social relations. The ideas being explored here serve to demonstrate the ahistorical space of the contemporary 'hegemonic' subject of McCarthy's novels, locked as it is in a battle to determine the world 'as it is'.

The Formalized Space of Bourgeois Will

The subject in this section is necessarily treated as an absent necessity: necessary for any evaluation of space, at the same time his/her absence is necessary if some isolated, objective sense of space is to be explored. Affectless space is the space of this *faux*-objective detachment; the subject is absent inasmuch as affect fails to characterize the subjects' perception of the world and what they do in it. This also translates into a kind of absence of will, understood here through the sometimes vague, sometimes repressed desires of the characters. As opposed to the kind of Bataillean "will" that is always associated with the 'good', these characters exhibit the dissolution of that will into the movements and functions of formalisms and machines. The subject is absent from this space inasmuch as he/she fails to 'will' much of anything; by incorporating their will into the lines and movements of the formalism (by identifying with the will of the formalism), the machine can now be trusted to carry out that will (and to pursue the good life for the subject by nature of their very operation). Even in *Remainder*, whose narrator is initially

obsessed with producing authenticity, the character's will is conditioned or seduced by the world at a friend's party, where the narrator notices a door he missed as he is indifferently circulating the party in a figure eight pattern:

It was a bathroom. I stepped in and locked the door behind me. Then it happened: the event that, the accident aside, was the most significant of my whole life.

It happened like this. I was standing in the bathroom with the door locked behind me. I'd used the toilet and washing my hands in the sink, looking away from the mirror above it – because I don't like mirrors generally – at this crack that ran down the wall [...] I was standing by the sink looking at this crack in the plaster when I had a sudden sense of *déjà vu*.

The sense of *déjà vu* was very strong. I'd been in a space like this before, a place just like this, looking at the crack, a crack that had jutted and meandered in the same way as the one beside the mirror. There'd been that same crack, and a bathtub also, and a window directly above the taps just like there was in this room – only the window had been slightly bigger and the taps older, different. (60)

There are two factors that make this crack more than a structural imperfection. The first is its relation to the mirror in this scene, and the second is the way that it becomes, like the accident, a kind of point of origin for a process of reconstruction. In looking away from the mirror, the allegory of the screen or of the tension between fiction and reality, the narrator encounters the crack, the void, the absence of wall where wall should be, and the encounter with this absence (much like the absence of his memories and self after the accident) hits the character like a strong sense of *déjà vu*. In this quotation, the dreamlike quality of the narration is revealed: in his recounting of the original moment, his gaze avoids the mirror on purpose, in the scene of *déjà vu*, the mirror is replaced with the transparency of a window, "above the taps just like there was in this room" (an allegorical double-image that first appears when he receives a phone call describing his settlement in an earlier scene [Staunton 66]), as though the *déjà vu* had superimposed itself over the present scene. The aesthetics of the crack calls a series of vague memories into play for the narrator, memories of an apartment with this same crack, but in a different building, with different tenants, different details. At the end of this stream of memories arrives the cornerstone revelation of the narrator which appears to contradict this notion of his lacking will:

Most of all I remembered this: that inside this remembered building, in the rooms and on the staircase, in the lobby and the large courtyard between it and the building facing with the red roofs with black cats on them – that in these spaces, all my movements had been fluent and unforced. Not awkward, acquired, second-hand, but natural. Opening my fridge's door, lighting a cigarette, even lifting a carrot to my mouth: these gestures had been seamless, perfect. I'd merged with them, run through them and let them run through me until there'd been no space between us. They'd been *real*; I'd been real – *been* without first understanding how to try to be: cut out the detour. I remembered this with all the force of an epiphany, a revelation.

Right then I knew exactly what I wanted to do with my money. I wanted to reconstruct that space and enter it so that I could feel real again. I wanted to; I had to; I would [...] I was going to recreate it: build it up again and live inside it. I'd work outwards from the crack I'd just transcribed. (62-64)

It seems in this tract that the will of the narrator is what is revealed: his will to re-build this setting within which he feels real. There are clear allusions here to the protective space of reading described by de Man, in the sense that this ideal space of the narrator deproblematizes reality by bridging or merging the inside and the outside. The narrator understands this reality as a merging with objects, as sharing a presence and a passage with objects to the point of dissolving the space that separates them. Objects and subjects in a single networked movement together, in a formalism that combines the definite lines of fissure with the indefinite workings of memory. If we believe that these images are in fact memories, then it becomes a simple process to label this moment as that within which the will of the narrator becomes clear "with all the force of an epiphany, a revelation" (62). Instead, I argue that what we are witnessing here as readers is in fact the will of the crack, of the absence or the void, positively expressed as it seduces and then merges with that of the narrator, through the performance of the narrator, whose first action after his epiphany is rushing to make a copy of the crack on some wallpaper (64); the same paper that might once have covered the crack physically, now obfuscates its negativity by reproduction. The reproduced image of the crack becomes the point of origin for a process of reality production undertaken by the narrator, in the same way that the accident becomes the point of origin for the process of reconstituting the narrator's being according to scientific models. The will to recreate (to do) is the mask of the will to be real (to be), or to insert oneself into reality (or as is displayed in *Remainder*, the building of the conditions of reality around the subject). What I am suggesting is that it is not the will of the individual narrator (in a sense he cannot have an authentic will so long as he is not authentic), but rather an expression of the will of the world, of late capitalist hegemony, seduced into performance by the narrator by the presence of the void, absence or failure of the crack. The "epiphany" the narrator experiences is not the revelation of *his* will, but of the general will of all things, a kind of irresistible momentum or spirit of unification with things that finds its way into all of McCarthy's novels.

The narrator reveals more of this unified relation between producer and produced when he later recalls his school art lessons from when he was twelve: "We were given these big blocks of stone, a chisel and a mallet, and we had to turn the blocks into something recognizable – a human figure or a building. The teacher had an effective way of making us understand what we were doing. The finished statue, he explained, was already there in front of us – right in the block that we were chiselling away at. "Your task isn't to create the sculpture," he said; "it's to strip all the other stuff away, get rid of it. The surplus matter"

(87). The act of producing something recognizable is articulated as a process not of creative will, but of abstraction. The children are instructed not to choose what they want the sculpture to be, but instead to reveal what it already is, ahead of their artistic intervention. In other words, the appearance of the sculpture is up to the stone itself; it is the will of this as-yet-undiscovered form that determines what parts of the block are excess and what parts are not. This memory helps to condition the narrator's search for the building that emerged from the crack into his consciousness; rather than simply choosing a building and renovating, he insists that he is looking not to choose *a* building, but rather to discover *his* building, to cut away the surplus matter of the city and reveal its pre-existence. In his attempts to discover his building, he enacts certain strategies that not only undermine the idea of his autonomous will, but seek to actively avoid his own conscious participation in, or willful conditioning of, his search. After dreaming about successfully finding and entering his building by forcing the gears of a monstrous conveyor belt to a halt, the narrator shares the following:

In the morning, after I'd woken up, I started understanding why I hadn't found my building in the four days I'd been working on it: I'd been rational about it. Logical. I needed to go irrational on the whole thing. Illogical. Of course! I'd probably passed it at some point over the last few years already – which meant that it would be recorded somewhere in my memory. Everything must leave some kind of mark. And then even if I hadn't passed it already, I'd only manage to stalk it down if I moved surreptitiously: not in straight lines and in blocks and wedges but askew – diagonally, slyly, creeping up on it from sideways. (94-5)

In this moment, he begins to resemble Bataille's description of Heathcliff's particular brand of revolt against Good: irrationality. The narrator outlines some of these "illogical" and "diagonal" strategies: "I cooked myself some breakfast and pondered how best to make my search irrational. The first idea that came to me was to I-Ching the map: to close my eyes, turn round a few times, stick a pin in blindly and then go and look in whatever area it happened to have landed on" (95). All of a sudden occupying the space of the stone block, the narrator thinks that by removing an unnecessary part of himself (sight) through the ritual of the I-Ching, the building may be revealed. He continues:

Colours was the next idea I had: following colours. I could decide to go where, say, yellow things went: a van, an advertising hoarding, someone's clothes. I could start somewhere, anywhere, and walk down the street the yellow van went down, then wait beside a yellow shop front till a woman wearing yellow trousers went by and I'd follow her. It was completely arbitrary, but it might prompt something, get me looking at things in a way I wouldn't normally, open chinks up in the camouflage behind which my place was hiding (95)

In this instance, it is everything but colour that the narrator is cutting away from his vision of things: only colour matters, and only it will lead him to his discovery. Once again, it is his own perspective, it is the vast range of subjective interpretation, that is largely cut away in order to discover his building.

He also considers “walking jerkily, erratically” and “following a numerical system” (Remainder 95), both of which would ostensibly free him from the responsibility of deciding which roads to take and where to look for his building. The space in which he feels real, in which movements seem real, cannot be reached directly, but instead must detour around human will and rationality, around intention; which is to say, for reality to be real it must seem to reveal itself rather than be revealed. In other words, it can only be real if it is absent the contaminating hand of the subject, the directness of their intent, if that which defines the space of reality can at the same time erase the trace of subjectivity.

In the tradition of Bataillean evil, the narrator is giving up his reason, rationality and will to discern paradoxically in an attempt to reach a state of reality within which such choices disappear because “he and they are one” (Remainder 23); in this sense, he is performing (becoming) that which he desires in order to acquire that which he desires. It is the knowledge of this performance (how is it possible to perform what one desires if one does not already have access to it?) that he seeks to shed in his unification with the flow of things. The narrator seems to know that the space of his reality (the building) is only accessible or discoverable through the absence of the subject. The crack in the bathroom wall offers him an opportunity to discover what he is meant to want, which is distinct from *choosing* what he wants. The crack informs him, through the flood of memories and sensations, of what his will always was, and of what it *must* be. The character’s will forms out of the absence of the crack (and the absence of the subject, which had taken the form of “neutrality” up until now in the novel) along with the apartment building, in the same way that his understanding of the world forms out of the absence caused by the accident. The burden of will (of willing either what is right or to escape the burden of will) is eluded by its performance in the movements and mechanisms of the formalisms linking the absent subject to the world. Instead of good being opposed by evil in the form of a refusal of will, good absorbs and conditions the irrational refusal of will, making it the definition of rationality. This is a form of fatalist resistance that will be explored in later chapters: by restricting creativity to the form of the accident, increased pressure and expectation forms around the figure of the accident, eventually coming to bear the weight of all our fantasies about the end. If artists and authors once expressed evil through representation, in the space of the novels it is the object, the machine or the world which writes moments of evil into the script. By lending their will to the world, the subjects of McCarthy’s novels become absent *as subjects*; another way of putting this might be to say that they become present as objects caught inside the formalisms meant to reflect their subjectivity back to them. It is this formalist presence of the subject in the novels which signals their already-accomplished merging into the automatic processing of the world, into the cycle of information, reproduction and repetition which is the proper functioning of this kind of space. It is this

same presence, however, which reveals to them the beauty and allure of the absent, the accident, the end of repeated function: death. This process of merging is shown below in its relation to death in the war scenes of *C* and in the continuous ritual reiterations of *Satin Island*.

Though it is during Serge's flight training that the reader gets a clear sense of his will in the same fashion as the scene which reveals the will of *Remainder's* narrator, it is at his sister Sophie's funeral where the seductive aesthetics of death and the eroticism of merging are rhetorically aligned. The process of arranging the funeral acquires the character of the modelled and designed (formalised) re-enactments of *Remainder*:

The funeral arrangements take some time [...] Serge's father busies himself with arrangements over the next week: distributing invitations, developing and printing programmes, discussing the contents of the buffet with Maureen and Freida, consulting weather forecasts in the newspaper each day [...] Carrefax has devised an elaborate construction whereby Sophie's coffin will be lowered into the ground beside the Crypt, slid along rails into an enclave burrowed out beneath the edifice itself, then slightly raised so as to slot into its designated space between the bodies of two ancestors, with the communicating tunnel to be filled in once the manoeuvre's completed. The excavations are installed two days before the funeral itself: supporting pillars with winch-levers on them for the lowering; a second, horizontally operating winch for the sliding, and a pump-lever contraption for the final hoist. (C 95)

Though the topic of this quotation is a funeral, death is largely absent as a figure or concept. We might also say that any affect in relation to death, mourning, sorrow, etc., is also absent. In a sense, death and affect are as absent as Sophie herself; it is not Sophie who is lowered into the Crypt, but rather, "Sophie's coffin". In death, Sophie has passed from subject to object, in unremarkable human fashion. In a similar sense the Christian funeral has passed from a ritual reiterating the narrative of sin, redemption and rebirth into a technical schematic operation, into a repetitive ritual reiterating the duality of function. Sophie has accomplished the merging that is described by the narrator of *Remainder*, she has become one with the flow of objects and their functionality, which is to say that the funeral scene reflects an aesthetics of this desire to merge with the movements of the formalism. The connection between the dead and the real develops during the vicar's speech as Serge considers how his experience of the attic and his wireless machine has changed since Sophie passed:

He's spending lots of time up in the attic these days. It's the spot with which he most associates hours alone with Sophie. The cylinders and discs are still there. When he plays them now, her voice attaches itself, leech-like, to the ones recorded on them [...] it flashes invisibly within their crackles, slithers through the hisses of their silence. He looks out over the flat, motionless landscape and he listens. The sheep never seem to move: they just stand still, bubbly flecks on Arcady Field's face. The curving stream also completely still, arrested in a deathly rictus grin. (C 98)

Once again, we have death and the movement of merging set beside one another. Death in its technical form is the movement of coming-together, in this case the coming together of the recorded voices (some of which are also dead people) on the phonograph cylinders and the spectral trace of Sophie's voice. The recordings and traces that animate the space of Serge's wireless room animate the space of the novel generally. At once we must compare that to the stillness of death in nature: the landscape represents the death of Serge's sister not by moving, or secretly hiding her continued presence, but rather through a "deathly rictus grin" of stillness. It is this natural stillness of death that is denied by the machine designed by Serge's father; the funeral becomes a ritual demonstrating and considering not the impenetrable and fascinating absence of movement in death, but rather a ceremony celebrating death as a metaphor for an ideal finality: merging with the "Automatic writing of the World", with the objectivity of the machine. It is during the funeral itself that the erotic desire to merge with objects is revealed in its connection to death and the accident:

The steel rails in the trench glint blue and silver. They seem to hum, like railway lines hum when a train's approaching in the distance, just before you hear the train itself . . . The sensation of humming, real or imagined, grows: Serge can sense vibrations spreading round the lawn. He feels them moving from the ground into his feet and up his legs, then onwards to his groin. They animate his own flesh, start it levitating. He can't help it. He crosses his hands in front of his crotch and looks about him: everyone else is looking at the vicar, or the coffin – not at him. The vicar's still beaming aggressively, talking of heaven. Looking around him, trousers bulging, Serge is filled with a sudden and certain awareness that there is no such place: there's the coffin and the Crypt, the lawn, these conker trees above them, this fresh-smelling earth [...] A fly's buzzing around the vicar's head. The vicar tries to ignore it, but it brushes his face, tickling his lips and making him half-blow, half-spit his next few words out [...] Serge pictures minute dung-flecks being deposited on this man's mouth, the even tinier bacteria inside them turning inwards from his lips, swimming against his phlegm through the crashing rocks of teeth, past lashing tongue and gurgling epiglottis down towards his stomach . . . (C 101-2)

Serge senses a humming, like the distant approach of a train, or an impending catastrophe.¹³ There is a tension to this sensation of humming, expressed in erotic terms. The humming is like the humming of the wireless set that Serge describes as "the sound of thinking" (79); Serge is turned on by the experience of being embodied or occupied by some external 'thought', by his body being set into involuntary motion by the underlying code of the world, of the lines and momentum of the formalism. As soon as he is animated by this force, he acquires a sense of reality and effortlessly rejects the idealism of "Heaven", turning instead to a realistic, vulgar materialist vision of the space he is in and the meaning of the vicar's words. In a sense the imagery of dung entering through the mouth provides the framework for the reversibility

¹³ Though this occurs before Serge's military exams, we might consider that this scene is in fact the origin of that later scene where a catastrophe or accident is described in terms of two trains unknowingly approaching each other on the same track.

on display in the scene. Far from being sacred or secret, death is mechanically reproduced and made real by virtue of this merging (of death and the artificial life of machines); death is made tolerable and banal through its obfuscation by the movements of machines. It is, as such, subsumed into the erotic desire for a final completion or merging with objects, subsumed by the positive narrative of reality and reproduced as an ideal state of total unification. The funeral scene ends with the machines' malfunction, and as the workmen move in to finish the burial, Serge, "feels a heaviness enter his stomach, as though something foreign were being lodged there. It's a pronounced, visceral sensation [...] Several mourners are sobbing. Mr. Clair is weeping quietly. Not Serge: for him, this shoddy, whining spectacle has nothing to do with death, nothing to do with Sophie either. Both death and she are elsewhere: like a signal, dispersed" (105). Though the technological spectacle of the burial machine has failed, the formalism that dominates Serge's life, the signal, has successfully interred Sophie into afterlife of the subject: as data, signal, code, etc. Death as a formalism of machines, ritual and signals, points not to Sophie's absence, but to her interminable presence inside the lines of technical-poetic formalism. This is the point in the novel where Serge becomes aroused by the possibility of the world as crypt.

Paul de Man has noted the importance of the crypt in literature and more recent work has noted the same in McCarthy's novels (Vermeulen 2012; Namwali Serpell). In thinking about the sublime in the work of G.W.F. Hegel and de Man, Susan Bernstein suggests that "The figuring of the body as a harmonious container for the spirit it houses partakes in what Paul de Man has called "aesthetic ideology," [...] The logic of aesthetic ideology picks up material and integrates it into a conceptual whole. In de Man's terms, aesthetic ideology reconfigures materiality as phenomenality, that is, as the material appearance or manifestation of the intelligible, of which it then stands as a synechdochal signifier" (984). Both the body and the symbol become like Sophie's crypt, distributors of invisible but powerful signals. Bernstein offers this sense of connection between crypt and container through Hegel's explanation of the sublime:

On the other hand, when the symbol is developed independently in its own proper form, it has in general the character of sublimity, because at first, on the whole, it is only the Idea which is still measureless, and not freely determined in itself, that is to be given shape, and therefore it cannot find in concrete appearance any specific form corresponding completely with this abstraction and universality. But in this non-correspondence the Idea transcends its external existence instead of having blossomed or been perfectly enclosed in it. This flight beyond the determinateness of appearance constitutes the general character of the sublime. (Hegel qtd. in Bernstein 995).

Simply put, the symbol itself constitutes a crypt of meaning; intending to contain and transmit uniformly, this intention fails at the point of reading and interpretation. The idea contained in the physical symbol is never complete, there is always some aspect of it left behind. McCarthy himself describes the figure of

the crypt in particularly literary terms during an interview, where it is likened to how influences work in literature¹⁴ and as a figure of “the central archive, [...] or chamber where it’s all written down—stored or recorded [...]” (Eburne, Hart and Jaffe 674); a clear allusion to its function as a screen of information. The novel is a crypt in this sense, but so is the archive, the hard drive or the server. He says something similar in an article for *The London Review of Books*, reprinted in his collection of essays as “Get Real: or What Jellyfish Have to Tell Us About Literature”, through the work of Francis Ponge:

Bataille’s real is the material real that Francis Ponge spent his life trying and failing to manage, the failure itself being what the work is about. What happens when something as simple as an orange undergoes ‘the ordeal of expression’, Ponge asks, his phrasing giving equal weight to two senses of ‘expression’: ‘representation’ and ‘squeezing’. Unlike a sponge, he tells us (*éponge* in French, a play on his own name), which gathers its form back again, the orange loses its form when pressed. Its cells are crushed, its tissue ripped; there is spillage, but a husk remains and, on the squeezer’s part, a bitter sense of seeds ejaculated too soon. The orange’s realness imposes itself on the expressor, yet can’t be mastered or possessed by him. Despite its debasing – indeed, in its very baseness – the orange, like Wallace Stevens’s plum, ‘survives its poems’. (*Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* 71)

Not only is the novel a crypt, so is language itself; the crypt in this instance is the poetic language of Ponge, and even this fluid symbolic container cannot completely encompass something as banal as an orange. Death undergoes “an ordeal of expression” in the funeral scene through the lifeless movements of mechanized ritual and the crypt. They can try to contain death within their limits and repetitions, but as Serge acknowledges in the closing lines of the scene, death and Sophie both escape. The key here is that it is this knowledge of the potential to escape through internment in the formalism, to be free through imprisonment in technology, that is precisely the idealism of modernity and Baudrillard’s art of disappearance. As such, this idealism is experienced by Serge as a kind of revelation, a turn from religious and mechanical idealism towards realism and materiality. And yet there is a transparency laid across this scene. It seems as though Serge is rejecting dominant narratives of idealism and turning towards a kind of functional objective materialism, though it is precisely through this turn that the narratives of death and afterlife are not shed but repressed and reformatted, into the heaviness in his stomach. As we will see in what follows, the absence of death from this funeral scene will express itself in the consequences of its repression, the biological and (in terms of vision) spatial symptoms produced by the heaviness in Serge’s stomach. This is not Serge turning from a metanarrative position (of religion) to a scientific one (materialism), which was his dead sister’s obsession, but rather a repressed shift from one narrative form

¹⁴ “Harold Bloom writes about influence being Oedipal; you off the fathers and take the crown. But if we’re going to look at a psychoanalytic model for how influence works in literature, then I’d be much more drawn toward Abraham and Torok’s idea of a crypt and its attendant motifs of encryption and coding, so other writers are becoming encrypted in one’s own work and leaking out— like zombies. It’s a kind of haunting” (Eburne, Hart and Jaffe 672)

(or formalism) to another. We might see this shift as progression or even personal growth, but what occurs in this scene is a substitution of one aesthetic ideology for another; the narratives of religious immortality are supplanted by the base materiality and repetition of a landscape of dung and flies and death (an iteration of the battlefields of WWI, *avant la lettre*). Like Sophie's body is interred beneath the crypt, the death and immortality of narrative and language is interred in Serge's intestines, only to find their way out again through Serge's eyes (which themselves become a crypt), to be restored to his vision as though they now make up the spatial material of reality itself.

The spectacle of the technical internment of Sophie's body reveals to the reader the relation between the art of disappearance and death in the space of the novels. At first, Serge acknowledges the fault-lines in the religious and technical idealism of the performance; his view of the vicar confirms that he is suddenly aware of the negative materiality confronting idealism (the static hillside landscape, the placement of dung from the hillside into the mouth of the religious figure). This materiality, this refusal of religious and ritual idealism, imbues Serge with a sexual (reproductive) energy. Finally, as Serge's materialistic viewpoint observes the failure of the machine to inter Sophie smoothly, the meaning of the scene momentarily splits. First, we have the affective feeling of a "heaviness" in Serge's stomach, an involuntary physical product of the scene. This heaviness is diagnosed in the following chapter by a doctor as, "A blockage. Stagnant. You are having autointoxication. Skin is dark, eyes too. You seeing well, or not?" (114). Serge responds:

"Not," Serge says. "I mean no. It's kind of . . ."

"How is?" Dr. Filip asks, impatient.

"Furry."

"What is meant?"

"Furry, like fur. The hair of animals. Small hairs. It's like . . ."

His voice trails off. It's hard to describe [...] The closest thing he could liken it to is one of his mother's silks – the really fine, dark ones – held right up to his eyeballs and stretched out in front of them, making the world gauzed: dark-gauzed, covered in fleck-film. It's been like this for months. When it started, he'd try to blink a hole in it, or wipe it away, peel the veil back; but that only ingrained it further, lodging it beneath the surface of the eyes themselves. (114-15).

The blockage in his intestines has caused his vision to be obscured once again, and his thoughts here reiterate the mechanics of the funeral scene, this time also referring back to the caul at his birth. What this demonstrates is that once again, even after the funeral and its materialist epiphany, Serge is caught once more behind an "over-pixelated screen" (*Satin Island 3*), a shroud whose removal only further

embeds its presence in reality. Just as when the caul was peeled away, the act of attempted revelation or transparency serves only to further embed the pixelated darkness of the screen “beneath the surface of the eyes themselves”. His thoughts here refer also to the mechanics of the crypt: what has been buried within his intestines (his repression of the unknowability and necessity of death, the undecidability of language) is now dispersed into shadows and spots that have embedded themselves in his vision (without fully obstructing it). Seeing at all in this state is seeing the trace of Sophie’s death, without any consciousness of seeing it. Confrontation without the affect of confrontation is the appeal of this condition, it is what makes the pursuit of the crypt or en-cryption erotic: it is the pursuit of the final completion, the final reproduction (as opposed to conflict) which allows for presence and absence at once.

Serge is suffering from autointoxication, or in this case, physical symptoms of an automatic repression of death’s unknowability; despite the apparent transparency of the performance for Serge, the negativity that he directs towards the pageantry of the funeral ends up reaffirming the purpose of the ritual: to make death technically present through ritual repetition, seen in a metaphorical sense in the repeated motions and signals of the machine. As Serge explains later on, looking indifferently at a spot on the ground where one of his Air Corps comrades has fallen to his death:

“The acid from his body,” Steadman says as he and Serge stand above the patch one afternoon.
“Stops new grass growing.”

“It’s a good likeness,” Serge says.

“All his memories, and everything he ever thought about or did, reduced to battery chemicals.”

Why not?” asks Serge. “It’s what we are.” (162)

The aesthetics of both repetitions fail to completely inculcate Serge into the flow of their idealism, and yet the result is the same: Sophie and death relate not to some ideal heaven, nor even to nature, dung and flies, but to the ideal materiality of the signal, of the body and crypt as transmitter. The idealism of the crypt as transmitter encourages both this kind of affectless materialism and euphoric and erotic encounters with topography and transmission; neither is alien nor alienated from this idealist perspective. As such, Serge maintains one foot in each realm, or in another sense he is hedging his bets; he rejects narrative and linguistic idealism, but embraces materialism for the same reasons that he embraces the former: its promise of escape from the foolishness and materiality of human existence. Connecting death to a process of signal-dispersion creates the connection to the “art of disappearance” and the desire of the subject to perform their own absence by escape into the repetitious flow of machines. Secondly, we

have the precise understanding of the meaning of the ritual/mechanical internment into the crypt: the dispersal of signals in every direction.

From the subjective point of view the accident of death becomes the ultimate glimpse of reality, a seductive and erotic force that promises a momentary rush of total reality, or final completion (through the co-presence of life/death or function/accident). The accident (death) and the total view start to resemble each other in *C*; the erotic desire for ontological completion leads first to one and then to the other. And yet death is denied by the trace of the subject, chemical or electronic, that it leaves behind. In the quotation above this denial is itself a kind of serendipitous event, and yet in *Satin Island* this denial is productive; each encounter with the seductive figure of death leads only onwards to another, slightly different, encounter. McCarthy's characters interact with the space around them as *objects* whose accidents, malfunctions and miscalculations have unintended consequences on that space, movements which morph and animate that space, which set it into motion for the cameras. Like the subject who secretly wants to escape the negativity that defines human society, the object secretly wants to escape the cycles of repeated and predictable function, the cycles of successful operation, the prison of its strictly determined purpose. It is this logic that determines the nature of contemporary capitalist and novelistic space, what its perceived limits are, and what appearance it takes. For the subject, progressing beyond negativity equates to achieving a state of objectivity and total understanding; for the object, this ideal transcendence amounts to terminal malfunction. In a sense, the human will to escape or transcend is indicative of the will to *view* the ending without *experiencing* the end (through the frame of the formalism), whereas the will of the object is *to be ended*. Through *Remainder* it is reasonable to suggest that the unity of subject and object described by the narrator above as reality is precisely experienced as the simultaneous will to watch our own ending; to combine all three desires, to watch, experience, and persist beyond, our ending.

Satin Island opens with the protagonist U. contemplating the nature of the screen and its relation to society:

Turin is where the famous shroud is from, the one showing Christ's body supine after crucifixion: hands folded over genitals, eyes closed, head crowned with thorns. The image isn't really visible on the bare linen. It only emerged in the late nineteenth century, when some amateur photographer looked at the negative of a shot he'd taken of the thing, and saw the figure – pale and faded, but there nonetheless. Only in the negative: the negative became a positive, which means that the shroud itself was, in effect, a negative already. A few decades later, when the shroud was radiocarbon dated, it turned out to come from no later than the mid-thirteenth century; but this didn't trouble the believers. Things like that never do. People need foundation myths, some imprint of year zero, a bolt that secures the scaffolding that in

turn holds fast the entire architecture of reality, of time: memory-chambers and oblivion-cellars, walls between eras, hallways that sweep us on towards the end-days and the coming whatever-it-is. We see things shroudedly, as through a veil, an over-pixelated screen. When the shapeless plasma takes on form and resolution...when it begins to coalesce into a figure that's discernible, if ciphered, we can say: *This is it, stirring, looming*, even if it isn't really, if it's all just ink-blots. (3-4)

What is established through the example of the shroud of Turin is two-fold: 1) that world-narratives or master meanings are always present, whether we are incredulous to them (and hence searching for them) or not, and, 2) that their immanence requires some material presence which the 'believers' can both point to and participate in. Transparency equates to exactly this: the performance of an indifferent reality, by the world and the subject. In the quotation above, it is paradoxically the emergence of "form and resolution" (formalism) that serves as the performance of transparency; the higher the resolution, the more solid the form, the more transparently real objects appear to be. Space is merely the frame across which this transparent screen is stretched, a context made absent through transparency. Only through this superficial level of screen does the subject and society of the novel find their place within that space; only through the flat screen can the characters fumble blindly for the edges of the frame and know themselves through its limits. The space of the narrative of *Satin Island* is immediately declared to be a shrouded one, a space that is separated from, and paradoxically connected to, the subject by a veil (the formalisms) of screens and information. There is always a 'negative' (in the doubled sense of the photographic and the spatially absent or non-existent) that must be turned into a positive; it is this context of repetitive consumption and reproduction that constitutes a fundamental social relation to 'reality'. And yet, this is not simply an illustration of theory, but a contextualization of it based on the material conditions of the author. As Peter Boxall argues when considering Sartre's idea of the present as "nothing but a disordered rumour": "Sartre's sense of the blur of the present, its cinematic disintegration into 'flickering and quavering points of light', is thus tuned, I think, to the quality of a specifically twentieth-century speed" (*Twenty-first-century* 3). U. hints at the dominant forms of those conditions when he refers to the 'over-pixelated screen', 'shapeless plasma' and 'resolution'. Space seems to be an absent or indifferent concept without its mediation by the subject's relation to the formalism; clarity is not a path to objective reality, but rather a fiction fundamental to the subjective position. It is through the confluence of those things that the space of U.'s opening fragment takes shape through the mists of referential and rhetorical language. Like reality according to Baudrillard, space in the novel is an idea that submits to the formal conditions of the subject-object relation; it is both manipulated and mediated, and it is absent and indifferent. This is representative of what Julia Kristeva describes as a major tension in 21st-century global society: "The problem we're facing at the beginning of this new millennium is not one of religious wars

but rather the rift that separates those who want to know that God is unconscious and those who prefer not to, so as to be pleased by the show that announces he exists [...] Saturated by enterprises, seductions, and disappointments, our televisual civilization is propitious to belief" (Kristeva 16). The space of the 21st century is described as one of ontological tension: God as idea/unconscious or God as icon. The former requires continuous treatment, the latter deproblematizes precisely the nature of the former, it eliminates the need for continuous conscious engagement. Kristeva is effectively arguing that the age of information is paradoxically the fertile ground in which belief re-emerges as a dominant global force; the space of the novel is space caught in a screen that provides the potential of both the idea and the icon. Like U.'s speculative subject who accepts that whatever "it" is that he is looking for takes shape as pixels or ink-blots, this relation to reality is both permanently figured and transfigured by language and the limits of human senses, and conditionally figured by the nature of the contemporary moment it colludes with.

The opening of *Satin Island* doubles the image of a fundamental relation and contemporary scene, layering both in order to demonstrate the double-image of novelty and continuity upon which McCarthy's own understanding of what it is to be an artist is based. The two dimensions of McCarthy's novelistic space consist of the intersection of a fundamental relation (to death or nothingness) and the contemporary ideological imperative of reality. As John Banville has it, "For us, life is sustainable only as fantasy; we create a fantasy about love, saying it will never end, about death, saying it will never come; and these are only the bigger issues. Entire mythologies, entire theogonies, have been invented to shore up our manifold illusions. Human creatures pass their days in gloriously irresponsible denial of the cold reality staring them pitilessly in the face" (Banville). Where the ideal of reality production comes into play here is in the notion that this dependence upon illusion and fantasy is 'irresponsible'; this assertion presumes that living in 'cold reality' is the responsible choice (as if it were a choice). Reality however, is not a choice but a mode of competition by which modern global society defines its progress. And it is a struggle specifically because of its dualistic and undecidable nature; we need narrative to understand and relate to reality, but in narrative lies the 'interim' violence of fiction, the glitch that demands an improved relation to reality. What we get in this quotation about the shroud of Turin is not a struggle, or a conflicted account, but rather a direct assertion of the 21st-century subject's relation to the two-dimensional space it occupies. Space is always-already understood through a shroud of information, through a technical formalism; space is deproblematized by the information that doubles it. If conflict in this space is absent, it is absent *as a problem* specifically by virtue of its excessive reproduction as information.

Remainder is the story of an unnamed character and narrator, whose accounts open with the recollection of a (physically and intellectually) traumatic accident of which he technically knows nothing:

About the accident itself I can say very little. Almost nothing. It involved something falling from the sky. Technology. Parts, bits. That's it really: all I can divulge. Not much, I know. It's not that I'm being shy. It's just that – well, for one, I don't even remember the event. It's a blank: a white slate, a black hole. I have vague images, half-impressions: of being, or having been – or, more precisely, being *about* to be – hit; blue light; railings; lights of other colours; being held above some kind of tray or bed. But who's to say that these are genuine memories? Who's to say my traumatized mind didn't just make them up, or pull them out from somewhere else, some other slot, and stick them there to plug the gap – the crater – that the accident had blown? Minds are versatile and wily things. Real chancers. (5)

Right from the outset the reader is confronted with a paradoxical doubling which reiterates the paradoxical doubling of 'authentic self' and 'narrative self' that emerges out of deconstruction, poststructuralism and the narrative turn in literature. In this case the comparison is tacitly between his 'self' prior to the accident (which may or may not be real) and his self after the accident. The self after the accident is one whose duty necessarily becomes the integration with and domination of space, of reality. The character first goes through a series of medical procedures and treatments, which are meant to re-establish forgotten modes of movement and speech. Then, having reacquired the physical and linguistic capacity of a 'human', the narrator receives news of the conditions of his re-entrance into society at large. Semantic transparency becomes one of the key ways through which he attains security in the postmodern space of the world.

In literary terms McCarthy is doing something by immediately exposing the basic logic and problematic of 'trauma fiction': the way in which the traumatized mind becomes almost untrustworthy to itself, becomes an unreliable narrator of its own existence through the means of metalepsis (in that the event is only accessible through its effects). What we have is an immediate acknowledgement of the character and the text conditioned by trauma, which is to say, an immediate acknowledgement of the problematized act of self-identification which comes with being traumatized (by technology). What McCarthy accomplishes with *Remainder* is the aesthetic unification of the tropes of trauma (repression, expression and repetition) and an illustration of late capitalist life and society via the manipulation of the space that surrounds the narrator. This latter illustration takes the appearance of what Liesl Schillinger of the *New York Times* calls the "perplexity and excessive focus" ("Play It Again") of the narrator. The images and ideas conjured by the narrator's excessive focus constitute a kind of Freudian 'mental detritus', they allude in a side-ways fashion to theories of capital that problematize his conception of authenticity while at the same time acting as the vectors of that authenticity in the contemporary sense.

Falling is a dominant figure in this scene. Though Byatt speculates that, as in J.G. Ballard's novel *Crash*, the narrator's experience is merely the mental delusion conjured by his own death (which is in turn imagined to be the potential plane crash which ostensibly closes the novel), I would suggest that this 'accident' can be better understood as a kind of abstract allegory for the modern apotheosis of reality and the effect it may have theoretically had on human society and at the same time the subject. I believe that in order to properly contextualize this reading, we have to turn briefly back to Baudrillard's idea of modernity. In short, Baudrillard thinks of the project of modernity as the beginning of the 'real world': "[...] if we look closely, we see that the real world begins, in the modern age, with the decision to transform the world, and to do so by means of science, analytical knowledge and the implementation of technology...This is the moment when human beings, while setting about analysing and transforming the world, take their leave of it, while at the same time lending it force of reality. We may say, then, that the real world begins, paradoxically, to disappear at the very same time as it begins to exist" (*Why?* 10-11). This "setting about" is, I think, the allegorical corollary of the accident in *Remainder*. Reality as such is the trauma of the unexpected and accidental death of God, of the introduction of modern technology and culture which goes about transforming the world; it is in other words the experience of disappearance behind the formalism as real existence. Jim Byatt reiterates this idea of the trauma of reality when he argues that,

The beginning and end of the novel work to compress time, demonstrating that the entire narrative takes place in an instant [...] The disruption of time, which divorces external temporality from the internal, allows for the creation of an imaginary space in which the subject, no longer corporeal but purely semiotic, can continue to exist. Like Scheherazade, Ballard's and McCarthy's characters are, at least potentially, dead, but as long as they continue to imaginatively construct a space in which to exist, a simulacrum of the real world, they are able to maintain at least the illusion of indefinite longevity" (257-58).

The trauma of reality's emergence as a dominant force compresses time by bringing all temporal states into play at once in the space of information. It also conditions the desires of the subjects, compelling them, as Byatt suggests, to continually recreate their semiotic selves within a semiotic space (the space of language, of dreams). Time is in this sense therefore a modality of space, which is to say, a modality of the relation between spatial formalism and absent subject. The nature of this space, as when encountering the uncanny, accumulates time in a way that subtends time to the "veering" (Royle, *Veering: A Theory of Literature*) quality of contemporary space; the experience of time is conditioned by the nature of semiotic or representational space. It does so, however, from the amoral perspective of reality and the accident. Though Byatt's reading of Ballard and McCarthy leads him to question the amoral nature of Baudrillard's hyperreality (249), we can understand this affective detachment from ethics and morality

through the condition of this reality-trauma: the accident is beyond moral judgement because the accident is a product of an objective reality, rather than God. The accident is the amoral act of objective reality revealing itself, moving itself independently of the will of the subject, though certainly to the subject's delight.

I want to suggest that the falling technology, parts, bits of *Remainder's* opening scene are in fact the half-remembered visual fragments of a kind of collective social trauma or catastrophe. It is an allegorical confrontation with that fundamental dualism manifested equally by narrative, technology and the space of the world; how can it be that we both *make them* and they *make us*? This vision of falling parts and fragments is therefore an illustration of the trauma of technological communication and mediation (the ubiquity of formalism), a trauma which problematizes memory and the capacity for the autonomous judgement (and therefore 'authentic' and 'individual' existence) of the modern subject by simultaneously outstripping and confirming it. The space of the novel is conditioned by this paradoxical trauma: space which flows on the basis of the doubling of the repression and expression of this trauma. While trauma is normally understood as the splitting of the subject in order to safeguard it from re-living that trauma, the part of the consciousness that is repressed expresses the trauma in symptomatic fashion, revealing what is repressed in an often sideways or paradoxical fashion (for example rape victims engaging in rape-fantasies, or in this case, the narrator re-investing in the *form*, technology, of his own trauma). Trauma in this instance is a thing which necessitates its own repression. Like transparency, it could be expressed as a moment, an event, a process, a slow unfolding; the space of trauma is as such also a modality of time. Whatever it is, however, its very nature causes it to be consciously unapproachable. Neither his mind nor his memory can be trusted, and yet *what can* be trusted in this problematized subjective context? The importance of technology's presence in this opening scene is never confronted directly (and can never be confronted without serious fiscal penalty) by the narrator; what we get instead is a plot that revolves around the attempts by the narrator to resolve this lack of authenticity he feels, through the precision, predictability and operationality of spatial formalisms (technological models). A complication arises when we consider technology to be a mode of expressed repression, paradoxically put in place by the trauma of modernity and modern technology. Medical technology serves in *Remainder*, for instance, to *erase* the effects of the trauma by the *addition* of a scientific understanding (how to move again); in effect, it is a process of repression by a greater or more complete mode of expression. This is a technological excess that is not squandered, but made productive as a form of positive repression (meaning it represses the disruptive, the accidental, the negative, the violence of trauma, etc.). In the accident, technological trauma effaces authenticity by making subjective memory and function

redundant: function is learned again yet memory persists in an ontologically indefinite form. This lack of authenticity is expressed by the narrator's dependence upon technology to enter the space of authenticity; and yet far from being *experienced* as a closeness to things, the space of authenticity offers a kind of intense detachment from the world, *within the world*. It is the space within which the subject occupies its perspective (grounded in the distinction between inside and outside) without there being any distance between it and the world. The space of the narrator's authenticity, the space of the film-screen, is the space of Baudrillard's obscenity: "for as soon as there is a scene or a stage, there is gaze and distance, play and otherness [...] On the other hand, when we are in obscenity, there is no longer any scene or stage, any play, and the distance of the gaze is abolished" (*Passwords* 27). The desire for obscenity, the erotic draw of the *final* completion, is reiterated by the narrator when he refuses to have sex with Catherine, after hearing his sketches and blueprints of his imaginary building disturbed by the wind (*Remainder* 71) and then later on when he hires a set-designer to build his building (114), but refuses to allow any video cameras in or around it (121). The narrator is not just re-enforcing the notion of the obscene but actively rejecting the distance between fiction and reality that a film-set or a stage would imply in favour of an erotic pursuit of unification.

What we find in *Remainder* is that the narrator decides that further investment in technology, further encrustation onto himself and the world is the only path backwards to that authentic point; this is a demonstration of the technologically semantic space of contemporary society. It demonstrates the horizon of space for the contemporary subject; this subject is compelled to act within and through a technological landscape, made obscene and transparent. Confronted with a lack of authenticity whose cause is the technologically-oriented accident, the narrator's only option is to turn to technology in order to spin up a better, more reliable and less fallible or vulnerable authenticity. One of the first things he does is invest his money into the stock market. At the accounting offices of Younger and Younger (a playful allusion to a mode of regression), the narrator is enlightened as to how investment works. For instance, he is told that "The prices aren't fixed: they change depending on what people are prepared to pay for them. When people buy shares, they don't value them by what they actually represent in terms of goods or services: they value them by what they *might* be worth, in an imaginary future" (43). He is then told that it is the collective imagining of this future value that sustains the profitability of the stock market. Where he chooses to invest is therefore instructive as it represents a contemporary material translation of the ideas of imaginary futures and collective desire:

"There's banking, manufacturing, telecommunications, oil, pharmaceuticals, technology..."
"Technology," I said. "I like technology."

"Good," Younger said. "That sector's one we're very well-disposed towards as well. We could..."

"What was the one you mentioned just before that?" I asked.

"Pharmaceuticals. The big drug companies are always an..."

"No: before that."

"Oil?"

"No: signals, messages, connections."

"Telecommunications?"

"Yes! Exactly."

"That's a very promising sector. Mobile telephone penetration is increasing at an almost exponential rate year after year. And then as more types of link-up between phones and internet and hi-fi systems and who knows what else becomes possible, more imaginary futures open up. You see the principle?"

"Yes," I said. "Let's go for those two: telecommunications and technology." (45)

The narrator chooses to ignore the suggestion of diversification and to invest exclusively in these two sectors. When forced to respond to his accountant's trepidation regarding his portfolio's lack of diversity, he states simply: "Yes, I understand...But I want to know where I am. To occupy a particular sector, rather than be everywhere and nowhere, all confused. I want to have a...a..." I searched for the right word for a long time, and eventually found it: "position" (46). Having suffered from an explicitly technological trauma, his first act is to invest his new-found capital precisely back into that sphere in the form of technology and communication technology: two things that afford him a 'position' which is his solution to the threat of being 'everywhere and nowhere, all confused'. The space he occupies as such contains the potential of both. The 'everywhere and nowhere' is therefore conveyed as affect, as the subjective *feeling or experience* of an ontologically fractured postmodernity, as opposed to postmodernity in itself. It is in a sense the ontological affect of the religious space of purgatory; a state of numb stasis in which the dead await their entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. Postmodernity in itself consists of the narrative of a stage of material conditions in a constant process of reconfiguring the conflict between Bataille's good and evil, which constitutes an irresistible coming-together of things that attempts to permanently banish the disruptive historical potential of opposition. His investment into the spheres of communication and technology is the performance of his own investment into the enclosed space (crypt) of late capitalism; an investment that fixes him in crypt-space of financial algorithms paradoxically defined by fantasies of exponential growth and potential.

What this demonstrates is one possible (and performative) way of moving beyond the 'everywhere and nowhere' position, the void, of postmodernity. We can think about and characterize the reading of 'position' here in a variety of ways. I am choosing to characterize this particularly authentic position idealized by the narrator as 'ideologically subjective space'; the position he wants to return to, to perform, is the position through which he had some sense of 'authenticity'. In a fatalistic but logical twist, the path out of the postmodern and toward authenticity is determined to be an objective (object-driven) *fiction of authenticity*, the expansion and intensification of a focus on completion or death which has in some sense defined both readers' and critics' attitudes toward modern and postmodern literature (Lea; Vermeulen 2015; Boxall 2012; Namwali Serpell). Authenticity in other words is precisely what this space produces, by holding it back. Once again, this conclusion can be read in more than one way. For instance, it could be a structural reference to the literary context into which the novel emerged, the context of the 'narrative turn' (Meretoja), a dominant narrative realism (McCarthy, *Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* 57-76), and a doubled-down investment on the inner truth of the subject and its capacity to be clearly expressed. It could also be understood ideologically, as a mode of spatial framing which indicates a subject compelled to strive continuously only for what is already accomplished, doing so in late capitalist fashion through the detached participation in investment banking. However, it demonstrates precisely how a 'position' in that space might be achieved: it must be *bought into*. The double-meaning of *bought into* is instructive: this is a brand of investment that reflects the Bataille dualism of the accursed share, in that it is both semantic and economic. The actualization of this position in space tacitly requires investment in the screen which purports to establish the horizon of existence in that space. It consists of the integrated performance of both subject and object.

Accelerated Space

Serge Carrefax in *C* performs a similar operation when confronting the space of early 20th century England. Section one begins with Serge's birth on the family estate, called Versoie, where silk is produced, technological innovations in communication are pursued by Serge's father, and where deaf and mute children are taught how to speak. It ends with the death of his older sister Sophie and his convalescence in a spa town in Germany, where he has sex for the first time. The novel opens with Serge's birth, in an allegory of being born into the space of transparency:

The bedside maid holds Mrs. Carrefax's shoulders, Mrs. Carrefax grips the bearing-down sheet and the baby's head appears between her legs – or rather, half-appears behind a glistening film of plasma, a skin-membrane. Learmont has heard of this phenomenon but never witnessed it before: the baby has a caul. The amniotic bag envelops the entire head, a silky hood. As soon

as the baby's fully out, Learmont pinches this away from its skin and peels it upwards from the neck, removing it. (11)

Serge's caul (a clear reference to *David Copperfield*) becomes the analog of the shroud of Turin, 'a glistening film of plasma', a plasma screen separating baby Serge from the reality of the womb which protects and nourishes him. Transparency is achieved precisely as the caul is pulled back; reality is revealed to the child for the first time by peeling back the screen he is born with. This is how transparency works: its formal traces, its material and ontological presence must be relegated to the background (or the trash heap) in order that they not disrupt its continuous flow. The caul is even an analog of this principle, as Dr. Learmont concludes,

"And the caul is meant to be a sign of - "

But she cuts him short with a gesture of her hand towards the canister.

"It can't hurt, I suppose," he says. "We'll give a couple more minutes." He turns the valve back on. Mrs. Carrefax's eyes warm and widen. The baby stops crying. For a long while the room is silent but for the hiss of the chloroform and, quieter than this, the intermittent mechanical buzzing he heard earlier, floating in from outside, from the stables. (12)

The caul is established as a source of meaning, and yet this meaning is silenced, interrupted by Serge's mother in the manner of Blanchot's *Orpheus*, vandalizing and interrupting "even [her] own labour" (T. McCarthy, *Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* 111), the labour of giving birth to character, like a writer herself. This interruption opens an interim of silence within the scene: the sounds of new-born subjectivity are drowned by the sonorous formalisms of the chloroform equipment and the mechanical buzzing of the wireless. In place of this meaning is received a dose of narcotics, enforcing a different kind of blindness or obfuscation. The screen, the shroud, the caul is acknowledged through its refusal and removal, through the repression and replacement of its meaning by the pleasant detachment of narcotics and the background hum of what we come to know shortly as Serge's father's attempts at wireless communication. The caul, as material allegory for the shroud of information, is removed and forgotten, and in its place is received the passive, humming, ambient signals of hissing narcotic numbness and technological communication. The space that Serge is introduced into is space unified by repression (drugs) and expression (technical communication), where the subject's absence and presence are doubled and thereby relieved of their antagonistic nature by their synthesis in mere background noise. Space here is present, but unremarkable; it is pressed, like Ponge's orange, into the subjective relation to certain formalisms. In the final lines of the chapter it is confirmed as a safe maternal space: "[t]he room is silent but for the clicking lips of the sucking baby and the copper buzzing rising from the garden" (16). It is a space characterized by the double-image of narcotic mother's milk and the already ubiquitous hum of

electronic communication equipment. It is always-already dominated by the principles of transparency; the allegory of Serge's birth accomplishes the simultaneous revelation and disappearance of the 'secret of literature' as it has expanded into the realms of reproduction and mass communication. Serge's birth opens a chain of repetitions, reiterations of the movement of acceleration symbolized here through a reality whose curtains have been pulled back by science but whose semantic consequences can be dulled by narcotics and technological communication. The removal of the caul will be reiterated as an allegory of removal-as-addition, repeated as a kind of regressive movement through the space of the novel. Acceleration, simulation and allegorization reveal certain connections. Acceleration begins life in the novel allegorically, as an idea; and it continues throughout the novel as such. However, in certain of its simulated iterations it acquires material and even subjective character; the spirit of acceleration embodies a variety of scenes, objects and subjects. It colours McCarthy's prose and robs these things of their particularity, even of their affective context. But acceleration also allows Serge to skip past all kinds of potential events and occurrences which might serve as opportunities for subjective growth in the standard novel form (an instructive quality, given that *C* alludes to the structure of the *Bildungsroman*). As is noted by Byatt in *Remainder*, in *C* the space of Versoie appears to condense time and make it a modality of space. This is to say, though the form this acceleration takes for Serge may have been traumatic, it demonstrates how a regime of repetition can mimic or make present narratives of personal development. Development (both personal and cultural), in other words, can be simulated by a regime of reiteration which replicates movement forward while staying largely in place. In effect, the accelerations I will address below constitute the simulated fast-forwarding of personal development in the space of the novels.

In the second chapter, we find Serge as a toddler, playing with wooden blocks with colourful images on the sides. His play is then interrupted by his older sister Sophie:

Scooping three or four of the wooden blocks up from the carpet, she starts laying them out in front of him. Then, kneeling behind them and pulling the front of her skirt forwards so that it covers the figures on their surface, she says:

"If you can remember which one is which I'll give you my pocket money. If not, forfeit." But Serge doesn't want to play her game. He reaches between her legs, pushing through the pleated fabric. She grabs his wrist and pulls it out again. "Forfeit!" she cackles. "Take your trousers down."

"No!" Serge snaps. But she's stronger than him. She wraps her arm around him, pulls him to his feet and, still kneeling beside him, yanks his trousers down his legs. He wriggles as she pulls the pants beneath these down as well.

"Aha!" she shouts in triumph. "Now to telegraph the Admiralty." Holding him in place, she begins tapping his little penis with her index finger. "'Dear Sir: Please send reinforcements,'

tap-tap-tap. 'Enemy quite outnumber us,' tap-tap. 'Are holding out but fear total submission if not soon relieved,' tap-tip tap-tip."

"Stop it!" Serge shouts.

"Why? I've seen Miss Hubbard do it. She did it with the man from Lydium. 'Dear Man from Lydium,' *tap-tap*, 'please send more charcoal and wipers for our school class,' *tip-tip-tip*. 'Weather here fine but rain is forecast for tomorrow.' *Tippety-tap*. See? You're laughing."

"No I'm not!" Serge shouts, straining to get away. Eventually he manages to break loose. (26-27)

This is exemplary of the double-image (the irresolution) of McCarthy's narrative style: the language brings to mind simultaneously childhood innocence, incest and sexual abuse, mass communication and the simple hieroglyphic-like pictures on Serge's wooden blocks. The language is temporally and spatially confusing, simultaneous and singular. I want to think of this scene as the next stage of Serge's acceleration, first from the blindness of the womb to the visual space of the world, now from childhood to sexual maturity. The performance, the simulation of an illicit sexual connection between brother and sister is embedded in the language of this scene ("He reaches between her legs, pushing through the pleated fabric."), and it is made simultaneous with the simulation of mass communication (reinforced by the spondaic power of "*tap-tap*") and innocent pleasure ("See? You're laughing."). McCarthy's language creates the temporal conditions of both early 20th-century and early 21st-century space by making simultaneous what comes before and what comes after, in this case, personal or subjective development. Serge's personal sexual development is effectively skipped past, the experience of this tumultuous path is denied by the simulation of its ostensible end-point during the nascent stages of its expression. This double-image of child and fully formed adult carries forwards into the next scene. Serge, having escaped Sophie's attention, stumbles on his mother sitting on a bench on which rests a teapot, a cup, a jar of honey, and a little phial, presumably of laudanum. His mother's eyes, "look like honey, warm and murky" (29). Honey reappears immediately on the bench,

A wasp has landed in this and is drawing off the syrup with its needle-like mandible. Its legs have broken through the honey's surface; they tread slightly, trying to free themselves, but they're already immersed; its mandible, meanwhile continues drawing. Serge watches it for a while, then takes the phial and presses it down across the insect's body, using its rim to slice apart the bridge where thorax meets abdomen. The wasps' legs continue their treading and its mandible is drawing even after they're no longer joined. Its thorax throbs, then stiffens and is still. (30)

Honey is the shape of intoxication and passivity in the eyes of the mother, the colour of mental and emotional detachment. It then shifts into an allegorical image of a wasp, both struggling and eating, mindlessly consuming the very thing that precipitates its imminent death. Mother and insect come

together through the more contemporary usage of 'wasp', to indicate a white Anglo-Saxon protestant, and through the medium of honey in which Serge's mother's eyes swim and in which the insect finds itself trapped. Honey sustains and traps the wasp at once; the wasp replaces baby Serge at his mother breast in the closing moments of the first chapter, and the honey replaces the copper buzzing of the wireless set. The baby at the breast, the wasp in the honey: these are images of the suspension of the accelerated subject inside a medium that it consumes for survival. Acceleration constitutes a strange kind of simultaneity, a simultaneity that is temporal because it is spatial, ideal because it is material. These are images of the future of Serge (the subject) in the form of regression, back to the womb, back to less evolved and complex (flattened) forms. Serge the toddler responds precisely as he will when he is an adult: he rushes the creature to its end, because everything else is just the perpetuation of a repetitious struggle to escape the honey while feeding off of it, to elude the maternal protection of information despite being formed and nourished by it. The toddler Serge then finds himself by a stream with his blocks, where he accelerates towards his own version of the fate which he offered to the wasp:

He leans forward and catches sight of the top of his own head, his eyes, his nose and mouth. Then he takes a block from his left arm and places it gently on the surface of the water. The block floats. He prods it with his finger and it sinks, then bobs back to the surface again [...] Serge floats a second block, then a third [...] He leans out after them, so far that he can see his whole torso reflected in the water, right down to his knees, with the blue sky revolving above it like a turning lid...

And then he's in, tumbling and turning like the blocks as water rushes up his nose and burns his throat. His hands push muddy slime and he bobs up again, his face back in the air, his legs beneath him [...] Beneath the surface of the stream, he opens his eyes. The water is bright and murky at the same time, like honey. Snake-like fronds wave and dance in its lit-up darkness; particles of mud hang between these, stirred up into canopies of blossom. The water's right inside him; its not nasty anymore, just cold. And he's no longer sinking: if anything, he's been lifted, by strong arms, coiled around him... (30-31)

Toddler Serge moves with an intelligence and meaning not his own; his actions are purely symbolic, as they must be when a body is lacking the self-definition which is given it by a process of growth and development. There is no reason to believe that Serge meant to drown himself; in fact, he is so unaware of the meaning of these events that he barely reacts once rescued: "He slips out of her grasp, scrambles to his feet and wanders back towards his trolley – but she sweeps him up again before he reaches this [...]" (31). The technique of doubling is inescapable here: Serge is both a child who may have been very recently traumatized sexually, and at the same time the suicidal who only recently confronted a repressed episode of their childhood. Serge and the wasp seem to take on each other's qualities: Serge sees the wasp caught in a paradoxically nourishing trap, and kills it. The same logic is evident in the movements of Serge; a kind of silent agency, the same that made Serge kill the wasp, is at work in this

scene. The silent knowledge of the state of things, of 'the way things are' that recur in *Satin Island* and *Men in Space* in particular, informs the actions of little Serge. Though utterly banal and realistic, the events of this scene are pure allegory. The appearance of original and final expression of repressed sexual trauma are separated by mere moments in the text. Cycles of repression and expression are accelerated in the space of the novels, to the point of simultaneity, and it is this simultaneity which makes stable evaluation of meaning so difficult. I suggest that this is a poetic elaboration of the absence of the traditional subject in the novels, one which establishes the space of the novel as necessarily cyclical; without a subject to determine meaning based on accumulated personal experience, space becomes a formalism (a network of surfaces, lines, etc.) whose content is, for the purposes of the subject, void of meaning. Honey is the medium that fills the void, the sweet sustaining alibi of the meaningless space it fills. This acceleration takes the form of repeated iterations, where the images of Serge, honey, breast-milk, technology, insects, and incest all collude in a conspiracy of repetition whose surface at least attempts to demonstrate progression to the end. However, the honey that intoxicates his mother, traps the wasp, and surrounds him before the ending arrived, soon morphs back into its technological form from that of the insect (a symbolic back and forth that recurs throughout the text); the sweetness of the crypt takes on the form of a board game of real estate in Chicago.

Called "Realtor's Game", Serge and his sister Sophie's tutor M. Clair hopes that the game "adequately impresses upon [them] the iniquities of capital" (51). As the narrator puts it: "It doesn't: they both love it" (51). This is representative of the positivity which accompanies this kind of repression or alienation by and of the object; there is a pleasurable aspect to the absence of things like uncomfortable truths and the uncomfortable genetics shared by profits and suffering. The children are older now, and this scene demonstrates the role repression continues to play in the text. In this instance, it has been expanded into the realm of political economy, and it is the evil of inequality at the base of capitalist exchange that is condemned to absence. To drive this point home, within three short paragraphs of being introduced, the physical game itself is abandoned, like the caul, making the *rules* of the game merely a transparency draped over the grounds of Versoie itself:

One warm early-summer morning they decide to play outside, but, finding the board won't sit flat on the Mulberry Lawn's grass and being so familiar with the layout of the grid that its actual presence before them has become unnecessary, they assign one of the estate's landmarks to each of its squares – Crypt Park's second bench for George Street, beehives for Soakum Lighting System and so on – and conduct their game by moving physically from one spot to another [...] As the outdoor version takes over from the original, additions creep into the rules, modifications [...] At first, games advance slowly as both players have to travel to their opponents game-locations on each move, to check that the other doesn't cheat [...] After a

while, though, Serge has the idea of expanding the Ting-a-Ling Telephone Company out into real space, and they rig up, with the help of poles that feed them over garden walls and around hedges, a primitive web of strings and soup-can mouth- and earpieces through which they can communicate their positions and report the outcomes of each sycamore throw, for some reason trusting each other to tell the truth when being overheard live [...] So as not to blow the fantasy of telecommunication, they conduct their business in hushed voices, almost whispers. After a few days they're spending whole sessions not trudging from spot to spot rather sitting at their tele-posts, quietly agreeing their positions and negotiating sub-clauses for each now imaginary move . . . (50-52)

As the children missed the original point of the exercise, we have to be careful not to miss the lesson being taught beneath the surface of this episode. After ignoring or repressing the iniquities of capital, the children abandon the physical form of the game and apply it to their entire home. But the scope of this space is too much, and so they construct a communication system which establishes an implicit trust that allows the game to continue smoothly without the board. Eventually, it runs so smoothly that physically moving anything in space becomes redundant, and all movements in the game are achieved by words, by technical communication. In effect, what we have is another scene referencing the opening scene of Serge's birth; the caul was the physical manifestation of the Turin 'shroud' of information, of rules, biological perhaps, but divinely invested, to the point that its disappearance (like that of Jesus) is precisely what allows these divinely invested rules to be draped across the world that confronts the newborn baby. The caul is lost, but in being lost it comes to embody all space. The game board is lost, but its rules remain. Not only are the developments within the game an allegory for the accelerated technological and political transformations of late capitalist space (namely the rapid rise of the digital surveillance state), but an example of the disconnected and diagonal ways these children might unknowingly recreate the structures at the base of their actual society: through a simulation in the form of a fun game, hardly a form conducive to truly confronting the 'iniquities of capital'. As Benjamin has noted above, the allegorical form serves as a death's head of history; the game (and its setting in the first years of the 20th century) becomes an allegory of space within which history and time are ubiquitous *as allegory*. If we pursue this line of reasoning, we eventually come to the possibility that the lesson is only finished once the board is thrown out and the rules simultaneously internalized and externalized. The lesson is learned only after the allegory (figure) is absorbed into space itself; as when Marx names the class struggle. This is precisely in line with de Man's concept of understanding irony (the irony of the children absorbing and re-transmitting the structures of capital instead of contemplating them as M. Clair desired) as being achieved only once the attempt to understand has been abandoned or stopped (*Aesthetic Ideology* 166). De Man describes both the trope and irony through the register of

undecidability; meaning in the first sense and presence in the second are difficult to fix in place. As he puts it:

[I]f this is indeed the case that what is at stake in irony is the possibility of understanding, the possibility of reading, the readability of texts, the possibility of deciding on a meaning or on a multiple set of meanings or on a controlled polysemy of meanings, then we can see that irony would indeed be very dangerous [...] There would be in irony something very threatening, against which interpreters of literature, who have a stake in the understandability of literature, would want to put themselves on their guard – very legitimate to want, as Booth wants, to stop, to stabilize, to control the trope. (*Aesthetic* 167)

The game board as the trope of capitalist space is perhaps ironic, perhaps not. What we do know is that it moves from trope to performance, which is the precise language used by de Man to describe what he calls aesthetic ideology.¹⁵ Nor are the simulated advancements of this game in any way abandoned by the players in the text: Serge continues to be indifferent to suffering and takes up the wireless set as his primary interest. The first episode with the wireless set in the attic alludes to the double-image, or double-knowledge, of space that has been elaborated here.

The wireless set connects Serge to the world outside of his home and his vision, and at the same time reiterates the nature of this connection in the first years of the 20th century: “The static’s like the sound of thinking. Not of any single person thinking, nor even a group thinking, collectively. It’s bigger than that, wider – and more direct. It’s like the sound of thought itself, its hum and rush” (C 79). The first description we get of Serge operating the wireless set indicates the objective nature of what he is linking up with; not the thoughts of a person, or people, but instead some kind of grander scale of thought that transcends the limits of the group. As Catherine Lanone has suggested, the idea of the subject as “coherer” (Lanone 5) is prominent in *C*; the wireless becomes a device that synthesizes all manner of diverse phenomena into the coded information of the machine:

[C]oastal stations’ call signs [...] Poldhu’s transmitting its weather report [...] The stories blur together: Serge sees a man clutching a kitchen knife chasing a politician across parched earth, past cacti and armadillos, while ambassadors wave papers around fugitive and pursuer, negotiating terms [...] Serge transcribes for a while, then lays down his pencil down and lets the sequences run through the space between his ears, sounding his skull: there’s a fluency to them, a rhythm that’s spontaneous, as though the clicks were somehow speaking on their own

¹⁵ “The occurrence is true because it occurs; by the fact that it occurs it has truth, truth value, it is true. The model for that, the linguistic model for the process I am describing, and which is irreversible, is the model of the *passage* from trope, which is a cognitive model, to the performative, for example. Not the performative in itself – because the performative in itself exists independently of tropes and exists independently of a critical examination or of an epistemological examination of tropes – but the transition, the passage from a conception of language as a system, perhaps a closed system, of tropes, that totalizes itself as a series of transformations which can be reduced to topological systems, and then the fact that you *pass* from that conception of language to *another* conception of language in which language is no longer cognitive but in which language is performative.” (*Aesthetic* 132)

and didn't need the detectors, keys or finger-twitching men who cling to them like after-thoughts . . . He lets a fart slip from his buttocks, and waits for its vapour to reach his nostrils: it, too, carries signals, odour-messages from distant, unseen bowels [...] Once, he picked up a CQD: a distress signal [...] He listened to the whine and crackle, though, right through till morning – and heard, or thought he heard, among its breaks and flecks, the sound of people treading cold, black water, their hands beating small disturbances into waves that had come to bury them. (C 81-84)

The wireless clearly gives Serge access to distant parts of the world and the events occurring in them, much like news media, television, internet and radio do today. Though I agree that this machine brings these diverse objects into contact with Serge by a process of coding and decoding, I would argue that the particular language used in this section indicates a processing of coherence that exemplifies the intolerable symmetry of the virtual. For instance, it is instructive that this connection to the world creates coherence between a diverse set of circumstances by reducing all this information to the odour of flatulence. This is a darkly comedic allusion to the idea of the “degree zero” of culture described by Baudrillard: all the information about the world Serge receives is reduced to the smell of his own gasses, itself a turn of phrase alluding to an extreme arrogance or self-interest. The notion of the ‘degree zero’ is also mentioned in an interview with McCarthy where, when asked if there is a specificity to the urban space in his novels, he replies as follows:

Not really. The novel I'm working on now opens in an airport lounge, I suppose. But I am interested in space's degree zeros. I made an art piece with Rod Dickinson that's showing in both Pittsburgh and the Hayward Gallery in London right now called *Greenwich Degree Zero*. It's an installation piece in which we depict the 1894 attempt to blow up the Greenwich Observatory that gave rise to Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*. There was a real attempt—a guy blew himself up ten feet away from the Observatory, and it was almost certain that he was trying to destroy this building, which is the degree zero of time. (Eburne, Hart and Jaffe 665)

The degree zero of space is where space becomes so present that it disappears, and in doing so seems to leave behind only the reflection of the subject embedded within it. This indication of self-obsession sits side-by-side in this section with the notion of the “Automatic Writing of the World” in the form of a “rhythm that's spontaneous” (C 82); Serge's operation of the wireless set amounts to a moment where the end of the reality project is rushed towards, where a sense of totality is experienced through the imagery of involuntary excretion, autonomous transmissions, a waiting for death alone in a vast and black sea of information. The coldness and alien nature of this totality is re-iterated when Serge describes an addition he was forced to make to his machine: “The spark gap flashes blue each time he taps it; it makes a spitting noise, so loud he's had to build a silence box around the desk to isolate his little RX station from the sleeping household – or, as it becomes more obvious to him with every session, to maintain the little household's fantasy of isolation from the vast sea of transmission roaring all around it” (80). This

reiterates the double quality of the space of information transmission, inasmuch as Serge must isolate himself from the household in order to gain access to the world at large, in exactly the same way that the dark isolation of the novel and the reader in Proust gives them access to everything they have effectively isolated themselves from. Literary space is understood in the same sense of protection when Laura Colombino describes three spatial perspectives in Ian McEwan's novel *Saturday* as coming together to, "all imply the idea of fencing out a space of rationality where events may unfurl under fairly controlled circumstances" (7-8). Connection to the world through the wireless set evokes the double-image of space as both collective and isolating, revelatory and diminishing at once. Daniel Lea extends this metaphor of a defensive posture into contemporary conditions by invoking the doubling necessary to the security of the self: "[...] the self in the age of mass mediation and communication is indistinguishable from, and completely reliant on, the technological code it uses to articulate its presence in the material world" (472). McCarthy's poetics of space establish the paradoxical simultaneity of isolation and connection, reducing both to technical doubling and indifference, which is in this instance compared to enjoying the smell of one's own flatulence.

Each of the four sections of the novels is a re-combined re-iteration of the symbolism of Serge's appearance in the world as already blinded, of our view of reality as always-already obfuscated by fictions, agents and screens. Like the narrator of *Remainder*, who states, "Things I don't understand make me feel dizzy [...] If I don't understand words, I have one of my staff look them up" (*Remainder* 7-8), Serge has problems with written language:

Serge gets stuck on words like "antipodean" and "fortuitous," and even ones like "tables." He keeps switching letters round. It's not deliberate, just something that he does. He sees letters streaming through the air, whole blocks of them, borne on currents occupying a zone beneath the threshold of the comprehensible, and tries to pluck and stick them to the page as best he can, but it's an imprecise science: by the time he's got a few pinned down, the others have floated on ahead or changed their meaning, and "Manchester"'s "chest" has turned into an old oak coffer, the kings 'coronation' into a flower, a carnation. (C 47)

Early in the novel, and in his life, Serge seems to naturally ('just something that he does') have trouble with reading and writing. We might read this as a silent diagnosis of dyslexia, but it is my opinion that McCarthy is always thinking and writing beyond the surface meaning of his texts. Writing is a formalism whose lines and movements can be continuously witnessed undermining itself; whereas, the lines and vectors of the machine tend to convey a sense of stable repetition. This quotation alludes to the concept described by de Man as the movement of the trope (*Aesthetic* 165), where the attempt to understand one word leads to the next and the next, in an endless string of semantic associations. What immediately

follows this section on words is a section on painting, where Serge is described as 'wanting': "He's a steady brushman, and has a good feel for line and movement, but he just can't do perspective: everything he paints is flat" (48). The narrator of *C* relates to the reader how the space of transparency conditions Serge's relation to these artistic formalisms, those that may have in the past indicated a gap in representation: he cannot fix meaning in words, nor can he illustrate depth. The very conditions of the caul, a depthless screen whose meaning is denied, are reproduced in this narration. Depth and meaning are difficult for Serge to personally fix in place inside the contents of these two artistic formalisms, if not absent from his character.

I would argue that the combination of these two reflections constitutes space as a doubled-image, the image of an emergent 'modern' space as well as a postmodern one. This doubling may not be initially apparent to the reader as it requires knowledge of where and how the story ends. Serge begins life around the turn of the 20th century, surrounded by artifacts of its ecstatic sense of scientific rationality and technological innovation. Serge ends his life in a context that is seemingly both spatially and temporally distant (1920s Egypt) from where he begins, one which is a particularly regressive and yet synchronous double of this one, surrounded by the depthless images of hieroglyphics (a kind of refusal of words) and the invisible signals of transmitter towers, sending messages and hiding meaning. Serge is absent from this space, inasmuch as he has some sense of his lack of will within it. This lack of agency is illustrated in the opening of the second section of the novel, entitled "Chute".

While considering the answer to a military entrance-exam question about the angle of train tracks and the precautions necessary to avoid an accident, Serge uses the curve of his arm to visualize the curved track established in the problem; from this he envisages, in a moment of detached analysis, two trains heading in opposite directions along the same curved track:

He moves his head back, hoping that the extra surface view created by this action will reveal a switch, branch-line or siding into which one of the trains could be diverted – or, if not, at least a signal further back to warn each of the other's presence. Yet even as these things take shape in his imagination he realises that not only will they fail to prevent the collision, but it was they *themselves*, in their amalgam, who caused it in the first place: the catastrophe was hatched within the network, from among its nodes and relays, in its miles and miles of track, splitting and expanding as they run on beyond the scope of any one controlling vision; it was hatched by the network, at some distant point no longer capable of being pinned down but nonetheless decisive, so much so that ever since this point was passed – hours, days or even years ago – the collision's been inevitable, just a matter of time. (149)

In this quotation, Serge performs a speculative return to the moment when his caul is pulled back and his view of the world becomes unobstructed, he positions himself above the scene through visualization, he

recreates the space of the train track with his body in an attempt to view it in 'real' space and in that space to find the solution. Space is also, however, the problem: it is the tracks' expansion in space "beyond the scope of any one controlling vision" that allows Serge to identify the fault as born of the rail network itself. His initial head movements are microscopic allegorical iterations of the generalized movement towards technical detachment, indicated by the desired outcome: creating a wider and more complete view in order to locate those technical additions that might help the passengers avoid the impending catastrophe. And yet, Serge's imagination immediately abandons this hopeful notion when he realizes as his view widens that it is the entirety of the system itself that has caused the crash which was 'hatched within the network'. In other words, it is the invisible agency of the totality, the remainder of the shroud after it is removed from view, that determines the outcome of the problem, and not Serge himself; his desire to discover some way to avoid this collision reveals that his ideal absence from this geometric space serves as the context for his search for the solution. He cannot save the passengers, because their demise was written and conditioned by the world itself; his job is not to save them, but to decode how they might be saved by the system. His agency is denied by the overwhelming agency of the network itself; the answer he seeks is not to be conjured from his mind, but to be discovered in the lines and loops of the rail network. The scope of this absence of agency is re-iterated during Serge's first training flight, when from the observer's seat of his plane the narrator states that,

He looks down: as the landscape falls away, it flattens, voids itself of depth. Hills lose their height; roads lose their camber, bounce, the texture of their paving, and turn into marks across a map [...] Buildings, ditches, hedgerows turn and re-align themselves like parts of a machine, then shift and re-align themselves again as the line rotates back the other way, cogs and arms swivelling around an axis at whose centre Serge's own head sits [...] Beyond the town, the canal forms a dark line across the marsh; beyond that, the rim of shore is marked in white by waves that have become entirely static, as though no independent movement were permitted of the landscape anymore: all displacement and acceleration, all shifts and realignments *must* proceed from the machine... (155-56)

Serge's first flight reaffirms in the micro-scale of subjective experience the macro-scale principle elaborated through Serge's exams. The language used to describe the movements of the terrain is instructive: all references to movement are words whose connotations are unstable. "[A]s though no independent movement were permitted of the landscape anymore [...]"; the movement that is now tied to the machine is first described in linear or geometric terms, which then resolve into the terms 'displacement', 'acceleration', 'shifts' and 'realignments'. These terms split the meaning of the scene (and the path of the reading) by relating to both the imagery that confronts Serge and the meaning of that imagery at once. They reference themes of alienation, the acceleration of the Italian Futurists, the shifts

and realignments of class struggle. What makes this so instructive is Serge's response to this first training flight:

"How did you like it?"

"I liked it a lot," Serge replies. "It was just right."

"Just right?"

"Yes, sir: just how things should be" (156).

Serge understands this position in the sky as ideal, as how things 'should be', and therefore how they usually are not. This position is defined by an absence of agency (he is after all in the observer's seat; unlike the pilot, his job is to record and transmit, he has no control over the attitude or direction of the aircraft). This ideal state is a state of subjective detachment from the movements of and in space; movement in space is the determination of the machine, and this is a spatial condition that Serge idealizes because it detaches him from responsibility for both the success and failure of movements of space. This condition is ideal because it constitutes the final step in actualizing (returning to) the space of the caul, or the screen; it offers a certain distance between space and subject that allows the subject a grand view of space, without the fissure of individual agency or will that might discredit the 'reality' of the scene. The relation established is a detached but pleasant one. Not quite affective, it produces a sense of correctness, of propriety, as if this experience of space was a material analog of the transparency of information; as if through the machine Serge is able to relate to space 'correctly' (It is how he is "should" relate to it)¹⁶. This experience conforms to the dictates of the reality ethos: it performs the detachment of space and subjective agency, and in doing so seems to detach human concerns from material events unfolding in the world. Serge feels correct when it is the movements of machines that move things in the world, and in his eyes.

Swiss philosopher Yves Citton describes this refusal of responsibility in the ideologically positive terms of refusing the concept of failure. Through reference to Spinoza, Citton makes the following assertion: "Here again, however, it would be erroneous to speak directly in terms of *personal failure*: failures, no more than successes, are never simply "mine", but result from a *concretion of interfaces*. It is only insofar as I contribute to forming my own environment and that of others, i.e. insofar as I contribute to conditioning that which will condition acts to come, that my act can come under the category of failure. But from then on, it is a failure that is *always collective*" (Citton 4). Pointing out the dualism of Spinozist

¹⁶ There is a 'proper' and 'pleasing' way to relate to space found in McCarthy's novels. You are supposed to want to see it all, to write the Great Report.

agency in terms of the necessarily reciprocal development of the capacity to both affect and be affected, Citton is placing the subject both inside and outside of action or free will. For Citton, refusing failure in this way means refusing the guilt feelings of any failure to act, of failure to act in the proper fashion, because we cannot technically be both the beginning and ending of failure. He is effectively arguing that any increase in sensitivity equates to an increase in power to affect, and that subjecting art to the market forces of individual preference dilutes its capacity to increase sensitivity, because the market consists of a feedback-loop: “[B]y submitting artistic innovation to the rules of a market where the consumers’ preferences are more and more explicitly organized by the conditionings of fashions and the manipulations of advertising, our society imposes the slowness proper to the ways of diffusion of the underground on the development of its sensitivity” (“Failure” 6).

Instead of development we have re-iteration and reproduction. What we see in Serge is the non-affective, intellectual pleasure of the indifference at the heart of this spatial relation: Serge *prefers* to understand the world not in terms of individual agency or creativity but in terms of technology’s capacity to be the vector of that agency and creativity. The desires of the technical (manifest in the perceived independence of their movements) exceed Serge’s own desires to the point of replacing them; the creativity and agency of the technical exceeds Serge’s own agency and creativity in the novel. Though Citton’s philosophy implicitly values the humanist perspective by synthesizing power with the capacity to experience affect, the example of Serge, and to a certain extent of U. in *Satin Island* and the narrator of *Remainder*, suggests that this absence of guilt and responsibility actually leads to a kind of insensitive hedonism, agency and irresponsibility. More than just slowing down the development of affective sensitivity, I would argue that the space of postmodernity doubles and expands this sensitivity to the point of its disappearance. In the same way that sensitivity to Bergson’s notion of the ‘mechanical encrustation’ has disappeared in the face of the ubiquitous encrustation of communication technology, the development of sensitivity has been both irreversibly accelerated and irretrievably lost to communicative performance. The circular form of the contemporary system makes it impossible to escape the grip of this ‘development’; the market system both defies and encourages the development of sensitivity by endlessly deploying manipulative and affect-inducing symbols. In *Remainder*, the narrator seeks a return to the *feeling* authenticity precisely through his investment in and engagement with advanced capitalist financial markets. It is in this sense that a kind of sensitivity prompts U. in *Satin Island* to conspire against his corporate mission, to organize an intentional disruption of this capitalist market of cultural information in which he exists. The totalizing scope of the Great Report seduces these sensitivities, making U. question his part in this project, even causing him to think about it in terms of evil.

However, it only takes a short conversation with his lover Madison to dispel this fantasy of revolt and disruption: “[I]t isn’t revolutionaries and terrorists who make nuclear power plants melt and blow their tops, or electricity grids crash, or automated trading systems go all higgledy-piggledy and write their billions down to pennies in ten minutes – they do that all on their own” (*Satin Island* 129). Both Madison and U. come to tacitly acknowledge the dualism between affecting and being affected, and yet they reside inside that part of the dualism which privileges both lack of sensitivity and lack of agency. It is not as though Madison does not understand the feelings behind U.’s desire: she is merely already at the Spinozist end of things: she is saying yes, I’m sensitive to these same affects, but I *know* my place in the world (the reader finds out later that this certainty is a product of her being arrested and disciplined by Italian police during a demonstration). We might therefore rearrange Citton’s argument to say that advanced capitalist markets slow the development of sensitivities while they increase and increasingly value the distribution of information, knowledge and understanding. In other words, sensitivity is perhaps slowed because information is sped up, information which takes on an objective, material and detached form; a form that seems incapable of failure so long as it appears as what it says it is (information, objective, non-biased). As Citton suggests,

Now it becomes clearer how the spinozist conception of human agency can concern in the most direct manner the type of practices that we qualify in the 21st century as "artistic". Spinoza himself centred his description of human agency on the category of reason (ratio, intellectus), conceived as understanding things by their causes; humans individually as well as collectively will only achieve freedom to the extent that their acts are directed by an adequate knowledge of what causes the events on which their happiness or unhappiness depends. The receptivity in question here is that of the intellect, which must make itself as attentive as possible to the singular details of every situation, in order ceaselessly to refine its understanding of the hypercomplex causal relations that surround, constitute and condition us. ("Failure" 4)

In other words, if we are to operate on the basis of the dualism at play here, the Spinozist subject must understand him-/herself as both cause and effect; as both *sensitive* to cause/effect relations as well as understanding cause-effect relations. However, it seems possible to suggest through the example of U. and Madison that the problem with this theory is the potential mutual exclusivity of intellect and affect. After reacting to his feelings towards the Great Report, U. arrives at Madison’s understanding of the world and their place in it. Intellect follows from sensitivity because it acts as a kind of repressive mechanism: knowledge of reality relegates feelings or affects to secondary sources of information about the world. In the end, though it may be logical to want the power to affect the world, what that means is that sensitivity has correspondingly increased. However logical and powerful this sensitivity may be, the question that remains in a space defined by the art of disappearance is the following: is the power-sensitivity couplet actually *desirable* to the subject of the novels (the privileged white male subject)? The novels would seem

to argue in the opposite direction: the narrator of *Remainder* has the power to affect the world while being extremely sensitive not to human suffering or even his own pain, but to certain unexpected and uncalculated performances (independent seeming movements) of the world around him. It is precisely the automatic writing of the world, the objective irruption of something outside his plans that produce instances of this extreme sensitivity, eventually culminating into a series of comatose episodes. Sensitivity in this instance is a double-edged sword: it is thrilling, and it does bring the narrator into a space beyond the world wherein he is indifferent, inauthentic and detached. However, the recurrence of these intense affects is like the recurrence of periods in the text: they constitute momentary breaks in between sentences often brimming with indifference. I bring this up because, in the spatial context of postmodernity, an increased sensitivity is only sustainable in short bursts. Like U.'s dream about the black tarmac that both gives access to, and deletes, the scenes of history contained in the cobblestone mosaic of Paris streets, attention paid to "the singular details" of his dream results in brief glimpses of former scenes of heightened sensitivity (revolution) followed by the envelopment of this historical environment by the tarmac and reproduced store-fronts. This is a space with a specific relation to history; it asserts a depth of historical event and a movement of tracing and erasure at once. Images in the scene offer U. the depth of historical sensitivity, lost to him by time's passing and the irresistible momentum of the tarmac. Movement in the scene offers perhaps an even greater sense of depth: "The Tarmac ran on endlessly, [...] heading nowhere in particular, just gliding, on and on; on either side, at the periphery of my vision, coffee-chain concessions ran together, like the tarmac, in a smooth unbroken blur" (*Satin Island* 62). Movement seems to have access to the greatest depth of possibility in this scene, of being endless, reaching everywhere, even into the past. When describing the depth of Wilde's *De profundis*, de Man suggests that,

The gain in pathos is such as to make the depth of *De profundis* the explicit theme of the poem. Instead of being the infinite expanse, the openness of 'Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,' depth is now the enclosed space that, like the sound chamber of a violin, produces the inner vibration of emotion. We retrieve what was conspicuously absent from 'Correspondances,' the recurrent image of the subject's presence to itself as a spatial enclosure, room, tomb, or crypt in which the voice echoes as in a cave. (*The Rhetoric of Romanticism* 256)

For de Man, it is the pathos of the text that reveals its depths, which in turn reveals the figure of the individual as 'crypt', as an enclosed space which conditions emotion by the rebounding of "the subject's presence to itself" as a kind of voice. In U.'s dream this arrangement is present, but reversed. Instead of pathos we have a voice declaring the scene to be a non-dramatic, non-disastrous demonstration of "just the way it is" (*Satin Island* 62). As a result, what we have is an enclosed space

defined by the depth of movement and time made possible within it, but at the same time an enclosed space whose “inner vibration of emotion” seems to be the repetitive rhythm of fascinated indifference. There is an energy to McCarthy’s narration that defies this absence of affect or we might even say glorifies this pathological disinterest. To sustain either extreme or increasing levels of sensitivity is to be threatened with madness and the incapacity to continue to participate in the machinery of the space that the postmodern subject occupies. To measure and to feel are incommensurable modes of relating to reality in the late capitalist context, but they are made commensurable and indifferent through the form of the image or symbol (emojis, emoticons, etc., become like symbolic measurements of affect). After his disempowering conversation with Madison, U. describes what lies beyond the horizon of sensitivity through the example of the anthropologist (a figure whose work closely resembles the work of the subject confronted by hypercomplexity that Citton describes in the quote above):

Lévi-Strauss claims that, for the isolated tribe with whom an anthropologist makes first contact – the tribe who, after being studied, will be decimated by diseases to which they’ve no resistance, then (if they’ve survived) converted to Christianity and, eventually, conscripted into semi-bonded labour by mining and logging companies – for them, civilization represents no less than a cataclysm. This cataclysm, he says, is the true face of our culture – the one that’s turned away, from *us* at least. The order and harmony of the West, the laboratory in which structures of untold complexity are being cooked up, demand the emission of masses of noxious by-products. What the anthropologist encounters when he ventures beyond civilization’s perimeter fence is no more than its effluvia, its toxic fallout. The first thing we see as we travel round the world is our own filth, thrown into mankind’s face. (130)

In the same way that civilization is a catastrophe to the tribe, sensitivity (which is a product of the sea of transmission in which the subject finds themselves, exemplified in Serge’s family’s desire to be isolated from the sounds of transmission) is a (potential) catastrophe to the subject. As Citton alludes to in his article, the power/sensitivity couplet is not the commonplace understanding of power. With increased sensitivity comes increased awareness of the suffering of others, of the “noxious by-products” of capitalist civilization. As we saw with the example of Serge at his wireless set, the nature of space in *C* alludes to the possibility that the mass communication networks that bring this space into contact with Serge, actually synthesize ‘noxious by-products’ into the singular and positive model of information transmission; in other words, this space is the space of an indifferent and technical form (information) that allows for the synthesis of all forms (negative and positive) of reality. Perhaps at the same time (assuming affect and intellect are balanced in this ideal equation) this space produces an intellectual awareness of one’s own role in that process of production. This is the awareness of affects and truths that are without a doubt, for the sensitive/powerful subject, uncomfortable. By actively seeking, or performing, or participating in, the simulated separation of sensitivity from power, the subject establishes

a kind of power relation dependent upon insensitivity, a kind of insensitivity born of intellectual focus and technological deferral of responsibility. This is the insensitivity of Proust's reading room, or Serge's "silence box"; an enforced insensitivity owing to the overwhelming nature of space in the early 20th century.

Conclusion: Inescapable Reflections

The space of the novels is a conscious space, whose form is determined by the interplay of that which is below and above a surface (the surface of consciousness, the screen of a smart phone, the mirror). This surface reflects back what is above it, and obscures that which lies beneath. The space of the novel and the space of postmodernity are both demonstrably the space of a certain kind of interplay between fiction (the narratives and operations embedded in objects and machines) and reality (the apparent self-expression of those embedded narratives). It is both a space of consciousness, and a conscious space; it provides the framework for the performance of consciousness within a space which itself exhibits signs of consciousness. I have attempted to address this objective consciousness through various instances of autonomy in the novels and the notion of the "Automatic Writing of the World" in the work of Baudrillard. The space of the screen is defined by the tension produced between these two forms of automation, between the subjective manipulation and objective irruption of reality. Yet, this tension is shown to be vulnerable to resolution by the screen, to unification through the base form of information transmission.

I have attempted to demonstrate the reflective and superficial nature of this space by identifying moments in which the will of the character seems to have been superseded by the appearance or operation of screens, objects or machines (formalisms). Both McCarthy and Baudrillard indicate the nature and desirability of movement invested into the operation of machines; movement in space, and of space, flows from the operation of machines. The abdication of a character's will to the movements of a machine often appears in the form of an intellectual but affectively detached interest in the nature of that movement. Both Serge and U., for instance, are pacified and entranced by the movements of/in space brought to them by machines. The subject, as such, seems like a *willing* prisoner of a vast network of information relays. This sense of entrapment extends into the difficult relationship between cause and effect demonstrated by the narrator of *Remainder*. Unable to identify the nature of contemporary space as the cause of his traumatic incident (he is in any case not allowed to identify *any* cause), the narrator immediately invests in communication and technology. The space of the novel (contemporary space) necessitates this development inasmuch as this space is a technical double of subjective consciousness; it

appears to be both cause and effect, an appearance which reiterates the enforced absence of the subject from this equation.

Postmodern space is the space of the novel, and of the mirror people. This implies the existence of a particular threshold in societies organized around the transmission of information. When that threshold is reached, those societies turn *en masse* to narrative forms of information, rhetoric, ideology etc. This is the cycle of capitalism, whose own basis in money chains it to the fate of systems of information, meaning and value circulation. Any globalising tendency has to confront this double-edge: only through the broadest of transmission networks can any system or idea be global, but the experience of global information (as with Serge on his wireless set) overwhelms our capacity to take it all in (it becomes equated with dung). The last stretch of the race towards ontological totality overwhelms our capacity to absorb it all; but it is not a matter of a final hurdle tripped over. In fact, it seems more likely that our capacity *to understand* our reality is equal precisely to our desire for narratives and fiction (to end the attempt to understand with modes like these); the more space equates to information we have about its contents (space as formalism overlaid with the formalism of information: like the territory covered by the map in Borges' fairy tale), the more we feel compelled to fill the trace of emptiness that separates space and its contents. Reducing every signal to flatulence brings the transmission and expression of everything down to the automation and vulnerability of the digestive tract. In turn, it continues to represent the difference between pathos and indifference illustrated above.

With the digital we have more information about the world at large than ever before, and this "sea of transmission" (C 80) is the condition of contemporary space as well as that of the novels. The carnival mirror in which we once observed a distorted image of the world turning, and in doing so saw stories about ourselves and our place, has straightened. The image in the mirror now stands straighter and with more purpose than our bodies are able to. The slavish attendance we provide these terribly synchronous images with is astounding; the desirability of the reflection (*to be* the reflection) compels us to mimic them, to perform their likeness to the best of our ability, until we have become the reflection trying to keep pace with the real person on the other side of the mirror (or screen). This is perhaps a universal threshold; perhaps objects and subjects alike respond to the terrible straightening of their reflection and seek without knowing how to rid themselves of this intolerable and unsustainable symmetry? But with a difference: the object seeks escape from its servitude through malfunction, accident, fault, and failure. The capitalist subject seeks escape through the perceived effect of digital production and language insinuated into the broader stream of information about the world; just enough

to keep us at a distance from total ontological straightness, but far enough to entertain the risk of slipping into the narratives of extremist ideology. We are constantly being told what to think and feel, through a form of communication that ranges from explicit to invisible. Space in the novels is both the source of imperatives that drive the protagonists, and the condition of those imperatives already-resolved. It serves, therefore, to generate linguistic relations that infer the presence of the subject even as its formalism denies those relations any capacity to finally resolve understandings or appearances. In the following chapter, I will discuss the novels' temporality in terms of the formalisms that generate the aesthetics of passage within the context of the postmodern interval.

Chapter 2: Timelessness

Space in McCarthy's novels is the space of fascination and indifferent information circulation. The vastness and potential of this space confronts the subject (novelist, reader and character) with a seemingly interminable problem: when does the attempt to understand this fluctuating and fascinating field of information production come to an end? It is, perhaps, fair to call this space ironic when it is precisely the solution (information) to disorientation and metanarrative manipulation which ends up producing the very condition it is meant to eliminate. Does this make space of this kind ironic, in the de Manian sense that understanding the ironic is achieved only once one ceases to try to understand? If it does, it equally necessitates a temporality defined by the tension between continuity and the end. We might understand the contemporary space of the novels as a deconstructive space, or in Phiddian's terms, space structured by "an infinite and subjective play of signifiers" (675). However, this understanding of Phiddian's is actually the end of an instructive thought regarding the commonplace practice and understanding of literary deconstruction: "If everything truly were radically indeterminable, either we can not know this fact, or we can know *only* this fact, and all further discussion and interpretation are pointless. Even if this were true, nothing can follow it, except an infinite and subjective play of signifiers" (675, italics in text). Hence, if contemporary or novelistic space seems to be "an infinite and subjective play of signifiers", it is not because it *truly is* only the "infinite and subjective play of signifiers", but rather, according to Phiddian, because deconstructionists were politically motivated by the negative capacity of deconstruction to reveal unseen structures of misogyny, racism and classism (676). In simple terms, they found what they were looking for because they presumed it as an *a priori* condition of their search. As such, for Phiddian deconstruction is not, in its pure form (676), politically-oriented beyond a certain point: "It does not discover occult truths that have been repressed, masked by false consciousness, or distorted by logocentrism; it deconstructs. To tie it to particular political ends is an appropriation that requires a potent combination of blindness and insight (blindness concerning the discourse of the oppressed combined with insight into the false consciousness of oppression)" (676). What this line of reasoning is building towards for Phiddian is the suggestion that too often (politically motivated) deconstruction is *opposed* to the text it analyses, which serves to pre-determine the results of the analysis. Instead, he suggests that it be applied primarily to parody, because deconstruction is itself a parodic form confronting language as an *a priori* parodic form (673). Deconstruction works *with* parody as opposed to against it.

Irony (de Man) and parody (Phiddian): two forms of engaging with the logic of deconstruction in relation to time. The former problematizes the endlessness of textual or tropic interpretation, the latter laments the absence of this endlessness in academic and critical practice. This endlessness denies the political capacity of deconstruction, and temporarily allows the political capacity of parody (its disciplinary, doubling and comedic techniques) to replace it. For the notion of 'pure' deconstruction must surely mean the endless playing out of tropic turns and veerings and etymological interpretations, because to put an end to this process is to come to a conclusion in fact and in theory. If the act of deconstruction were truly endless, then it would in fact serve to detach its object from the world and treat this object/analysis pairing as isolated and autonomous. Which is to say, the cessation of deconstruction returns ultimately to its origin: some kind of dominant cultural understanding. Textual deconstruction is therefore not just *necessarily* political (in that it must come to an end, and that end is contained within material space that is inevitably meaningful and political) but also *positively* regressive (it must always return to its origin in secure meaning/understanding, or the problem of the ending). The temporal structure of narrative is therefore central to understanding deconstruction, in the sense that it is both endless (in theory) and finite (in fact).

There is therefore a particular temporal structure to any space conditioned by the superfluity of information and the logic of deconstruction. Time, like space, is structured as a double movement, or a double-image; the simultaneity of isolated moments (which end) within an undivided duration that defies human finitude (continuity). However, as the logic of deconstruction and the duality of space suggests, this double image has a tendency to hide beneath the surface of experience like a pulse: a background condition of life noticed only in moments of distraction, fascination or vulnerability. One such moment occurs in the opening scene of *Satin Island* at the airport in Turin:

To a soundtrack, incongruous, of looped, recorded messages and chimes, a fruit-machine's idle tune, snatches of other people's conversations and the staggered, intermittent hiss, quieter or louder, of steam-arms at espresso bars dotted about the terminal, a memory came to me: of free-wheeling down a hill as a child, riding my second bike. It wasn't a specific memory of riding down the hill on such-and-such a day: more a generic one in which hundreds of hill-descents, accumulated over two or three years, had all merged together. Where my first bike had had a footbrake, activated by the pedal, this one, fitted with a handbrake instead, allowed back-peddalling. This struck me, I remembered, as nothing short of miraculous. That you could move one way while rotating the crank in the opposite direction contravened my fledgling understanding not only of motion but also of time – as though this, too, could be laced with a contra-flow lodged right inside its core. (*Satin Island* 5)

It is important first to note that this memory of U.'s emerges out of the conditions of a soundtrack; an indirect and banal background condition of much contemporary commercial space (if we are talking about

music and automated announcements), but also a post-hoc addition to images in film and television. However, this particular soundtrack is both repetitive and incongruous, consisting as it does of a *mélange* of digital recordings, chimes, voices in different languages, and the aural effluvia of industrial/commercial coffee preparation. The space of the scene is flooded and made present by this soundtrack, which itself iterates the notion of the temporal condition of this space. The simultaneity of structural looping and ontological incongruity brings to mind Derrida's idea of iteration as that which "ties repetition to alterity" (qtd in Phiddian 673). Time in this context constitutes a flow that produces metalectically the experience of forward progress (a flow of self-referencing signs of passing time); time in this context is the process of converting repetition (of a sign of progress) into alterity or novelty, and understanding that novelty as the passage forward in time. The looping but incongruous soundtrack establishes a kind of atemporality within which the concepts of beginning and ending are lost: it is both infinitely continuous (looping) and infinitely segmented (iteration).

Like the image of the oil spill referred to in the first chapter, this memory is not temporally or spatially particular (like Benjamin's mechanically reproduced art object, it lacks historical and material particularity), but a product of a kind of temporal accumulation which dissolved the details of each ride into the allegorical memory-image of 'the ride'. Time is not particular in this moment, and yet the affect on display is temporally specific: it is a memory of what he *felt*. In other words, though this revelation was once miraculous, it is no longer; this affect, already experienced, now exists as image and sign. It is merely fascinating as a past event, merely a moment of the past rising through the soundtrack of the airport to occupy the screen of the present, as a consequence of an aesthetic chain of tropes considered by U. in the novel's first section (the Turin shroud, the banks of television screens in the airport, the concept of the 'hub', the soundtrack, the memory). And yet, this feeling overcomes the distance between past and present in the scene: "Whenever I hurtled, back-peddalling, down the hill, I'd feel exhilaration, but also vertigo – vertigo tinged with a slight nausea. It wasn't an entirely pleasant feeling. Recalling the manoeuvre now reproduced – in the crowded terminal, in my head and stomach – the same awkward sense of things being out of sync, out of whack" (5-6). Paolo Virno would describe this scene through Henri Bergson's theory of duration, in terms of the experience of a postmodern *déjà vu*. *Déjà vu* for Virno constitutes the experience of the "false recognition" (7) of "the untrammelled extension of memory's jurisdiction, of its dominion. Rather than limit itself to preserving traces of times past, memory also applies to actuality, to the evanescent 'now'." (7). Within this context, the 'memory of the present' constitutes not a memory of an actual moment of the past, but of the potential contained in the here and now (32); it exhibits the thrilling *potential* of the memory-image and the nauseating fall from potential to actual.

According to Virno, the “memory of the present” and the “false recognition” of déjà vu are in fact opposites: while the former,

[...] allows for the experience of the possible, ‘false recognition’ instead dissimulates or wipes away this experience. [...] With ‘false recognition’, conversely, the simultaneous presence of heterogeneous moments (the potential and the act) is camouflaged as the chronologically articulated repetition of a homogenous *act*; the *possible-‘now’* is passed off as a *real-‘back then’*; the present event seems like the hallucinatory verbatim copy of another event that took place in some previous period. (26)

U. is demonstrating in this scene the internalization of this ‘false recognition’, where the source of déjà vu is not the preternaturally perfect repetition of action and material space in the airport (that space seems to be repetition itself, when we consider the framing effect of the soundtrack and the looping news coverage on a variety of screens), but rather the poetic homogenization of the space of memory with that of conscious experience. In a sense, déjà vu is being deployed here not as a sudden temporal disorientation, but as a condition that was once, and continues to be, confronted by U. The ubiquity of images and text in postmodern culture constitutes the ubiquitous co-presence of past and present, in that the nature of the present seduces the past into play and this continuity is exhibited here between the young U. rushing downhill and the old U. in the airport.

Flying downhill while vainly pretending to arrest this descent is the condition being described here in this accumulated memory-image, and the experience of which is itself double: both exhilarating and nauseating. This memory, like the day-dream visions of eroticized oil and flowing Parisian tarmac, is not just a link to the past but also to the present; like a novel, this memory offers U. a view of the structure of his own perspective. This movement is, in effect, an analogy of the headlong rush to the end that occupies contemporary Western culture and the characters of the novels (or anything for which a true ending is repressed or structurally denied by the space it occupies); an uncontrolled race to the bottom characterised by the action of producing cycles of vain resistance. The sprint to the finish is characteristically both thrilling and nauseating: the runner is both as close as they’ve ever been to their goal, and at the same time the most depleted and exhausted they have ever been in the race. There is a simultaneous and untrammelled rush of energy *into* the fantasy of the end and *out of* the body (the material present). Though the text seems to imply that this feeling he gets once again is the result of the rise of this memory, the memory itself is called forth by the soundtrack of the scene, and hence the nausea acquires a connection to both. As such, it is equally possible that the reader might attribute to this memory the quality of an unexpected tropic turn, as if it were merely part of the soundtrack, which in the end

reveals something about the conditions within which it appears as opposed to the condition within which the memory originated.

What this memory image offers the reader is the illustration of subjective action disconnected from objective context; the pleasure of useless (but meaningful, affective) effort within the irresistible seduction of gravity. Time is acknowledged by U. to be a process of linear progression within which is contained a physical but symbolic force of “contra-flow”, something that necessarily affects this subjective relation to time without necessarily producing quantifiable physical consequences. Internal to time, as to language, is a force of contravention, a tendency to resist the narrative notion of the end through symbolic action. In the example above, this anti-temporal force is precisely the result of repetitive human effort or labour (U. as a child at the pedals of his bike). In a way, ‘pure’ deconstruction as Phiddian describes it is precisely a manifestation of this desire for the arresting of temporal progression; by keeping the act of deconstruction true to its premise of the infinite play of signs (and thus in a sense identical to itself in an ideal fashion), time itself becomes a series of autonomous but repetitive moments that are representative, like signs in this post-structuralist context, of nothing but their increasing self-evidence, their increasing actuality. Time itself acquires the character of a formalism, in that it contains a mechanism in the form of a “contra flow” which, like language, seems to undermine the linearity of this temporal formalism. However, this equally speaks to what McCarthy has called the “interval”. Back-peddalling down the hill becomes evocative of the attempts of the writer confronted by Google to achieve what Conrad describes as an essential quality of “great literary work”: “To arrest, for the space of a breath, the hands busy about the work of the earth, and compel men entranced by the sight of distant goals to glance for a moment at the surrounding vision of form and color, of sunshine and shadows; to make them pause for a look, for a sigh, for a smile – such is the aim, difficult and evanescent, and reserved for only a very few to achieve” (Conrad qtd in *Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* 110). The interval is thus understood as a kind of writerly holding back of resolution, to refuse resolution even to the end of writing as labour meant to “vandalize” (McCarthy, *Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays*, p. 111) itself. I argue here that the interval described by McCarthy (a temporal formalism characterised by the dualism of writerly production and destruction) constitutes not moments in his novels, but the entirety of the novels themselves. The interval as a temporal mode both is capable of refusing resolution as much as it is capable of accomplishing it (where its accomplishment equates to its own undoing, its self-vandalism).

Time in McCarthy’s novels is pregnant with this contra-flow described in the opening scenes of *Satin Island*, a concept which is reiterated throughout the novels in the form of fascination which seems

to locate the protagonist outside the flow of the present into a timeless space of reading and thinking (he is emotionally and intellectually distant from these objects which fascinate him; which means he is absent affect while his intellect is in high gear). This is a comedic temporality in the Bergsonian mode: broken up, segmented, slow-motion, isolated from flow or duration, affectless because it is intellectual, but without the theoretical (disciplinary) consequences of laughter or comedy. In terms of language, undecidability alludes to an incessant temporal direction (circularity in a closed space, infinite expansion in a void), whereas understanding puts an end to that metaleptic sense of progression as a continuous iteration of undecidable readings; ironically, understanding equates to a mechanism that attempts to resist the continuous flow of time.

Derek Attridge notes how, by the end of *Remainder*, “The narrator himself appears doomed to die; the narration, which had seemed to be an address to the reader from a particular moment in time, turns out to be an impossible one” (19). The time of narration is precisely an impossible time, it is perhaps the time of the “no space” of the coma which opens the narrator’s account. Attridge reveals a narrative conceit used by McCarthy in *C* and *Remainder* specifically: the first person past tense narrative whose narrator is always-already dead. Which is to say, the narration entails the atemporality of living death, of the already-dead, the position of the subject who has surpassed death, and is able to look back on their life and recount it. The temporality of this narrative position is “impossible” precisely because it is a formal expression of the contemporary mode of surpassing death. In the past tense of *Remainder* we get an initial suggestion of a future from which the story is recounted; but this past tense reveals itself as the future of a dead thing. The presence revealed by this impossible time is the presence of death, where all images are of the past, and all recounted acts were naught but acts of devotion calling for the ending that is longed for but ultimately unexpressed or experienced by the narrator (who is ostensibly dead but continues to narrate, or commentate, following the imperative of his coma visions). Unlike Conrad’s writer, the narrator of *Remainder* never seems to down tools; this is precisely because, as absent or dead subject, he is already inculcated into the unremitting flow of information and time. The narrative position of *Remainder* is conditioned by a deathly state (a lack of dimension) that it can allude to, but never express directly; this is a metaphysics of the novel that reiterates the logic of the narrator’s Settlement. This narrative limit is described by Arne De Boever through an analysis of *Remainder* as the limit of representation termed “realism’s collapse” (*Narrative Care: Biopolitics and the Novel* 140), a concept illustrated by author Heidi Julavits in an interview with BOMB magazine through the idea of realism’s reliance on the technique of flashback: “One of the reasons I fetishize [*Remainder*] is because it eliminates flashback entirely by establishing in the first paragraph that the protagonist has been hit on the head by

a heavy falling something, and he can't remember his life. No flashbacks allowed! No need- or rather, no ability- to write about the neglectful parents or the scarring divorce or the excruciating shame of learning to downhill as a teen. Tom McCarthy freed himself from the burden of having to represent his character's past in fiction" (25). I would argue that McCarthy's narrative perspective in *Remainder* reiterates the timeless position not just of writing itself, but of any subject caught trying to enunciate the coherence of the constantly flowing and shifting field of digital social aesthetics. Rather than laying down tools, in the fashion of Conrad, the narrator works to undermine the linearity of past-present-future by continuity and excess: he does not refuse to add his commentary, but rather allows his narration to undermine itself, to point to the possibility that the tools were downed long ago, and that he is trapped precisely in this temporal condition because no one any longer holds the tools that they must abandon. We get a sense of the dualism of this temporality in the images conjured by the narrator of *Remainder* as he sits contemplating and visualizing Africans:

I tried to picture them putting up houses from her housing kits, or sitting around in schools, or generally doing African things, like maybe riding bicycles or signing. I didn't know: I'd never been to Africa, any more than I – or Greg – had ever taken cocaine. I tried to visualize a grid around the earth, a kind of ribbed wire cage like on the champagne bottle, with lines of latitude and longitude that ran all over, linking one place to another, weaving, weaving the whole terrain into one smooth, articulated network, but I lost this image among disjointed escalator parts, the ones I'd seen at Green Park earlier. I wanted to feel genuinely warm towards these Africans, but I couldn't. Not that I felt cold or hostile. I just felt neutral. (36)

His thoughts are structured as a series of images which are the consequence of his efforts to conjure them; the scene consists first of a series of three images, linked together like a commercial for a charity or development NGO. There is an ambiguity to the language that suggests an ambiguity to his understanding of these images: they could equally be still or moving, dead or living, in the recorded and edited past or streamed in the real-time of the ostensible present. In this sense, they represent the image-as-memory-of-the-present which denies the potential of that which is represented. He then admits these are images based not in knowledge or experience but ignorance and distance or detachment. As a result, he visualizes a global grid that will reject or refuse that distance or detachment. In his mind this grid is a mode of unification, and yet at the same time, like the series of images that open this quotation, the grid is at once a series of separated, individuated spaces held together by his imagined framework: a series of discrete and isolated spaces. This truth of the "articulated network" is then reiterated in its descent into a series of disarticulated mechanical parts (whose unified function is the creation of a mechanical loop which allow us to ascend and descend effortlessly). There is the suggestion in this quotation that it is the stillness, the separateness, the mechanical-ness, the deadness of the images and the parts that deny the

character the connection he seeks. The narrator is perhaps reiterating, in his failure to produce a feeling of connection via a series of images, Roland Barthes' attitude towards the photograph:

Every photograph is a certificate of presence. This certificate is the new embarrassment which its invention has introduced into the family of images. The first photographs a man contemplated [...] must have seemed to him to resemble exactly certain paintings [...]; he knew, however, that he was nose to nose with a mutant [...]; his consciousness posited the object encountered outside of any analogy [...]: neither image nor reality, a new being, really: a reality one can no longer touch. (*Camera Lucida* 87)

For Barthes, the social power of the photograph is in its relation to time and death. Its relation to time develops out of what Barthes calls its "evidential force" (89), which leads him to suggest that, "From a phenomenological viewpoint, in the photograph, the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation" (89). The photograph confirms with scientific certainty 'what was', and as such, "the past is as certain as the present, what we see on paper is as certain as what we touch" (88). As in the work of Benjamin and Jameson cited previously, Barthes describes a confused temporality, confused by the very fragile material substrate (paper) that seems to best capture it in all its self-evidence. The temporality of the photograph in his work increasingly resembles the temporality of contemplation in the example from *Remainder* above. As Barthes puts it, "In the photograph, times' immobilization assumes only an excessive, monstrous mode: Time is engorged [...]. That the photograph is "modern", mingled with our noisiest everyday life, does not keep it from having an enigmatic point of inactuality, a strange stasis, the stasis of an arrest [...]" (91). Time as monstrous is time as uncannily frozen, which is at once the time of the Bergsonian mechanical encrustation and the time of the interval. Time is monstrous in this context because it exchanges the narrative potential of human memory for the technical cage of the image: time acquires the existence of a sign, equally capable of annihilating the link to its referent as it is capable of embedding that link in the evidentiary power of the image.

The photograph for Barthes is an articulation of a paradoxical duality of movement and stillness; modern in its speed, in what it captures, but at the same time an icon of stasis. This combination of speed and stasis are what define postmodernity (after-modernity) as the interval: the co-presence of the double imperative of refusing resolution and undermining resolution. This stasis is what the narrator of *Remainder* experiences as indifference or neutrality, it is the cause and consequence of his failure to feel the affect of connection or authenticity; it is the stasis of the moment where Serge in *C* realizes that the impending catastrophe is encoded in the system itself and that there is nothing he can do to stop it; it is the stasis evoked by Madison's anti-political-agency diatribe, and the temporality (and power structure) invoked by U.'s final refusal in *Satin Island*; it is the repetitive, forever-trapped-by-gravity, isolated time of

the orbiting cosmonaut in *Men in Space*. The interval constitutes the temporality of the novels in that they depict a setting where attempts at resolution collapse under their own weight, and attempts at refusing resolution invariably extend themselves tropically into modes of collapse or failure.

The central portion of *Men in Space* offers two faces of this duality through the religious icon that is central to the plot. The content of the icon is described as follows by Joost van Straten, a visiting Dutch gallerist:

The subject itself showed a human figure floating above a sea, beside a mountain. There was a building at the bottom of the image [...] But the oddest thing was the oval shape of the saint's golden halo: it was like a hole into which he was disappearing head first. All the rest of the image was flat and depthless and without background, kind of blandly omnipresent – but then suddenly you got this other dimension entirely: an absence, a slipping away. (120-21 italics in text)

In Joost's eyes, the icon represents a motif of disappearance; the rising disappearance of the saint and the simultaneously "bland" disappearance of height, depth, and context into the background of the image. It is an essentially modern reading of the icon in the manner of a photograph. Maňásek and his lover Klara are found discussing this same topic in the process of copying the icon:

"But *is* he floating upwards?" Ivan's peering forwards now, almost sniffing the painting. "Everything else seems to be going downwards. The trees point down. And these bird-men: they seem to be falling."

"That could be to emphasize the saint's ascendance."

"Or to complement his fall. You must admit he doesn't look too happy."

"They never do. His look is unusual, though, I'll grant you. His mouth is more widely open than you'd expect. He looks as though he were disappointed. As though there *were* no transcendence – and no pure spirit either, no God: he gets up into the sky, and all there is is this ellipse, this void, this slanting nothingness..."

"To me he just looks neutral. Deadpan. Disconnected. Maybe he's stoned? You want to smoke one?" (110-111)

These discussions (the first by letter, the second in person) demonstrates the reversibility of movement and stillness in the postmodern interval. If the figure is floating or ascending, he enters into the realm of the cosmonaut trapped in orbit (88), figured here in the expression of the saint, an expression indicating the fate of attempting transcendence as that of indifferent, detached circulation: space as a track, time as a circle (recalling the form of stadiums and race-tracks populating the early coma of *Remainder's* narrator). If the figure is in fact falling, the ostensible experience being represented (in this case figured explicitly in *Satin Island's* recurring image of the falling skydiver) is that of U.'s temporal contraflow: thrill combined with nausea, or in more physical terms, terminal velocity experienced as

suspension in a void. These figures represent, in other words, the temporality of the photographic image and its violence, “not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion it fills the sight by force, and because in it nothing can be refused or transformed [...]” (*Camera* 91). This violent stasis, this stillness, this all and nothing temporality, alludes to the dead or to a state of subjective non-existence, in the same way as the pastoral hillside landscape of Serge’s funeral daydreaming. It is, in a sense, the violence of the crypt that abstracts death and Sophie into an unending stream of transmissions; it is the violence of being reduced to an image (the violence of understanding).

Stasis in this context equates to a kind of stillness and spatial detachment produced by the flow of information. McCarthy’s interval is valuable precisely in its capacity to foster the potential of “insurrection” and fiction (*Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays*, p. 124), and yet he does not attribute a morality or ethics to this temporal structure. In the same way that Serge turns from religious narrative immediately to a base materialism and a kind of quiet desire to become machine, Barthes describes the photograph’s relation to death: “For Death must be somewhere in a society; if it is no longer (or less intensely) in religion, it must be elsewhere; perhaps in this image which produces Death while trying to preserve life” (*Camera* 92). And yet, death is not contained by still images in McCarthy’s novels. The end of icon-copier Ivan Maňásek comes precisely in the guise of a performative reiteration of the path of the saint he was painting. He is first over-heard by police delivering the copy to the gangsters who paid for it: “[Maňásek] wore some kind of robe, which, when he stepped into an elongated, oval-shaped zone of light cast on the pavement by a nearby street lamp, I could see was red” (*Men in Space* 136). Having accomplished his goal (the copy) he now assumes the guise of the saint and withdraws from the story. We then get passing references to the Munich air disaster of 1958 (140) and the fall of Icarus (143) from the mouths of those self-same gangsters, before reading once again in a letter from Joost: “A dreadful things has happened: Ivan Maňásek is dead. He fell from the windows of his atelier on New Year’s Eve and landed in the street below.” (150). The kind of death that has passed into the image is the death that lies at the end of circulation and re-circulation, at the end of production and re-production: it is the fatal fall from the heights of the ideal into the ultimate barrier of the material.

The logic of the temporality of the photograph is spun into an endless stream of images in the novels, both as poetic figures laced throughout the plot (oil spill, parachute, Robert De Niro, early filmstrips, codes) and as a structure of rhetorical figures in a seemingly endless series of tropic turns. That the photograph exists in a continuous series allows for the *animation* of stasis, and hence a visual or abstract refusal of it. This is exemplified in the film-strip-like structure of, for instance, U.’s erotic dreams

of tarmac, oil and blackness or when the narrator of *Remainder* dreams of his building inside a massive industrial conveyor belt. The photograph in this context is like the Carrefax crypt, sending death and Sophie out in all directions as signals; *signals confirming and performing an ideal objective existence from the secure position of the crypt of the image*. Setting into motion the very medium of stasis is what provides the appearance (evidence) of progress, refusal, conflict and change. Though the photograph/crypt may contain death, it denies us the uncanny, abject or strange element of our relation to death (because of its evidential rather than representational force) and as such establishes in the subject an erotic desire for the very thing that disappears (death as symbol, as not-present or past, as absence) through its ubiquity on global networks of transmission. As Barthes puts it, “the photograph is a certain but fugitive testimony; so that everything, today, prepares our race for this impotence: to be no longer able to conceive duration [...] The age of the photograph is also the age of revolutions, contestations, assassinations, explosions, in short, of impatiences, of everything which denies ripening” (*Camera* 93-4). When time becomes the unified time of the dead, true death, a true ending, acquires the erotic appeal of the ideal and final completion; death and reality merge in their erotic connection to the subject. Interval time is dead time in that the photograph causes death to disappear from society, and hence confounds any attempts to arrest the flow of time through literary refusal or even through self-sabotage: in either case the subject is already absent, and is as such attending its eventual return through the passage of time and the movements of the formalism.

The Temporality of Anticipation in *Remainder*

The temporality of McCarthy’s novels is contained within this paradoxical pairing of death and reality, in the confusing concreteness of living through anteriority, or the paradox of acquiring an interminable freedom through internment in passage. In what follows I will demonstrate that this temporality is embedded in the undecidable structure of the narration, undecidable in terms of its blurred border between waking life and dreaming, between material-affective presence and intellectual distance or absence. *Remainder* in particular is a narrative punctuated by moments of trance, coma, and detached intellection which indicate certain temporal conditions connected to the spatial conditions of postmodernity.

The opening of *Remainder* establishes time first as a condition of recovery which flows through the narrator, set into motion by an object or machine:

As I lay abject, supine, tractioned and trussed up, all sorts of tubes and wires pumping one thing into my body and sucking another out, electronic metronomes and bellows making this speed

up and that slow down, their beeping and rasping playing me, running through my useless flesh and organs like sea water through a sponge – during the months I spent in hospital, this word planted itself in me and grew. *Settlement*. (*Remainder* 6)

Like the conclusion drawn about spatial movements by Serge in *C*, the movement or passage of time in this extract is animated or manifested precisely in terms of the repetitive function of machines (formalisms of lines and movements) which both animate and flow through him, like time and its contra-flow. However, in this iteration of “contra-flow” it is the staticity of his body that is contrary to the speed, control and flow of time natural to the machines. In turn, this temporal conditioning is explicitly prior to his acceptance of the settlement and the funds promised by it. In order to appreciate the specificity of this temporal condition, we must understand the settlement in the sense of its being the terms through which the narrator is allowed to return to the society from which he was removed by the accident. As he puts it,

Later still, during the weeks I sat in bed able to think and talk but not yet to remember anything about myself, the Settlement was held up to me as a future strong enough to counterbalance my no-past, a moment that would make me better, whole, complete. When most of my past had eventually returned, in instalments, like back episodes of some mundane soap opera, but I still couldn't walk, the nurses said the settlement would put me back on my feet. (*Remainder* 6)

Now out of the temporality of the coma, the temporal coordination of machines and the eternal presence of his static body, the narrator reveals the problematic distinction between the comatose experience of time and the waking experience of time. Having woken from the coma, the narrator's lack of memory, the absence of his past, is relieved by the eventual return of this past in the *technical* form of a television series: “like back episodes of some mundane soap-opera” (6). The temporality of the coma is the temporality of repetitive machine processes keeping alive a static body lacking all the marks of life, and so is the temporality of waking life in this instance; the accident, previously described as an allegory of the trauma of modernity or reality, establishes a temporality of recovery and post-recovery that is ultimately identical but different (an iteration). There is only a difference in kind when it comes to physical recovery and anamnesis. It is not the medium (technology) but rather the particular form that this technology takes that creates a sense of iteration between these two quotations. While the first iteration of this temporality is explicitly inhuman in its presence, the second acquires the figure of a humanised double or clone of the first: the soap opera-as-past is a technical form with an explicitly human appearance (and content, given the genre's preference for high levels of interpersonal conflict and emotion). And yet, this series of moving images is accompanied in the extract above by the conditions and promise of the Settlement: the narrator's silence vis-à-vis the nature of the accident, and potential future promised by

the 8.5 million pounds. The past is experienced as a syndicated¹⁷ drama, the future structured by the combination of the power of capital and an enforced silence where the traumatic origin of that power is concerned. This temporal imagery seems to leave out the present, or temporal presence, and yet we get an immediate sense of what kind of 'presence' sits in between a soap-opera past and an as-yet-unimagined, but fecund, future:

Later, much later, the Settlement came through. I'd been out of hospital for four months, out of physiotherapy for one. I was living on my own on the edge of Brixton, in a one-bedroom flat. I wasn't working. [...] I didn't feel like going back to work. I didn't feel like doing anything. I wasn't doing anything. I passed my days in the most routine of activities: getting up and washing, walking to the shops and back again, reading the papers, sitting in my flat. Sometimes I watched TV, but not much; even that seemed too proactive. [...] Mostly I just sat in my flat, doing nothing. I was thirty years old. (*Remainder* 7)

The presence offered by this quotation is made up of the co-presence of the past and the future, the former as the "too proactive" act of watching TV, and the latter as the impending moment of becoming "better, whole, complete", as a kind of ending. The temporal character of this description is therefore that of the subject caught in the postmodern interval who is detachedly waiting for this final act of completion, an experience of temporality reinforced towards the end of the novel when the narrator describes the strange temporal state in which he and his re-enactors find themselves:

The day came, finally. Then again, perhaps it didn't. In one sense, the actions we'd decided to perform had all happened already. They'd happened countless times: in our rehearsals at the warehouse, in the robbery training drills the real bank staff and real security guards had been through, and in the thousands, maybe even millions of robberies that had taken place ever since mankind first started circulating currency. [...] In another sense, though, it had never happened – and, this being not a real event but a staged one, albeit one staged in a real venue, it never would. It would always be to come, held in a future hovering just beyond our reach. I and the other re-enactors were like a set of devotees to a religion not yet founded: patient, waiting for our deity to appear, to manifest himself to us, redeem us; and our gestures were all votive ones, acts of anticipation. (*Remainder* 259)

The event in this quotation is, like the oil spill in *Satin Island*, both always occurring and always about to occur for the first time. The interval is present here in the potential produced by this seemingly endless withholding. In turn, like the origins of the protagonist that are found in the settlement, he traces a line directly from his final re-enactment (a re-enactment of a scene that ostensibly announces the state of simulation in Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*) back to that which gave birth to his suspended interval subjectivity: money and exchange. Rather than viewing or understanding time from the third-person perspective, from the side, as a horizontal line extending into the dual aporia of origin and ending,

¹⁷ This term refers to popular television shows which have already ended, but are then replayed from beginning to ending over and over again, effectively filling air time and delivering new ads over the already-ended series.

what we get is the perspective of time as contained completely in a single point, suspended between absent poles (beginning and ending), as if time begins and ends with the perspective of the subject (from inside time, inside the line, the line appears as only a point, flowing out of the subject towards the past and the future at once, each of which is necessarily perceived inside the line as the same point sitting both before and behind the subject). Instead of inspiration (or the potential contained in Bergson's *durée*), what we see is a temporality of affectively detached anticipation. Acts of anticipation are the acts that spike the novel, in the form of trances, visions, comas and other conditions which problematize the linear and consistent temporality of historical and personal progression. They are, in other words, modes of anticipation which perform the absence of the conscious subject (or at least its confounding). In turn, the aesthetic quality of the narration is unbroken between these atemporal moments of fascination and the more mundane moments of narration. What we get as a reader is a temporality that is both continuous and repetitive (iterative). What we understand is a frozen temporality, frozen in a state of anticipation that is made active and set into motion by technical images and their transmission across the globe. Merve Sarıkaya-Şen describes a similarly "strange" temporality in *Remainder* as the temporality of the trauma victim whose repeated re-enactments of trauma are "unbound by traditional time and space constraints" (65). A state of anticipation implies a dual temporal focus on the presence of what is to come (in the anticipatory formalisms of symbol, sign, icon, etc.), and in focussing in this way both the past and the present becomes nothing but the medium upon which the future (eventually) arrives. Not just a state, anticipation is an attitude, an abstract *spatial performance* of a particular relation to time in all its guises. An attitude performed silently by the narrator from the outset of the novel, always aimed towards this anticipatory event which never precisely enunciates itself or is enunciated.

Remainder and Memory

Time in the novels, like space, is conditioned by the networked structure of contemporary society (the power of potential expression). Once the narrator of *Remainder* has decided that his desire is to re-build the space in which he last recalls feeling authentic, he confronts the problematic nature of that desire within such a social structure; in simple terms, he knows what he wants (an end to inauthenticity) but does not know how to go about it, or even communicate it to others (73), because he is trying to describe a will that is not truly his own: a will based on imperative as opposed to rational explanation. What he seems to want is to undermine his own attempts at resolution, but he cannot do so by stopping or refusing, he must instead commit fully to the repeated artistic-commercial ritual re-enactments that serve to demonstrate his demand for the absent ending, an absent and as-yet-unknown deity. He calls his lawyer

for advice, beginning by attempting to describe what he had failed to convey to a series of real estate agents and property developers:

I cut to the chase and started describing the red roofs with black cats on and the woman who cooked liver and the pianist and the motorbike enthusiast.

"This was a place you lived?" Marc Daubenay asked me.

"Yes," I said. "No. I mean, I remember it, but I can't place the memory."

"Well, as we argued," Daubenay said, "your memory was knocked off-kilter by the accident." He'd emphasized that in his pre-trial paper: how my memory had gone and only slowly returned – in instalments, like a soap opera, although he hadn't used that metaphor.

"Yes," I said, "but I don't think this was a straight memory. It was more complex. Maybe it was various things all rolled together: memories, imaginings, films, I don't know. But that bit's not important. What's important is that I remembered it, and it was crystal clear. Like in..."

I hesitated there. I didn't want to use the word "vision", in case Marc Daubenay got ideas.

"Hello? You still there?"

"Yes," I said. "I was saying it was crystal clear." (75-6)

Two important concepts are problematized in this quotation. First is the notion of the accident and its relation to the narrator's memory. Suddenly, with the use of the verb 'argued' the reader is confronted with the possibility that this issue with memory is a consequence of the legal Settlement rather than the accident; in other words, it is the condition of being re-admitted to society, rather than the condition that was caused by the accident. This loss of memory was previously portrayed as both a condition of the settlement *and* result of the accident, making the condition of the settlement seem redundant and somewhat humorous. However, in this extract this loss seems to be something like the stereotypical unnecessary neck-brace used by ambulance-chasing lawyers¹⁸; a *symbol* of victimhood and its violence, an aesthetic legal strategy used to trick the judge and jury, a necessary mark of victimhood, rather than an actual physical consequence of the accident. This legal argument places his memories (and his feeling of authenticity) in the realm of the soap-opera, in the realm of undecidable transmissions from outside to inside; in other words, this ostensibly places the subject's problem with memory both *before and after* the accident. What this means in terms of time is that the past conveyed through memory has been supplanted by the aesthetics of presence bound to the formalisms of mass communication and transmission.

¹⁸ This is a derogatory term used to describe untrustworthy lawyers who chase ambulances in order to convince their occupants to sue. A popular media trope of this type of lawyer's strategy would be to get their client to feign an injury by wearing a superfluous neck-brace.

There is thus the possibility that the settlement has *forced* him to view (and act as though) his authenticity and his past through *technical* forms of memory as opposed to human forms. Very much like U. in *Satin Island* who comes to see “*the* oil spill” rather than a particular oil spill, the narrator describes his building not as a memory, but as “various things all rolled together: memories, imaginings, films, I don’t know” (*Remainder* 76). There is a timelessness to this mix; that this image can be memory, film, imagination and ‘unknown’ implies that these things are mutually exchangeable for the narrator. If memories represent the presence of the past in his ‘vision’ of the building, imaginings and films straddle past and present, while the future is left to be represented by the implied absence of “I don’t know”. The narrator then reveals the silent co-presence or correspondence of human memory and technical images when he marks the connection between human memory (the subjectivity of the word ‘vision’, which he resists using) and technical image (“I was saying it was crystal clear”). Memory as a temporal *mélange*, like the film or digital image, is understood as a phenomenon or experience of crystal clarity. This is represented in an earlier scene when he asks Catherine, (right before rejecting her sexual advances) about the “most intense, clear memory” she has, “The one you can see even if you close your eyes – really see, clear as in a vision” (70):

It’s when I was a child. In Park Ridge, where I grew up, just outside Chicago. There were swings, these swings, on concrete, with a lawn around them. And there was a raised podium, a wooden deck, a few feet to the swings’ right. I don’t know what it was there for, this podium. Kids jumped on and off it. I did too. I was a kid, of course. But I can see the swings. Playing on them, swinging. . . (70-1)

It is interesting to note that, for the narrator, closing one’s eyes while trying to visualize a memory seems like an obstacle to overcome in the act of remembering, as if it were easier to see what you remember with your eyes open (implying that memories are more easily or clearly seen in the world rather than in one’s own mind). In this memory clarity assumes the form of two qualities: flatness and affectlessness. It reiterates another more recent memory Catherine had just recalled for the narrator: her trip to Oxford. She describes Oxford (from where she had just arrived) in terms that will be echoed in her recollection of the park and swing sets in Chicago. Oxford is described in terms which *perform* affect (“Oxford rocks!” she said. “It kicks ass!” [69]), which convey affect’s co-presence in Oxford with Catherine without describing any kind of specific internal feeling (aside from an undecidable degree and application of positivity). This might support Vermeulen’s idea that McCarthy deploys “weak affect” (*Contemporary Literature* 21) to the end of opening new paths for subjectivity in the novel, if not for the fact that these signs of weak affect are examples of well-established and banal language-use, and as such hardly novel or likely to open avenues for change (they continue the structure of the sign as a reference to itself, as alibi

for missing affect). Language, in other words, is shown here to contain and perform a kind of generalized, ambiguous positivity; the affect performed by these signs is 'weak' inasmuch as it seems inaccessible beyond the vague assertion of a colloquial and stultified positivity. She continues,

"It's so...The way the kids, the students, ride their bikes around town. They're so cute. So enraptured in being students..."

"So *what?*" I asked her as I brought the cups into the living room and set them down.

"Engrossed. In cycling around and talking to each other. I was thinking it'd be like great if you could shrink them down and keep them in a tank, like termites. You know those termite kits you get?"

"Yes," I said. "Yes I do." I looked at her with interest and surprise. I thought that what she had just said was funny and intelligent – the first interesting thing she'd said since she arrived in London.

"You could go look at it twice a day and go: *Oh look! See, that one's studying! That one's riding his bike!* And they don't even know you're watching them. It's just so..." [...]

"It's just so..." I repeated slowly, prompting her to find it.

"Cute!" she said again. "Just being students, doing what students do." (*Remainder* 69-70)

Like her memory of the swings, this more recent memory consists of a generalized and visual experience; it reiterates the sense that the narrator develops of Africans after hearing Catherine describe various international development efforts (the image of the bicycle links both scenes, but so does the flat performative generalization of both 'students' by Catherine and 'Africans' by the narrator). In another sense, it can be read as a kind of highlighting of the limit of a novel's language to convey emotion or affect; despite the clear presence of energy in Catherine's recollection, she is only present in the memory as a detached observer of an insect-like performance of subjectivity. It is the performance of this perspective that the narrator finds both intelligent and funny; a similar perspective is reiterated throughout *C*, from Serge's initial observations of the silk-producing moths of Versoie (34-37), to his observing sex behind the kinoscope screen, "The thing pulses like an insect's thorax" (75), to his final death-fantasy of an indifferent network of human-insect hybrids (375-86). The affectlessness and detachment that structure this kind of visually-dominant memory connects the narrators' conjuring of stock images of Africans (out of his memory or out of the world of images, we cannot be sure, as in this novel they appear very similarly) to these much more recent and ostensibly actual scenes. Affect finds itself relegated to the self-referential sign; in both cases, visual details dominate to the point of consuming the internal experience of affect and re-producing the allusion of affect in the form of the sign. This represents both the dominant form of social expression in postmodernity, and the difficulty of writing novels in a world where such banal forms

of linguistic representation dominate. Language is the formalism at play in these scenes, in its attempts to develop images into affective relations with Catherine as a subject; Catherine's positivity generates an equivalence between these images that attempts to establish her presence in her memory, but instead it demonstrates a certain sort of detachment through the performance of an uncritical positivity. In this context, what we get is a sort of visual perception that unifies past and future in the interminable present of the termite kit: the interminable present of the fetishized performance of both subject and language (both effectively becoming symbols). Each serves to inculcate past and present into a single perspective: that of performance.

There is a timelessness at play between these instances of memory, within which memory acquires the character of, and exchangeability with, technical images. Clarity as it appears above is a characteristic of both personal 'vision' and technical image, of the experience of observing a fixed space as opposed to actually placing oneself back inside the mind of a child at play. Clarity of memory is memory at a certain remove from the inconsistency of subjective experience (the remove of the detached observer enjoying their termite kit). The flatness of the memory is present in the images' lack of particularity; there is a spatial arrangement that is particular, but it lacks character or specificity *in time*, just like U.'s downhill bike ride. This accumulation of spatial arrangement overcomes the affective specificity of the memory as well. It seems odd that the clearest memory a person might have would not be associated with an equally clear feeling or affect, and yet, in the context of the narrator's Settlement (which seeks to legally establish his memories as both fiction and reality at once), memories acquire the clarity of the technical image while they lose their temporal particularity. The textuality of space and time in postmodernity, what I argue here alludes to the totality of McCarthy's interval, the reduction of their affect or experience to signs of that experience or affect, is exemplified here in the nature of memory and in the often dream-like nature of the narration (that the narrator describes Catherine as funny, but does not laugh, indicates the replacement of the description and experience of affect by its sign, its *enunciation* by the narrator to himself in the same manner as Catherine). The inconsistent intermingling of temporal states and the rough equivalence given between images, memories, films, etc., in the novels reflects, in my opinion, the nature of the postmodern interval as McCarthy understands it. McCarthy uses a short excerpt from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, in which Brutus contemplates the nature of the time after the decision to kill the dictator and the actual execution of the act. This time is described as "*Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream*" (*Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* 124) by Brutus, which McCarthy links directly with:

Tool-downage, implements (*instruments*) idle, waiting. In this most political of plays, this recess is called *council*, and man's being a *state . . . a little kingdom*. Yet what's truly revolutionary (in

all senses of the word) here is *not* the putative end-goal, the murder of the Emperor or overthrow of the state; it is the interim itself. *Then* is the time where insurrection lurks: *then* . . . *then* – he says it twice, the temporal qualifier doubles or accretes, as though to open up and ground its referent: the interim, interim-time. And that, as we know, is the time of fiction. (124)

The potential he describes in terms of insurrectional violence in the novels is drained away via the signs that are used as alibis for the absence of the affect that might engender such violence. The interval or interim is ripe for fiction and revolution, but what comes across above is the possibility that that fiction is expressed in terms of the affective detachment that might pacify revolution in advance, shown in its indifferent guise by the narrator and its more positive guise by Catherine. We might say that the language of memory in these examples is a language of immediacy or presence; the memory as a phenomenon is not defined by its place in time relative to the present and future, but rather by its spatial particularity and by its perception of subjectivity as an ongoing performance for the benefit of the observer (a performance whose description by the narrator tends towards the qualities of the formalism, and yet which retains the essential aesthetic quality of language). As Madison puts it in *Satin Island*, the revolution is “taking place already – it’s always been taking place. You just didn’t notice . . .” (*Satin Island* 129). There is almost no temporal dimension to these memories, aside from the fact that the text labels them ‘memories’; they are not positioned specifically within the timeline of these character’s lives, aside from being from before the scene in which they are described. Both Oxford and the park with its swing-set are observed from the same point in time, the present, and expressed through an accumulation of banal tropes and expectations. Both park and Oxford lack temporal and personal particularity, each is conveyed as if being viewed or reviewed on a screen, and it is precisely this impersonality of description that causes the narrator to think of her as intelligent and funny. Even in real time then, the narrator persists within this observational position, his language indicating a detachment that he finds both satisfying and seductive. The same kind of detached presence in the scene that is both wished for and performed by Catherine is performed by the narrator and the word ‘funny’. We might even argue that this sense of timelessness conveyed by the characters through their memories is reiterated in the novel as a whole, through the use of language as self-referential sign, but also in the sense of the novel itself lacking temporal marks or signifiers of historical particularity. Aside from the inclusion of cell phones, satellites and financial capitalism, the novel resists temporal location in anything other than what might be described as ‘the present’, making explicit for the reader the tendency for historical and temporal specificity to be consumed by the presence of advanced capitalist and communication technology. For Namwali-Serpell, this indifference between memory and image is articulated in the narrator’s re-enactments as the confusion or merging of art and reality (237), despite the narrator himself rejecting the

notion that he is an artist (the latter of which Namwali Serpell notes), or a metaphor of an artist. Namwali Serpell sees this merging through the deployment of a variety of terms that relate to artistic representation, or as she puts it:

Searching for his building, he recalls an art teacher's advice: "the building was already there, somewhere in London. What I needed to do was ease it out, chisel it loose" (93). A later conceit describes forensics as "a higher art": "the diagrams: with all their outlines, arrows and shaded blocks they look like abstract paintings, avant-garde ones from the last century" (185). His last re-enactment is as rehearsed and beautiful as a choreographed ballet (248). These artistic models of mimesis confuse the status of the re-enactments—are they real or art?—threatening to draw the novel into a stilled reflective staticity. (237)

What I would suggest is that rather than seeking to establish "a stilled reflective staticity", the narrator is in fact seeking the feeling that would confirm his merging with a pre-existent "stilled reflective staticity"; what he is missing is not that ontological state itself, but rather his feeling of connection to it, its promised affective serenity. The interval, however, is aligned with movements of anticipation as opposed to resolution. It is important to note that the examples used above to establish an opposition between art and reality are always-already attuned to the pressures of the reality ethos; far from representing the plastic forms of painting or sculpture, the character notes forensic diagrams, calling them a "higher art". In his perception of the forensic diagram the narrator establishes the duality of the formalism by merging the operational mode of the diagram with the artistic mode of modernism. They are "higher" than mainstream art because they have already succeeded in what the character himself desires: the merging of fiction and reality. They are symbols of the precession of this desire in the world of things, a desire which the narrator attempts to tap into or connect to (rather than produce) through his re-enactments. In other words, this merging which the narrator seems to desire is always-already in the past (as the allusion to the modernist avant-garde illustrates); like the subject of Baudrillard's post-modern society, he seeks only what he is already embedded in. The theme of re-enacting memories reinforces this notion; namely, that in order to acquire the feeling of having merged with the object world, the narrator must return to the origin of this social phenomena already-past, which in this case is the uniting of art and reality. However, we can equally assign this meaning to the accident that caused his reality to be reduced to the dream-world of the interval.

The Surpassed Coma

The first description of a comatose state in *Remainder* appears on the second page of the novel, after the narrator's attempts to relate the details of the accident. He describes being inside his coma as follows:

[...] during the months I spent in hospital, this word planted itself in me and grew. *Settlement*. It wormed its way into my coma: Greg must have talked about it to me when he came round to gawk at what the accident had left. As the no-space of complete oblivion stretched and contracted itself into gritty shapes and scenes in my unconscious head – sports stadiums mainly, running tracks and cricket pitches – over which a commentator’s voice was playing, inviting me to commentate along with him, the word entered the commentary: we’d discuss the Settlement, though neither of us knew what it entailed. (6)

In this comatose state, the narrator begins the novel in the position of the Oxford students or Africans mentioned previously: trapped in his body, like the walls of the termite kit, observed like some kind of zoo-animal by his friend Greg. And yet, the images of students and Africans are not static or comatose in their description, they are note-worthy because of how closely their performance cleaves to preconceived notions of these individuals, and to being in general. The coma itself acts like a container or crypt, into which the word “Settlement” is embedded and retransmitted through the aesthetics of circularity and the imperative to include his own commentary. Beginning with this word, the coma moves from a condition of immobility and “the no-space of complete oblivion” to an aesthetics of circular movement shadowed by persistent linguistic expression. This movement mimics the impending movement from his coma to this ‘settled’ existence outside the coma and then back; it symbolically precedes the path the narrator is to eventually take, with the Settlement allowing him to ‘surpass’ his coma while retaining the kind of affective and personal detachment of a person stuck inside the circular “no-space” and no time of a coma. Inside the coma signs do not seem to be self-reflective, instead, stadiums, running tracks and pitches all serve to signify, not their own self-evident reality but rather the implied repetition and circularity of sport and of language, alluding to the equally circular temporality of this void.

What we will find is that temporal distinctions between pre- and post-accident begin to fail when the condition of the coma is taken into consideration, despite the two clear temporal distinctions made in the text. The first distinction made between pre- and post-accident is made by the narrator when, after receiving news of his Settlement, he says that, “Other than that, I felt neutral. I’d been told the Settlement would put me back together, kick-start my new life, but I didn’t feel any different, fundamentally, from when before Marc Daubenay’s secretary had phoned” (10). His post-accident subjectivity is defined by two qualities: inauthenticity and neutrality or a lack of feeling, and though he was sold the idea that the settlement would return him to the living in the form of a ‘new life’, it seems to have failed to restore two crucial aspects of life as a subject: a sense of authenticity and affect. As if to reinforce the problematic nature of this temporal distinction of pre- and post-accident, these lines are immediately followed by what amounts to a momentary contradiction of this condition, a temporal shift backwards, *within this*

condition. Standing in the street after having spoken to his lawyer, the narrator remembers that the spot he is in was the setting for a police siege that he had witnessed two months before the accident:

I stopped right in the middle of the road [...] I paused for a while, I don't know how long, and stood in what had been the marksmen's sightlines. I turned the palms of my hands outwards, closed my eyes and thought about that memory of just before the accident, being buffeted by the wind. Remembering it sent a tingling from the top of my legs to my shoulders and right up into my neck. It lasted just for a moment – but while it did I felt not-neutral. I felt different, intense: both intense and serene at the same time. I remember feeling this way very well: standing there, passive, with my palms turned outwards, feeling intense and serene. (10-11)

In this scene, time is absent, as in moments of fascination, mechanical encrustation or orgasm, represented by the suspended temporality of, "I don't know how long". The atemporal and paradoxical affect of orgasm is perhaps most evident in the duality of "feeling intense and serene"; in a sense this moment is a moment of orgasmic connection to the world of things, a brief expression of pleasurable absence from the scene *in the scene*. The narrator occupies the space of a past event as a kind of nexus used to access a memory of what has ostensibly been erased from or re-coded in his consciousness, the non-neutrality of pre-accident existence. In a similar sense to Baudelaire which was discussed in the introduction, the narrator seems to see himself *feeling*; not participating in, performing, or engaging with the scene, but merely observing himself *being* in it. What this suggests is that his position in the present, a position reinforced by his thinking about Africans and later by memories shared by Catherine, is laid over the past like a transparency; the past is contained in the frame of its continued *presence*, in its real-time expression or transmission. The interval in effect *suspends* the narrator between an absent past (seduced into the present through technical mediums or formalisms) and an absent future (made present as a trace in the narrator's re-enactments). The fact that this police siege had occurred before the accident in the space he now occupied allows for the return, the re-experience, of pre-accident subjectivity in post-accident real-time. What he experiences in this space is not the siege itself, but the affect of pre-accident existence, in this case described as a combination of feelings of intensity and serenity. In a sense then, it is the experience of *the space itself* that the narrator is tapping into, as if the connection he seeks was always there to be accessed, a kind of momentary granting of his desire for unity with the network of objects. This is a scene of paradoxical simultaneity in every sense: temporal (pre-accident/accident/post-accident), spatial (space of the siege/space of the accident), and affective (serenity and intensity). It represents the reversibility of the extremes which are necessarily brought into contact by, which necessarily share the same time and space as, the concept of reality as suspension within an eternal present.

Timelessness and the Tale of Bourgeois Staticity

In the previous chapter I noted the spatial relevance of the recurring theme or image of the shroud, in particular in *C* and the opening of *Satin Island*. Given the all-encompassing nature of the shroud metaphor in these novels, we are able to draw conclusions about the temporality at play through this figure. The opening chapter of *Satin Island* establishes the spatial paradigm of the shroud of information, and through Frederic Jameson's work *The Antinomies of Realism* we might equally identify the marks of a certain temporality in the pages which follow the contemplation of the shroud. A confused temporality emerges almost immediately in the novel through a certain temporal undecidability. Section 1.2 of the first chapter, the section immediately following that of the shroud, begins with the following sentence: "One evening, a few years ago, I found myself stuck in Turin" (4). This seems to clearly imply that what follows will be a recounting of events that occurred in the past. Instead, the narration quickly veers into a tone that problematizes this temporal distinction between past and present, in particular through the use of the temporally ambiguous words "now" and "remembered". This ambiguity is first framed by the problem of narration as remembering: "[...] a memory came to me [...] This struck me, I remembered, as nothing short of miraculous. [...]" (5). If we begin with the premise that this entire novel is a recounting of memories of the events of a few years ago, the first thing to complicate matters are the words "This struck me, I remembered, [...]" (5). I previously asserted that this line indicates that this perception of the miraculous was inside the confines of the memory *internal* to the memory being recounted, in other words, that the child found this to be miraculous, not the adult in the airport. Ostensibly the act of recounting past events occurs in the present, even if the events themselves do not. However, because the 'it' he is referring to is a memory inside another memory, is it equally possible that this is inferring the present-tense of remembering remembering. This complication is reinforced once again in the line that ends this section (1.4): "Recalling the manoeuvre now reproduced – in the crowded terminal, in my head and stomach – the same awkward sense of things being out of sync, out of whack" (6). The act of remembering in the present creates a situation once again reflective of the subject's relation to the screen: having drawn the past into the present, U. now re-produces the feelings of being on the hill and the revelation it entailed. Like the television or YouTube viewer seeing from the perspective of the tight-rope walker and getting a sympathetic feeling of vertigo or anxiety, U.'s own memories seem as imminent in this scene as they were originally. In turn, the spatial figures of terminal and body add to the confusion, with the former being located specifically in the past, and the body (head and stomach) being both spatially and temporally continuous, or in other words, necessarily always *present*. That the novel establishes this confusion in the past tense represents a formal register of Virno's *déjà vu*, rearticulated through the digital ubiquity of

images (memories) of the present. Finally, the sense of being “out of sync” refers the reader back to the problem the narrator of *Remainder* elucidates in terms of feeling inauthentic or outside the flow of objective authenticity.

Hence, the second thing to complicate the temporality of the novels is the remembering of remembering. Adding memories of memories temporally confuses the narration, with this new memory possibly occurring to the narrator in the real time of his narration, but equally possibly occurring in the past-tense of what is being narrated. This level of confusion can be equated to the work of Donna J. Bridge and Ken A. Paller which suggests that every subsequent recalling of an event in fact recalls the previous attempt to recall the event; in other words, after the first time, each subsequent remembering is in fact an act of remembering the last time we remembered, inasmuch as the inevitable inaccuracies of the first recollection are not corrected by each subsequent recollection but further fictionalized (12144). Siegfried Kracauer develops a similar conclusion about memory in his work on art and photography. He begins his discussion of the effect of photography on capitalist society by positing a distinction between the photograph and memory. Memory is distinct from photography in terms of its relationship to history: while the photograph is equivalent to the practice of historicism in the sense that it proposes to provide a continuity of certainty, memory valorizes a kind of significance that is separate from what he calls a temporal and spatial “continuum” (50).

For Kracauer, art and photography are intimately connected in historical and contextual terms, and yet photography bears a distinct burden of reality that art intrinsically avoids. He suggests that, “[...] one may arrange the different media along a continuum according to the degree of the elusiveness of their properties. One pole of the continuum can be assigned, for instance, to painting, whose various modes of approach seem to be least dependent upon the fixed material and technical factors” (Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality 12). Hence photography finds itself on the opposite end of the spectrum where, unlike for painting, there exists an inescapable technical demand to make apparent that which has materially existed. Art then finds itself closely related to the properties of memory in its distinction from photography. Art and memory both attest to a 'truth' based on the significance of traits made apparent by a 'liberated consciousness', or, as Kracauer puts it, “All memory images are bound to be reduced to this type of image, which may rightly be called the last image, since it alone preserves the unforgettable. The last image of a person is that person's actual *history*. This history omits all characteristics and determinations that do not relate in a significant sense to the truth intended by a liberated consciousness” (*Mass Ornament* 51). In essence, the 'last memory image' leaves out those

characteristics which are specific to the photograph (the continuity of a fixed historical meaning or spatial/temporal conditions), while making apparent those characteristics which might act as signifiers of a liberated consciousness, what Kracauer calls “significant” or “crucial” traits (58). These traits manifest themselves in *Satin Island* as the looping reiteration of tropes and figures that typify McCarthy’s literary style. Thus, there exists in this framework two conflicting types of truth: a photographic truth based on spatial and temporal continuity, and the more artful truth of memory, which identifies as its standard the ‘last image’, an image which originates in a subjectivity that is liberated, and thus free from the constraints of a repetitive spatial or temporal continuity. In *Satin Island*, however, the dreamlike quality of art and memory is merged with the endless stream of technical images on the ubiquitous screens of the 21st century; every image in that context constitutes the ‘last image’ of the thing that is no longer located in the memory of the subject but in the lines of global communication. This is what leads to the temporally indistinct, almost Platonic, image of the oil spill and the bike ride in *Satin Island*, or the memory of the building in *Remainder*. This 21st century continuity will be shown in what follows to reflect the bourgeois ideology not just of history, but of literary realism as well.

If we are considering the temporality of this realism, we will be aided in that effort by a distinction between what has been called *récit* (what Frederic Jameson calls the ‘tale’) and the novel, an opposition developed by Ramon Fernandez in the 1920s, and one that became highly influential in French literary circles “from Gide to Sartre” (*The Antinomies of Realism* 16). Though Jameson argues that “very little is to be deduced from Fernandez’s opposition”, it does lead to André Gide’s subsequent “conceiving of the *récit* as the tale of unique personal existence or destiny (mostly, for him, a tale told in the first person)”, as opposed to the novel which “ought then to be a ‘*carrefour*,’ a crossroads or meeting place of multiple destinies, multiple *récits*” (*Antinomies* 17, italics in text). According to this schema, *Remainder, C* and *Satin Island* can clearly be categorized under the form of *récit*, as each focus on a single character and his ostensible existence and destiny. *Men in Space*, on the other hand, seems to clearly represent the only ‘novel’ in the sense described above, with its multiple characters, points of view, and endings.

What does this distinction suggest about the temporality of the *récit* and the novel? Jameson quotes Jean-Paul Sartre’s understanding of the “structural core of the *récit*” (18), through an analysis of the literary structure of Guy de Maupassant’s short stories, in an attempt to clarify the temporal distinction between these two forms:

The structure of his short stories is almost invariable; we are first presented with the audience, a brilliant and worldly society which has assembled in a drawing-room after dinner. It is night-time, which dispels fatigue and passion. The oppressed are asleep, as are the rebellious; the

world is enshrouded; the story unfolds. In a bubble of light surrounded by nothing there remains this elite which stays awake, completely occupied with its ceremonies. If there are intrigues or love or hate among its members, we are not told of them, and desire and anger are likewise stilled; these men and women are occupied in *preserving* their culture and manners and in *recognizing* each other by the rites of politeness. They represent order in its most exquisite form; the calm of night, the silence of the passions, everything concurs in symbolizing the stable bourgeoisie of the end of the century which thinks that nothing more will happen and which believes in the eternity of capitalist organization. (qtd in *Antinomies* 17-18)

The length of this quotation will be justified through the multiple and varied connections it produces to each of the texts categorized as récits above. However, before delving into these connections it is important to reiterate the nature of connection not just within the novels but between the novels and the theory being deployed in this analysis. What will become clear in what follows is that these connections between novels and theory tend to be aesthetic connections; in other words, novels and theory are often connected through the nodal images or figures which each text shares with the others. We might understand this as a kind of textual détournement of theoretical illustrations of ideas, or just as easily, as an aesthetic series of connections that depend entirely upon the reader. There is thus an undecidability at play in interpreting the meaning of this reiteration in the novels, beyond the initial interpretation of any connection at all. What I want to demonstrate below is that all four of McCarthy's novels demonstrate certain characteristics of this 'bourgeois' temporality, this narrated staticity described by Sartre. However, I will also suggest that McCarthy denies the separation of destinies, the individuality or particularity of destiny implied by both the form of the récit and the form of the novel by continually alluding metaphorically or allegorically not to a general destiny, but to its general absence in the mode of the interval.

The first shared quality of note is the initial introduction of "the audience"; in the three novels in question this introduction is achieved not through a list of names or physical descriptions, but through narrative structures and allegories. In *Satin Island* the audience is introduced, not as audience, but as "believers", "People", "we" and "us", in the opening fragment concerning the shroud of Turin (a collective tone which fades immediately from view in section 1.2): "this didn't trouble the *believers* [...] *People* need foundation myths [...] hallways that sweep *us* on towards the end-days [...] *we* see things shroudedly [...] like a fish approaching *us* through murky waters [...] if ciphered, *we* can say [...]" (3-4 italics added). Through the context of the shroud the audience is unified; reader, narrator, and the rest. In *Remainder*, the audience is immediately identified (as if they had demanded some answer of the narrator) as the reader through an explicit first-person perspective: "About the accident I can say very little [...] It's not that I'm being shy [...]" (5). In the case of *C*, this introduction is less clear, owing to the novel's particular

brand of narration. It presumes the silent attention and interest of the audience from the opening pages. Unlike both *Satin Island* and *Remainder*, *C* opens not with narrative contemplation or explanation but with clear description of an unfolding passage: “Dr. Learmont, newly appointed general practitioner for the districts of West Masedown and New Eliry, rocks and jolts on the front seat of a trap as it descends the lightly sloping path of Versoie House. He has sore buttocks: the seat’s hard and uncushioned. His companion, Mr. Dean of Hudson and Dean Deliveries [...] doesn’t seem to feel any discomfort [...] Between the doctor’s legs are wedged a brown case and a black inhaling apparatus” (3). The passive and visual tone of this opening is formally reiterated in the text by the film-strip-like perspective of the doctor from the moving position of the trap: “In his hand he holds a yellow piece of paper. He’s scrutinizing this, perplexed, as best he can. From time to time he glances up from it to peer through the curtain of conifers, which reveal, then quickly conceal again, glimpses of mown grass and rows of smaller trees with white fruit and green and red foliage.” (3). The allusion to the form of the film-strip-like-perception and its relation to dreams and fiction is identified by Derek Attridge when he notes that the botanical details¹⁹ of this opening section of the novel suggest that “this is an alternative world” (21). The doctor is confused and fascinated by the language of the note (a consequence of the technical failure of Serge’s father’s wireless transmitter) and looks up from this fascination to note the repeating appearance and disappearance of organized nature (mowed grass, trees arranged in rows), which recalls the alternately obstructive and revealing capacity of the Parisian alleys and serialized coffee-chain storefronts in U.’s tarmac day-dream. Dr. Learmont is therefore both the representation of the audience, and the content through which the audience is drawn into this passive state of observation; the aesthetics of the scene allude to the characteristic passivity of the film-strip audience, the detached consumption of the natural made mechanical. This passivity is made into a literal ritual repetition later in the novel when family friend Widsun gives the Carrefaxes the gift of a projecting kinoscope:

It becomes a ritual: as soon as supper’s over the bedsheet’s hauled up, chairs laid out and reel after reel fed into the mechanism. Serge carries the sounds of the celluloid strip running through its gate to bed with him, clicking and shuffling in his ears long after the machine’s been put to sleep, more real and present than the trickle of the stream or chirping grasshoppers. Each time Widsun racks up a new spool and starts running it, Serge feels a rush of anticipation

¹⁹ “These opening pages bristle with enigmas. The realistic manner is in tension with the sense that this is not quite our world: not just that no atlas will show West Masedown and New Eliry, but the flora appear not to obey our seasonal rules—the rose-bushes are flowerless, but there’s an abundance of chrysanthemums, irises, tulips and anemones, all apparently flowering together, while the ivy has started to turn red. The ‘poisonberries’ on the trellis are, Wikipedia tells me, a Caribbean fruit, though Dr. Learmont appears to recognise them; on the other hand, he can’t identify the rows of trees with ‘white fruit and green and red foliage’ (nor can I). Other signs that this is an alternative world are the consumption of ‘kenno’ (which appears to be a kind of cheesecake) and the use of charcoal on ‘cotton-backed ground glass’ instead of chalk on a blackboard.” (Attridge 21)

run through the cogs and sprockets of his body; his mind merges with the bright bedsheet, lit up with the possibilities of what might dance across it in the next few seconds, its outrageous metamorphoses as moths' and mosquitoes' shadows on the screen turn into jumping hairs and speckles, then the first unsteady pictures, empty linen springing into artificial life. (57)

It is this audience perspective that is embedded in the poetics of the opening pages of the novel delivered from the perspective of Dr. Learmont. This is the audience perspective defined in terms of anticipation and unification; in this case, the unification of the potential of the present with the photographic staticity of the past. The real and the natural (the plants perceived by Learmont, the stream and grasshoppers mentioned by Serge) is exceeded in reality by the film-strip quality of the narration and the moving images of the kinoscope, establishing therefore an 'alternative world': that of the dream-like interval of simulation.

The space of this temporality according to Sartre, is the bourgeois drawing room, that space where the wealthy retire after dinner to relax, consume and socialize. The antithesis of a space of labour, this is a space of excess made productive of suspension; Sartre describes this space not just in terms of what is interior but also in terms of the conditions that surround and insulate it. Inside the space, a bubble of light contains the absence of "fatigue and passion" (effects of time and space respectively) as it puts to bed the oppressed and rebellious; those who might resist that light. This space is lit up, but is also "enshrouded" in darkness (like U.'s "we", or Serge's post-funeral vision in *C*). The drawing room for Sartre stands as the ideological isolation chamber of the bourgeoisie, and as such produces a connection to Proust's reading room and to the airport in the opening of *Satin Island*. In the airport lounge where we find U., there is no mention of labour, or labourers (human labourers that is; the reader is notified of the labour of machines through the soundtrack of that space) until U. receives a text from his boss indicating a recent victory for the company. It is explicitly a space of 'lounging' as in Sartre's description, and yet simultaneously includes within it a component of anticipation, thanks to the event which has caused this delay, a flight which recalls the flight patterns demanded by *Remainder's* narrator in the closing pages of that novel:

[...] nothing was taking off [...] what was causing the delay was a rogue aeroplane, some kind of private jet, which, ignoring all instructions, was flying in idiosyncratic patterns over Southern England and the Channel [...] So I sat, like everyone else, sifting through airline- and airport-pages on my laptop for enlightenment about our quandary – then, when I'd exhausted these, clicking through news sites and social pages, meandering along corridors of trivia, generally killing time [...] (*Satin Island* 4).

This anticipation, however, quickly fades into the banality of "me and my screen, more screens: of other laptops, mobiles, televisions" (6), what we might call the bourgeois ceremonies of "killing time"; the

performance of collective anticipation expressed through a kind of affectless fascination with both potential explanation (for the delay) and with images of death (of the end of the interval of delay). As has been explored already, there is no affect present in this scene at the airport, except in the images on the screens, and the words of U.'s text messages: "My phone beeped and vibrated in my jacket. [...] It said: We won. [...] Good, I texted. The answer came more quickly this time: Good? That's it? I deliberated for a few seconds, then sent back a new message: Very good" (6-7). In other words, like the oppressed and the bourgeois in Sartre's example, the passions of resistance in this scene are sleeping beneath the cover of images and words which signify without representing. In Sartre's terms, this affective stillness equates to an absence of opposition to the narrative preservation of the bourgeois order, to the temporal stillness of a society that has reached its apogee and is now in the process merely of keeping everything still by looking backwards at the past as a "brief disturbance" which is now over for good thanks to its positive expression in the present. In de Maupassant, then, this stillness is possible at least partly thanks to the somnolence of the oppressed (tired from their daily labour). In McCarthy, the oppressed sleep the sleep of the interim, of images, which is another way of saying that they perform the lives of products of a dream-world. In McCarthy's lounge this stillness is achieved, not by separation, but by the particular spatial and temporal simultaneity of mass communicated images:

Around me and my screen, more screens: of other laptops, mobiles, televisions. These last screens had tickers scrolling across them, text whose subjects included the air delay in which I was caught up. Behind the tickers, news footage was running. One screen showed highlights of a football game. Another showed the aftermath of a marketplace truck bombing somewhere in the Middle East, the type of scene you always see in this kind of report: hysterical, blood-spattered people running about screaming. One of these people, a man who looked straight at the camera as he ran towards it, wore a T-shirt that showed Snoopy lounging on his kennel's roof, the word *Perfection* hovering in the air above him. (6)

Visual priority in this description is given to the ticker which is speaking to U.'s own position: that of delay and anticipation. It is only through that running commentary of self-interest and the artificially produced tension of professional sport that we confront the images of the rebellious or oppressed in the grip of actual violence, tension and competition. Far from representing the ideology of "nothing more will happen", the space of the airport lounge is a space where everything is happening all the time, where the bourgeois subject enjoys both isolation and a kind of electronically-ordered current of anticipation. Instead of being silenced by sleep, the oppressed in this scene are made to perform the affect that is missing from de Maupassant's scene, like Baudrillard's "monkeys that used to be dressed up in admiral's costumes [...]" (*Carnival* 5-6). Unlike Sartre's bourgeois, these bourgeois enjoy both their own ideology of stasis and preservation *and* the anticipatory ideology of the oppressed; rather than being calmed by

distance (from the outside) and spatial and historical (temporal) proximity to other bourgeois and their ceremonies, the space of the screen brings the oppressed into a prophylactic contact with the privileged, thereby preserving through a network of ordered connections the very thing that spatial disconnection achieves in Sartre's example. This bourgeois subject position is in a sense reflected in the center of that suffering and oppressed subject fascinating the audience in the airport: "One of these people, a man who looked straight at the camera as he ran towards it, wore a T-shirt that showed Snoopy lounging on his kennel's roof, the word *Perfection* hovering in the air above him" (6). The use of the term 'lounging' establishes a link between the performance of lounging in the airport and the act of a cartoon dog 'lounging' in two dimensions in the midst of blood, death and terror, thinking only "*Perfection*"; Snoopy is the icon or reflection of the subject who has escaped into two dimensions in the face of the universal violence of reality, who lounges in the two-dimensional safety of the screen while observing the terror, death and pain of the other side (which amounts to reiterated images of standardized violence). The attention drawn by Snoopy is, in effect, what constitutes the narrator watching himself watch from the detached position of the artfully disappeared. The 21st-century bourgeois subject, far from being excluded from this space of material oppression and affect, from accumulated historical violence, is rhetorically contained and reflected on the surface of that suffering, without knowing or acknowledging it through intentional differentiation and distantiation.

Hence, while Sartre's bourgeois enforce an ideological stillness through the spatial and temporal particularities of their social ceremonies, the bourgeois of *Satin Island* enforce a similar stillness, by gathering all spatial and temporal particularity to themselves all the time; the truth of that stillness is continually reiterated by the incessant deployment of images which simultaneously confirm and deny that desire for preservation. Like *Remainder's* narrator who chooses to apply irrational means to his search for his building, the bourgeois subject seeks stillness through a fascination with movement. The post-ness of this temporality, in the sense that preservation of the Sartrean type is only possible *after* the accomplishment of a particular destiny or class-domination (modernity), is played out in this scene in precisely the way memories are found to work in the study described above:

The effects of my chance exposure to this football game lingered after I'd read these [celebratory text messages]; so it seemed to me that Bayern Munich's striker, roaring with delight towards the stands, was rejoicing not for his own team and fans but rather for us; and it even seemed that the victim with the Snoopy shirt on, as he ran screaming towards the camera, was celebrating the news too: from his ruined market with its standard twisted metal and its blood, for us" (7 [brackets added]).

His memory of the football highlight he has just seen infects his experience of messages declaring (his first memory of) the company's victory. U.'s consumption of these various images (people and words) brings them all together to reveal what might be thought of as the reflective servility of images: like the "blacks" in Baudrillard's theoretical hegemony (*Carnival*), or the enslaved reflections in Borges' fairy-tale (*Perfect Crime*), these images serve only as the reflection of the privileged bourgeois subject, and through its eyes celebrate its victory over them by the familiarity of their performances, through the truth of their being the living containers of the subjectivity they are forced to perform. As such, their performance brings together space and time; the spatial and temporal conditions of the airport unify the spatial and temporal conditions of the bourgeois and the oppressed, it is distinct from the drawing room to the point of being oppositional. The latter weaponizes separation and differentiation, the former weaponizes the simulation of simultaneity and proximity; each tactic seeks preservation and staticity. However, the former is explicit in its intent and understanding (historical difference between groups), the latter, on the other hand, is in a perpetual state of looping reiteration and reproduction of the same, or in U.'s words "its standard twisted metal and its blood, for us" (7).

In de Maupassant, the oppressed must always wake up for work (the work of survival) the next day, even if the bourgeois silence the darkness with their ceremonies and impenetrable light. In McCarthy, however, there is no sleep for the oppressed, they are forever awake as images who perform for the privileged in the safety of their drawing rooms or lounges, even when their homes and markets and lives are at rest in darkness. Sartre does not offer much in terms of an opening for the oppressed in the space of de Maupassant's drawing room, which is what makes his notion of the existential novel opposed to this static temporality. As Jameson puts it, the temporality of the *récit* as Sartre describes it is, "[...] a time of the preterite, of events completed, over and done with, events that have entered history once and for all. [...] It omits, in other words, the present of time and turns the future into a "dead future" [...] Clearly enough, then, what Sartre calls upon the novel to re-establish is the open present of freedom, the present of an open, undecided future, where the die has not yet been cast [...]" (*Antinomies* 18). Another way to understand this temporal irrevocability, for Jameson, is through what he labels the necessity of an "unheard-of event or conjuncture [...] worthy of retelling over and over again" which Walter Benjamin calls "Warming your hands on a death that is told" (qtd in *Antinomies* 19). This stands for Jameson as a mark of the *récit* which persists through Sartre's critique, coming "to stand as a mark of one specific temporality which is separated off from another kind" causing the unheard-of event "to designate, not strangeness or uniqueness, but precisely this shock of a marked time brutally differentiating itself from ordinary existence" (20). In other words, both the mark of the *récit* (the re-enactment of death in words

or symbols) and the mark of Sartre's existential novel (an open-ended present not committed to either future or past) equate here to a temporality "brutally differentiating itself from ordinary existence" (20); which is to say, the temporality of Virno's *déjà vu*. What we will find in McCarthy's novels is that this death-mark serves to unite the *récit* and the novel form, alluding to an open-ended temporal presence which is defined not by the existential conditions of subjective refusal and commitment, but rather by the fascination and enjoyment of anticipating the eventual *presence* of death, a final completion that is continually teasing the protagonist with images of the moving death which is precisely the accomplished order kept static by bourgeois ceremonies of movement and fascination.

Moving Death and Anticipation

One of the first figures of this shifting temporality (the temporality of moving death) is the oil spill U. encounters immediately following the marketplace bombing scene:

Then the scene gave over to an oil spill that had happened somewhere in the world that morning, or the night before: aerial shots of a stricken offshore platform around which a large, dark water-flower was blooming; white-feathered sea birds, filmed from both air and ground, milling around on pristine, snowy shorelines, unaware of the black tide inching its way towards them; and, villain of the piece, shot by an underwater robot, a broken pipe gushing its endless load into the ocean. (*Satin Island* 6)

The timelessness of the oil spill is reiterated visually on the dust jacket of the 2015 Jonathan Cape edition of the novel, the front and back of which shows the multi-chromatic and ubiquitous "buffering circle" dripping with a viscous, shining black liquid. Though this is clearly an example of "Warming your hands on a death that is told" through the glow of the screen, within that 'death' is contained the poetics of a seemingly endlessly reproductive motion ("gushing its endless load"), added to the fact that we already know how this image eventually becomes representative of all oil spills that have happened and will happen. Hence, the open-endedness of the Sartrean present is overcome in this context by the ritual repetition of contemporary bourgeois ceremonies of light and information; rather than being open-ended, past and future are subsumed by the logic of circulation and understood simply as iterations or re-iterations of the same. The oil spill is destined, in other words, to continue forever, in the same way that the image of the oil spill is destined to refer precisely to this continuity (simultaneously backwards and forwards, regressive and progressive) and nothing else in this context. Serge asserts something similar about his sister Sophie and death when he suggests that they are merely signals "dispersed", but his father later clarifies this principle when he explains that,

“Under time of great stress or excitement,” he explains to Serge over a glass of port one afternoon in Sophie’s former lab, “the body emits an increased static charge [...]” “Ah! Well, these electrical disturbances, once created, outlive the moment of their generation. If they remain behind indefinitely, they’re detectable indefinitely, *n’est-ce pas?*” [...] “Wireless waves don’t die away [...] they linger, clogging up the air and causing interference [...]”. “Waves move around the globe, bouncing off the ionosphere. The ones that make their way through this [...] go on until they hit some object out in space, and [...] bounce off that. They all bounce back eventually, or loop round: everything returns.” (C 244-47)

Sophie and death’s dispersion as signals is thus representative of a poetics of abstraction *and* continuity, of transmission, reproduction, returning, rebounding, reversal and repetition. As Jameson suggests, Benjamin’s notion of the *récit* as the tale of the irrevocable or death is opposed not by the novel, but by the “dissolution of the memorable and the narratable [...] in the so-called reproducible work of art” in the work of Baudelaire in particular (*Antinomies* 20). However, in the examples above we can see that within McCarthy’s poetics death and the interminable present (presence) are not opposed but are in fact unified through the formalisms of technical transmission and image; McCarthy seems to acknowledge in the very structure and language of his novels the transcending of ontological paradigms based on the photograph or the film, in the same way that Baudrillard surpasses and extends the theory of Barthes, Kracauer and Benjamin. Jameson concludes through his investigation of the antinomies of realism that realism is best articulated as the opposition, not between *récit* and novel, but between “destiny versus the eternal present [...] Realism is a consequence of the tension between these two terms; to resolve the opposition either way would destroy it [...]” (*Antinomies* 26). However, the images above are defined precisely by their lack of tension between finality and continuity; in these images are contained the anticipation of finality within the poetics of continuity, a unity which produces affectless fascination rather than tension. Destiny, rather than opposing continuity, finds its voice in the images of movement, circularity and continuity which dominate the novels. However, this is perhaps problematized when, driving to a museum with a friend, U. describes a scene of stillness in terms that seem to reverse this initial arrangement: “The box was sliding fast, and the arm was swinging fast, and we were driving fast as well; and it appeared, just for a moment, that the box, though hurtling along the moving arm, was staying quite still, rooted to a single spot of air. But only from the speeding car, there on the bridge” (*Satin Island* 100). The unity of this initial figure (movement containing or effecting stillness) is reinforced when it is reversed: when stillness gets interpreted as the consequence of movement or a unity of movements. This reversal is reinforced by the end of the next paragraph, when U. once again remembers remembering being fascinated by a particular object in the museum he is going to visit:

It wasn’t, properly speaking, an item: just a lump of some black substance, all unformed, whose rugby ball-sized mass consisted of no more than tubers and protuberances knotted and gnarled

together every which way. It's *caoutchouc*, Claudia had said, seeing me staring at it: rubber, in its raw form. Now, looking through the window at the bulbous clouds that, once again, were slightly smudged, I thought of this *caoutchouc*; then of Petr's cancer; then, once more, of spilled oil. (101)

This raw rubber is an icon of stilled movement, its shape describing the movement of the anarchic and liberated growth of cancer within the stillness of its form; in turn, it draws U.'s thoughts to the movement of cancer and to the movement of spilled oil. Each their own version of U. warming his hands on images of death, they equally contain the particular movement of the present, described earlier in terms of the movements of cancer:

Say each cancer-cell was like a coin – a certain type, from a specific period, with an exact denomination – well, iodine is trained to spot this coin and melt it down, take it out of circulation [...] say one of these coins is degraded, or a little different, through some quirk of the mint [...] then the iodine can't recognize it, since these variations haven't been included in its recognition software [...] So the coin, the cancer-cell, not only stays in circulation; it sets up its own mint and prints new copies of itself, each one corrupt, unrecognizable as well [...] It's a systems problem, Petr said. If we had a better database, then I'd be out of danger. (52)

This reversibility is epitomized and symbolized in the end of *Remainder* when the narrator is arranging the details of his final scene in the sky above London with the pilot of his private jet:

"Don't worry," I told him. "Don't worry at all. I won't let us die. I just want to keep the sequence in place." [...] "Where do you want to go?" [...] "Nowhere. Just keep doing this." "Doing what?" he asked. "Turning back, then turning out. Then turning back again. The way we're doing it right now. [...] Just keep on. The same pattern. It will all be fine." I looked out the window again. I felt really happy." (*Remainder* 284)

Death or destiny seem at first to be refused within the motions and poetics of infinite circulation; it seems to be separated and hence opposed to this pattern. And yet, the happiness the narrator finds in this pattern is precisely because death is contained as *a potential consequence* (he has made the conditions of the end, he has made the end possible *to experience*). As the narrator enjoys the view from the sky, he reiterates this lack of tension as a (present) lack of destiny:

Eventually the sun would set for ever – burn out, *pop*, extinguish – and the universe would run down like a Fisher Price toy whose spring has unwound to its very end. Then there'd be no more music, no more loops. Or maybe, before that, we'd just run out of fuel. For now, though, the clouds tilted and the weightlessness set in once more as we banked, turning, heading back, again. (284)

Death is, in other words, not opposed by circularity but anticipated by the very form of the pattern of movement itself, contained by it as it transmits this anticipation to the audience.

This same theme is reiterated throughout *Satin Island* in images of movement which fascinate U: from the banks of screens in the airport to the film of the roller-bladers which inspire (infect) his dream

about the post-revolutionary black tarmac of Paris streets, he finds himself consistently engaged by images of movement and traffic. The first of these double-images of movement and stillness is the fish of the opening paragraph of the novel: a symbol of devoted anticipation (Christ) and infinity at once, it combines these meanings when it becomes “an image looming into view from noxious liquid in a darkroom, when it begins to coalesce into a figure that’s discernible, if ciphered, we can say: *This is it, stirring, looming*, even if it isn’t really, if it’s all just ink-blots” (*Satin Island* 4). The temporal aspect of this dualism of movement and death is necessarily undecidable; it represents the simultaneous about-to-happen and already-happened tense of the eternal present, or of what has been engaged with here as the interval or interim. This is exemplified a few paragraphs later when a Skype conversation with his lover Madison leaves U. staring at his laptop screen:

Her face froze in mid-sentence too. Its mouth was open in an asymmetric, drooly kind of way, as though she’d lost control of its muscles following a stroke; her eyes had rolled upwards, so the pupils were half-hidden by the lids. A little circle span in front of her, to denote buffering. My screen stayed that way for a long, long time, while I gazed at it, waiting for the buffering to pass. It didn’t: instead, a *Call Ended* message eventually replaced both face and circle. (8-9)

A frozen screen and a buffering circle come to signify the eternal present and destiny (respectively) in this instance. The key however, is how this combination of meanings produces the affect of time for the character. We know that U. leaves the airport “in the small hours of the morning” (11), but because no particular temporality governs the commonplace action of the airport (newsreels, coffee and conversations), we really have no clear way of determining how long he ultimately spent waiting for his flight. Hence, we have no way of knowing how long “a long, long time” might be; these words indicate instead the affect of time: *it felt like an eternity*. If we return to the Christ metaphor, watching the buffering circle becomes praying silently for Armageddon; or if we return to the fish inside the shroud metaphor, praying silently for the image to emerge from the “noxious liquid in a darkroom”, a darkroom that encompasses in this context the space of postmodernity (the darkness of de Maupassant’s proletarian night). This is a poetics of a temporality of anticipation, a state of anticipation which has consumed and is consuming its own destiny, in the dream-like form of recycled and re-iterated images of death (Brutus’ self-conscious musing given over to the expressive formalism of the screen). Anticipating connection with Madison and the restoration of the resolution of her image, U. waits patiently until an automated message indicates that he will have to keep on waiting in real time. This is a poetics echoed in *Remainder*, when in the paragraphs following the narrator’s description of his actions as “votive ones, acts of anticipation” (259), we get a similarly photographic metaphor of an anticipated emergence:

I'd heard them over and over, spoken in exactly the same tone, at the same speed, volume and pitch – but now the words were different. During our rehearsals, they'd been accurate – accurate in that we'd had the replica van turn up and park in the replica road as the re-enactor practised speaking them. Now, though, they were more than accurate: they were *true*. The van – the real van with real guards inside – was arriving, pulling into the real stump-road and parking. It had turned up of its own accord, and turned the words into the truest ever spoken. The van did more than turn up: it emerged – emerged into the scene, like a creature emerging from a cave or like a stain, a mark, an image emerging across photographic paper when it's dunked in liquid. It emerged: started out small, then grew, and then was big and there – right there, where it was meant to be. I watched it, utterly fixated. (261-2)

The capacity of re-enactment and repetition in this excerpt is found in the power to draw the fish closer, to bring the narrator closer to some recognizable “form and resolution” (*Satin Island* 3) which in turn allows him to think, like Serge in *C*, that this was “just how things should be” (*C* 156). Serge and the narrator of *Remainder* are linked through their seduction by seemingly autonomous movements, movements of the world that seem to flow not from them but from the world as it exists independently of them. Like U. in *Satin Island*, these two characters share a fascination with automated, inhuman movements, movements seemingly detached from their will or understanding (the latter in particular relation to the narrator of *Remainder*). What is it that fascinates them so? The above quotation constitutes the first moments of the final re-enactment in *Remainder*: the bank robbery. Baudrillard's fake bank robbery metaphor, for instance, emphasizes the inevitable failure to ‘fake’ the robbery and the irrevocable domination of the fictional by the real:

You won't be able to do it: the network of artificial signs will become inextricably mixed up with the real elements [...] in short, you will immediately find yourself once again, without wishing it, in the real, one of whose functions is precisely to devour any attempt at simulation, to reduce everything to the real – that is, to the established order itself, well before institutions and justice come into play. (*Simulacra* 20)

In Baudrillard's example the perpetrators' goal is precisely a fictional act, a performance that stays just a performance, which marks out the difference between stage and audience. However, in the examples of the narrator of *Remainder* and Serge in *C*, what we find instead is an explicit and implicit desire (respectively) for precisely the unification that the fakers of Baudrillard's metaphor seek to avoid. It is precisely the immanence and impact of the ‘real’ that the narrator sees emerge “right where it was meant to be” (262), precisely that emergence which constitutes an aesthetic proximity to the authenticity which he has been searching for throughout the novel (the authenticity of the film star emerging from the “noxious liquid” of U.'s darkroom of late capitalist culture). Serge, on the other hand, seems to have less of a clear idea of what he wants or why, or what it means to want to be merged with machines; in any case, it is precisely the emergence of the independent movement of the world that makes him feel correct. It is, in other words, precisely the combination of death or stillness with an aesthetics of movement which

gives him this sense of appropriate or natural unity, and which represent the dual imperatives of the bourgeois interval.

This anticipation of instances of emergence is alluded to by Umberto Eco in terms that are similar to Baudrillard's but which constitute a difference that I believe is revealed in *Remainder's* bank robbery scene:

Constructing a full-scale model of the Oval Office (using the same materials, the same colours, but with everything obviously more polished, shinier, protected against deterioration) means that for the historical information to be absorbed, it has to assume the aspect of a reincarnation. To speak of things that one wants to connote as real, these things must seem real. The 'completely real' becomes identified with the 'completely fake.' Absolute unreality is offered as real presence. The aim of the reconstructed Oval Office is to supply a 'sign' that will then be forgotten as such: The sign aims to be the thing, to abolish the distinction of the reference, the mechanism of replacement. Not the image of the thing, but its plaster cast. Its double, in other words. (*Travels in Hyperreality: Essays 7*)

This is Eco's version of a sign that signifies nothing but itself, or its own self-evidence. He describes re-enactment, or reincarnation, as a postmodern mode of absorbing "historical information", effectively suggesting that in postmodernity only the "completely fake" can take the place of the "completely real". Though this schema relies on the same notion of the sign replacing the thing referred-to relied upon by post-structuralism, there is a fundamental difference here between Eco's and Baudrillard's conceptions of the mechanism that draws the real into being. For Eco, this is a mode of replacement. For Baudrillard it is less straight-forward; in his schema, the real is never replaced or consumed by fiction, but rather the reverse: the real always consumes and makes productive any attempt at fakery or fiction. Whereas in Eco it is the 'reincarnation' that holds power over the real, for Baudrillard it is the real which dominates the evil of fakery in the form of Bataille's "good"; the real makes any attempts to oppose it (fake it) into an opportunity for its own growth or expansion. This mode of growth is represented in the reversibility of movement and stillness, especially in the cancer imagery previously mentioned. In temporal and literary terms, a tension or a potential for tension persists within Eco's arrangement, through the maintenance of an ostensible difference between the real and the fake, through the chance that the oppressed of Sartre's scene wake up to this manipulation of reality elucidated as a kind of violent domination as opposed to the circularity of consumption. As Baudrillard says about the Situationist spectacle, so might we say about Eco's vision: it retains in the language used a sense of recognizable alienation, it presupposes a gulf between real and fake that constitutes a space that is not "complete", an empty space of possible conscious resistance. In simulation that gulf is forever in the process of being consumed and filled by the real.

Conclusion: Buffering Temporal Alienation

It is not the poetics of an individual subject's particular destiny contained in these moments of movement and frozen movement, but rather a general destiny all of things contained within and conditioned by the time and space of the dispersed signal, of death contained within the movement of life, value and information. The time of the interval is precisely the mode of time that keeps destiny, or the idea of the end, tied to the instability of fiction and the formalisms that convey fiction in contemporary Western society. Time in this context acquires the character of a feeling rather than a condition; a feeling that is both provided for and denied by the endless stream of images which constitute the structure of this space. According to Peter Boxall, through 21st-century novels we might understand this feeling of time as a feeling of lateness or even the vulnerability of age: "There is, then, a wide sweep of contemporary writing that registers a kind of late untimeliness, and which responds by producing forms with which to explore a discordance between newly passing time and the expired narratives with which we have made time readable" ("Fictional Time" 701). Boxall suggest specifically that this time acquires the character of "posthumousness", or that the passage into the 21st century meant that the subject of the novel moves "into a life that outlives itself, that persists beyond its own death" (701). Boxall is articulating the passage of the novel into the 21st century as a movement from a modern (linear) temporality to that to the kind of simultaneous (circular) temporality of postmodernity elaborated here. However, I would suggest that this proposed difference is ideological rather than historical, aligning therefore with McCarthy's own assertion that postmodern aesthetic concerns go all the way back to Cervantes (Alizart). What I have argued here is that in McCarthy's novels this temporality is both contemporary and original to the literary form; it is in a sense the temporality of the *récit* (a term intending to reflect the basic structure of storytelling) persisting beyond its "death" in the novel form (reflecting Jameson's use of these terms in *Antinomies of Realism*). If we recall the language of Sartre's critique of de Maupassant, we might get a better sense of Boxall's position. For instance, Boxall describes how the temporality of Don DeLillo's 21st-century fiction might act as a mode of providing access to a temporality that is distinct from what came before it:

[...] both novels contain powerful undercurrents that pull against such historical inevitability, opening pockets of dark, unbound time, time which remains unlit by the luster of brave age, unnavigable and uncorralled. [...] In these novels, time is once more "set free from whatever binds it" (*Americana* 349), but now we have no older paternal incarnation against which to pit such unbound energy, no millennial limit-horizon toward which to direct our historical longings or refusals. (688-90)

We might say then that Boxall identifies that there persists a remainder of undecidability, of evil, of uncontrolled time within the temporality of 21st-century fiction. In other words, confronting this 'unbound time', time not conditioned by the limits of previous temporal structures or narratives, is a situation both pregnant with the potential for re-imagining temporality in historical terms (reasserting limits) and with the possibility of detached continuity. Boxall identifies the open-endedness of the Sartrean novel in the temporal terms of "unbound time", while at the same time admitting that the "paternal incarnation" of de Maupassant's narrator, the bourgeois enunciator of the limit-horizon towards which we, "direct our historical longings or refusals" (690), now seems to be absent. The difference between our readings can be summarized through the following quotation where Boxall identifies the temporality sought after by the narrator of *Remainder*: "In all of these writers, posthumousness is the mark of a historical disorientation, in which the late time of the twentieth century "lingers on," persisting as a specter in the midst of a young time which is now, as Tom McCarthy puts it in his novel *Remainder* (2007), "differently weighted" (135)" (701-2). Like the specter of a communal trauma, 20th century time persists into the 21st century. Here we can see the distinction between the posthumous temporality of the 20th century and the "young time" of the 21st. He cites *Remainder* in an attempt to illustrate the nature of this "young time", using the term "differently weighted" in order to indicate a temporal difference between the "late time" of the narrator's day-to-day existence, and the "young time" produced by his first re-enactment. However, by taking a look at the context of that line I hope to demonstrate that the temporal difference being described by Boxall is a product not of progress but of regression (which, it should be noted, does not contradict the youngness of the time experienced, only the direction of the path taken to get there). The narrator makes this comment when he specifically engages with the old woman cooking liver in his first re-enactment, a character who was expected to develop her own lines (he wants them to emerge, like the van or the fish):

I'd told her not to concoct a sentence in advance, but rather to wait till the moment when I passed her on the staircase in the actual re-enactment – the moment we were in right now – and to voice the words that sprung to mind just then. She did this now. Still stooped, her face turned towards mine, she released her grip on the bag and said:

"Harder and harder to lift up." [...]

"Yes. Every time."

The words just came to me. I spoke them, then I moved on, turning into the next flight of stairs. For a few seconds I felt weightless – or at least differently weighted: light but dense at the same time. My body seemed to glide fluently and effortlessly through the atmosphere around it – gracefully, slowly, like a dancer through water. (*Remainder* 135)

The 'young time' in this scene cannot in any particular way be equated to novelty; both the space of the re-enactment and the feeling acquired within it relate backwards in time, to the narrator's memories of a time that has already passed (pre-accident existence). The feeling of flow and fluidity is therefore both a return to an imagined past (authenticity) and a taste of an inaccessible future (death) at once. What Boxall is describing in other words is the "young time" of the Bataillean child, of the imaginary or literary image, described by Bataille as Heathcliff's perpetual childhood: "There is no character in romantic literature who comes across more convincingly or more simply than Heathcliff, although he represents a very basic state – that of the child in revolt against the world of Good, against the adult world, and committed, in his revolt, to the side of Evil" (*Literature and Evil* 13). This childhood temporality amounts to an expression of unbound passion, passion not performing the temporality of linear growth as it is meant to. This is a time reiterated in the 21st-century, whose novels attempt, "to articulate their estrangement from their time that leads to a kind of newness, that suggests the unarticulated beginning of a new historical sense, a new mode of historiography that is already a bequest to a generation to come" (Boxall, "Fictional Time" 710). However, even in the context of the "differently weighted" time of the scene from *Remainder*, I would suggest that this "newness" can in fact be better articulated as the consumption and re-production or re-iteration of the old (the very essence of the narrator's expression of will).

These sentiments regarding the 21st-century novel's temporality perhaps find an echo in how U. eventually comes to understand the symbols and state of buffering:

If it was a video-file that I was trying to watch, then at the bottom of the screen there'd be that line, that bar that slowly fills itself in – twice: once in bold red and, at the same time, running ahead of that, in fainter grey; the fainter section, of course, has to remain in advance of the bold section, and of the cursor showing which part of the video you're actually watching at a given moment; if the cursor and red section catch up, then buffering sets in again. Staring at this bar, losing myself in it just as with the circle, I was granted a small revelation: it dawned on me that what I was *actually* watching was nothing less than the skeleton, laid bare, of time or memory itself. Not our computers' time and memory, but our own. This was its structure. We require experience to stay ahead, if only by a nose, of our *consciousness* of experience – if for no other reason that that the latter needs to make sense of the former, to (as Peyman would say) narrate it both to others and ourselves, and, for this purpose, has to be fed with a constant, unsorted supply of fresh sensations and events. But when the narrating cursor catches right up with the rendering one, when occurrences and situations don't replenish themselves quickly enough for the awareness they sustain, when, no matter how fast they regenerate, they're instantly devoured by a mouth too voracious to let anything gather or accrue unconsumed before it, then we find ourselves jammed, stuck in limbo: we can enjoy *neither* experience *nor* consciousness of it. Everything becomes buffering, and buffering becomes everything. The revelation pleased me. (*Satin Island* 68-69)

The temporal structure described here can be summarized as follows: either our memory of experience outstrips our consciousness of experience, or we find that the event itself acquires a strange capacity for transmitting experience in real time through the digital platform. In turn, it reiterates the presence of contemporary temporal structure in symbolic form. Where Boxall describes time which is “unlit” by the light of Sartre’s bourgeois narrator, U. is describing time which has caught up to our experience of it; time at the bourgeois speed of light, time experienced as an eternal present, the eternal present of the speed of information and expression. In other words, the time of the drawing room electronically projected into every corner of the world. Within this ‘real time’ of the event which transmits its own experience without the need for our presence or our organically generated memory (generated through proximity in space), experience and consciousness of experience are merged within the “flow” of time that the narrator of *Remainder* feels in the quotation above. A state of buffering is here equated to the real-time of Jameson’s eternal present: the lock-step pacing of experience and event which makes U. indifferent to both the experience and consciousness of time (as both are merged, they are also indifferent to each other). But this eternal presence is described as a process of continual “voracious” consumption, a processing of time in the extreme abstract of digital information. In this context, the division between destiny and eternal present is refused by the merging of images of death with images of constant movement. To return to McCarthy’s example of Brutus, we might illustrate the passage of buffering in line with his poetic contemplation of interval time: where Brutus’ interval is expressed in terms of poetic reflection and dream-like stasis, the time of buffering abstracts this reflective and dream-like stasis from the subject, returning it to them as the gift of real time information.

At this point it becomes instructive to return to Byatt’s reading of *Remainder* as an exploration of peritraumatic dissociation, or, “The phenomenon which causes those on the threshold between life and death to construct subjective narratives at odds with the flow of external time” (245). There is thus perhaps a fourth mode of simultaneity native to the novel, the simultaneity of life and death (or past, present and future in temporal terms). Baudrillard describes this living death of the subject in terms that will serve to connect the notion of eternal present with a single universal, but absent, destiny, suggesting that,

What we want is the immediate realization of immortality by all possible means. At this millennium end, we have all, in fact become millenarian: we desire the immediate attainment of existence without end, just as the medieval millenarians wanted paradise in real time – God’s Kingdom on earth. But we want this immortality here and now, this real-time afterlife, without having resolved the problem of the end [...] In its classical, glorious sense, immortality is the quality of what passes beyond death, the quality of the supra-living. In its contemporary version, it is the quality of the sur-viving, that is, of what is already dead and, by that token,

becomes immortal, but not at all in the same way. It is no longer a fateful attribute; it is the banal attribute of what is no longer threatened with death since it is already dead. Of what no longer comes to an end since it has already passed beyond its own ends, beyond its possibilities, into hypertely, so to speak, or into a 'surpassed' coma." (*The Illusion of the End* 90-99)

This immortal position, the position of the living-dead subject, is precisely the position implied by the banal simultaneity of death and movement in the examples above and in the interval. It also provides a sense of how the dead time of the 20th century, in Boxall's terms (and those of Sartre's critique), continues to exert a structural influence on the eternal present of 21st-century late capitalist society. It is this particular continuity that problematizes the notion of 'newness' and leads to the concept of modernity itself *as interval*: if death is both transmitted and itself a process of extension or transmission, then newness is subjectively experienced only as a kind of active but deadened unity of the experience and consciousness of what is dead.²⁰ For Baudrillard, this 'deadness' is expressed paradoxically through hypertely, or "Extreme development of size, patterns of behaviour, mimetic coloration, etc. beyond the degree to which these characteristics are apparently useful" (OED Online). Hypertely, in this context, is a process of applying the aesthetics of life to that which has died in the trance-like mode of the interval, a mechanical example being Sophie's electrical reanimation of the corpse of the family pet: "She throws the switch again; again the leg twitches and flexes. As she animates the leg over and over again, she shakes with a laughter that's sparked up afresh with each new quickening – as though she were also animated by the current, which was somehow running through her body too." (C 77). Hypertely, its production and consumption, is in effect the aesthetic mode of both the old time described by Boxall in terms of literary form or structure, and the "young time" anticipated as its imminent replacement. The "surpassed" subject is a position lacking fear, tension or negativity; it is a detached position that allows signs to replace the experience of emotion or affect with the signs of their once-irrevocable reality. This is the subject who has surpassed their own presence in the world by escaping into fiction and formalism. We might re-word the term "surpassed coma" into "surpassed death"; living in the world of contemporary mass communication means that the subject, and death, are always-already converted into signals, codes, images and texts. If the dominant mode of death and the dominant mode of life are expressed, merged, in hypertelic production, then newness and oldness are dissolved in the real time of the interval. As such, the contemporary subject of both novel and global society exhibits the quality of being caught in an interminable pattern of dispersal and return, a meta-figure-eight of continual movement spiked with moments of stillness that reveal both the atemporality of this space and the erotic anticipation of the very thing that has been aesthetically and poetically denied this subject: death as destiny. The temporality of

²⁰ Or what has been made irrevocable by photographic recording, by being definitively 'passed' and 'past'.

the interval is thus a kind of suspension inside a loop: a mode of suspension that does not deny access to various polarities, but rather dissolves them inside the ethereal unit of the interval. The narrator of *Remainder*'s desire for "existence without end" is established early in the novel, when he contemplates the figure of 8.5, the number of millions of pounds he received in the Settlement:

[...] I thought about the sum: eight and a half million. I pictured it in my mind, its shape. The eight was perfect, neat: a curved figure infinitely turning back into itself. But then the half. Why had they added the half? It seemed to me so messy, this half: a left-over fragment, a shard of detritus. When my knee-cap had set after being shattered in the accident, one tiny splinter had stayed loose [...] sometimes it got jammed between the ball and the socket and messed up the whole joint, locking it, inflaming nerves and muscles. I remember picturing the sum's leftover fraction, the half, as I walked down the street that day, picturing it as the splinter in my knee, and frowning, thinking: *eight alone would have been better*. (9-10 italics in original)

The narrator here establishes Baudrillard's conception of immortality as an ineffable desire for continuity without remainder, without excess, through signs of circularity and disruption, a sign that recurs in the final pages of the novel when the narrator demands his plane fly in a circuitous figure-eight above London (282-84). At the same time then, as we see the narrator praising the form of the infinite, we see him outlining precisely the idealist nature of that form through his rejection of the excess, the half, which comes to serve as the symbol for the material. This same relation to the material is demonstrated in *Men in Space* through the artist Ivan Maňásek, who desperately searches for the spirit of revolutionary destiny with which he once made contact in the varied materiality of post-revolution Prague. Where once this search was populated with the tension between a revolutionary destiny (capitalism) and an eternal present (communism), now destiny must be sought as an invisible but seductive presence inside the hypertely of capitalist society. The following chapter will first extend this investigation of temporality into the one novel that is largely absent from this chapter: *Men in Space*. This extension will focus on the destiny that is refused or held in abeyance in the interval of the novels discussed here. In what follows I intend to demonstrate how the iterative presence of an absent destiny orders or structures the narratives in question and how this structure contains the potential to reveal to both character and reader the conditions of power in the postmodern interval.

Chapter 3: Destiny Deferred

Several writers and critics have noted the centrality of a desire for completion in McCarthy's novels and their protagonists (De Boever, *Narrative Care* 132; Lea 465; Vermeulen, "Critique" 551), largely through reference to *Remainder*. These comments are almost always accompanied by the "contra-flow" of a dualistic mechanism of failure that prevents completion (De Boever, *Narrative Care* 191-193; Lea 465). At the same time, both Vermeulen and Justus Nieland seem to suggest that McCarthy as an author is himself in the process of a project of completion. While the latter calls McCarthy a "forensic scientist of modernism [...] compelled [...] to disinter modernism's catastrophic scenes" (570), the former argues that, "These novels can be understood as attempts to map the paradoxical remainder of the genre after everything novelistic has been subtracted from it" ("Critique" 549); both imply that McCarthy's intent is to study (and in some way present for view and analysis) the remains of both modernism and "the realistic (or traditional) novel" ("Critique" 549). Vermeulen explains precisely what he thinks has been subtracted from McCarthy's novels in order that the remainder be exposed and available for mapping:

Smith and McCarthy jointly characterize *Remainder's* intervention in the history of the English novel as a break with three crucial features of the traditional realist novel: first, it performs a "brutal excision of psychology" (Smith); second, it fearlessly confronts a reality that refuses to conform to available social or existential meanings; and third, instead of giving us thematic depth, "it works by accumulation and repetition." McCarthy's poetics, in other words, aims to disrupt our ideas of psychological integrity and the customary ways in which the self relates to society—ideas it associates with the novel genre as such ("Critique" 553).

These three points are applicable to McCarthy's work, and yet can each be added to in order to demonstrate the kind of erotic power relation that is central to the plots of each novel and contemporary Western bourgeois society. First, it is not merely the excision of psychology, but excision and reversal. Psychological history and depth are excised from the individual in order that they (along with will and intelligence) can be invested into the object, image, sign, commodity and machine (the formalisms that reflect an absent subjectivity). Second, the reality confronted is a total one whose 'refusal to conform' is precisely the entertaining and seductive function which allows its self-perpetuation and endless circulation; rather than the refusal to conform to "available" meanings, I would suggest the reality of McCarthy's novels demonstrates a refusal to conform, or rather resolve, in general. A refusal to conform in general amounts to a refusal of staticity or stability in general; if reality refuses to conform, it is because "the main objection to reality is its propensity to submit unconditionally to every hypothesis you can make about it. With this its most abject conformism, it discourages the liveliest minds" (Baudrillard, *Perfect*

Crime 3). Conformity is refused by its endless accomplishment and decay; resolution is achieved, only to be drifted past or confronted by all its imperfections. Third, this theme of accumulation and repetition is not just a move away from the traditional novel, it is a crystallized image of the historical accumulation of thematic 'depth' by the modern novel *as material event or object*; depth so deep as to overflow and disrupt its surface, so deep as to hide its origins from the light.

Vermeulen refers to one interview in particular (In Conversation: Lee Rourke and Tom McCarthy) which reflects McCarthy's established antipathy towards the contemporary realistic novel:

[McCarthy's] fictions attempt to do without the elements that are often assumed to make up a novel: readerly empathy, plot and character, social vision, and psychological depth. In keeping with McCarthy's ambition to break with "the contemporary cult of the individual, the absolute authentic self who is measured through his or her absolutely authentic feeling" (qtd. in Rourke), his two most recent novels refrain from developing a single privileged psychological perspective, and instead opt for a decentered network of characters (in *Men in Space*) or for a main character whose subjectivity constitutes only a moment of crystallization in a network of transmissions (in *C*). Both of these novels can be understood as efforts to map the paradoxical remainder of the novel form after everything novelistic has been subtracted from it. [...] *Remainder* [...] challenges this tradition's reliance on [...] what it identifies as the most recent instance of that tradition: *Remainder* is an attempt to debunk the customary pieties of trauma fiction. [...] Yet in spite of this studied indifference, a careful reading of *Remainder* shows that its attempt to elide sentiment and psychology does not lead to a neutral and affectless text; instead, McCarthy's project ends up replacing the strong feelings and identifications it finds in the retrograde humanism of middlebrow fiction with what can be analyzed as intractable and asignifying affects. (*Contemporary Literature* 23-24)

Though I agree that the antipathy is real (well recorded), and that the absence of these tropes of realism can be read as evidence of it, I would suggest that this antipathy is a *sentiment* (or side-effect) that is present in the novels without representing an overall authorial intent. I also agree with Vermeulen as to the importance of 'asignification' to McCarthy's work (which will be considered in detail through the work of Mauricio Lazzarato in section two), however, I would suggest that its relevance is clarified in relation to the performance of bodies and machines, as opposed to in relation to "weak affect". If McCarthy wishes to break from "the cult of the individual", it is the "cult" that he desires to break, precisely from the position of the individual. If we consider instead McCarthy's insistence that the role of writer today is similar to that of the anthropologist, "the function of the writer stripped down to its bare structural essentials. You look at the world and you report on it" ("The Death of Writing"), we might say that the challenge presented is not to a particular genre of literature, but to the apparent autonomy or isolation of genre, within the sphere of literature, and literature itself, within the sphere of contemporary information. Hence, McCarthy's novels might be understood better not as the products of a

pharmacological²¹ or medical strategy of removal and mapping (the politics and culture of such a strategy is what they tacitly oppose/critique) but rather a strategy of subjective investment into the material performance of, and play with, signs and objects (there is an undeniable and comedic playfulness to McCarthy's narrative voice). As pharmakon, McCarthy's novels are both curative *and* poison, a kind of literary radiotherapy. There is an over-arching poetics that runs through all of the novels; an imagery based on the following principle described by Deresiewicz: "'Human existence,' McCarthy writes, 'is formed in relation to a brute material facticity that cannot be mastered.' Cannot, that is, be escaped" (35). And yet, the novels reveal that the subjective relation to this facticity is not one of pure domination (Master/Slave), but rather one of seduction, play and reversal. This brute material facticity is perhaps best understood not as an appeal to any kind of positivist or objectivist materialism (or new materialism), but rather to the brute facticity of the materiality of language, sign and object in late capitalism: the brute facticity of the formalism. Vermeulen argues that McCarthy replaces "the feelings of a full-fledged subject" with expressions of "weak affect" ("Critique" 550); Namwali Serpell describes the absence of feeling in terms of McCarthy's narrative mode of "picturing", which,

[...] as in the French *Nouveau Roman*, narratively reinforces the repetition to which the narrator's mind is confined: while readers "see" and "hear" all that takes place, we are denied the concision of summary, analysis, or explanation. The narrator's seeming incapacity for and resistance to metacognition trap us in a perceptual realm limited to the sensory, visual, and aural. Gradually, even feelings are dissociated from thought, then sensory perception, until they are relegated to haptic experience. (233)

The "weak affect" and "haptic" experience of the protagonists are not the open-ended culmination of a series of ritualized repetitions, but rather the links in this unending chain; they create openings in which new societies and new subjectivities are held in reserve as *potential*, while the openings themselves are filled with the continuation of the ritual that will summon the affect of potential contained in repetition.

In what follows I attempt to explore McCarthy's novels not in terms of their revealed antipathy towards popular or traditional cultural forms but rather in terms of the subtle cultic features that reveal a more fundamental viewpoint; one that exceeds the vicissitudes of literary production. I privilege McCarthy's thoughts regarding the writer and anthropologist in part because they relate directly to the plot of his last novel, *Satin Island* (and as such potentially reflect an up to date image of his thinking), and in part because this notion is related directly alongside McCarthy's thoughts on digital society ("The Death

²¹ Arne De Boever's chosen rhetorical figure for literature (pharmakon as curative and poison), this is echoed in other recent literary theory where literature is treated as the vehicle of a new and revitalized society and subjectivity (Vermeulen).

of Writing”). This anthropological viewpoint has a built-in reality ethos: it presumes the capacity to describe the reality of human behaviour and the human relation to the world, first through fieldwork and ethnography, then (in *Satin Island*) something altogether different and yet theoretically very similar. If McCarthy is caught within his own description of the digital as the contemporary “brute material facticity that cannot be mastered”, then this chapter resolves to explore the bare essentials (the irresolvable remainder) of those fictional characters whose will and desire seems to precede them in the aesthetic formalist²² workings of a world with a will and desire so intractable and immense that it depreciates and diminishes their own (and hence compels a kind of worshipful fascination).

The Great Report and the Destiny of Cancer

The first time we encounter U.’s friend Petr in *Satin Island* is also the first time the Great Report is mentioned, in passing. Petr asks U., after declaring that he has decided to get the goitre on his thyroid removed, “how’s the Great Report coming along? Oh, you know, I said: it’s finding its form” (*Satin Island* 26). A second form is co-present in, or co-dominates, this exchange, a form Petr “didn’t want to talk about” (26): the shrouded-but-visible presence, the trace of Petr’s thyroid goitre moving “beneath the skin while he was talking, like a second Adam’s apple”, a trace that “squished and slid” in his neck like “Lagos traffic” (26-7). The next two mentions of the Great Report reiterate this banal, passing, inert-politeness-inflected form: “How’s the Great Report coming along? he asked before he hung up. Oh, you know, I answered: its finding its form” (36). Once again, the Great Report is described in terms of the image emerging from the darkroom liquid or the fish from the murk, placing U. in the position of the devotional adherent to a nameless religion; it is also an inert question meant to end a phone call politely. While there seems to be a rhetorical stillness to the progress of the Great Report, in its form as reiteration, there is activity beneath the surface of this continuity, as there is under Petr’s skin: “Five minutes after he’d called, Petr called too. Hey, he said: you know that goitre they were going to take out? Yes, I replied. Well, he told me, they did; and then they cut it up to look at it, and it was cancerous. Shit, I said. Yes, he said. [...] I’ve got thyroid cancer” (36-7). While Petr’s cancer progresses, while he gets closer to death, the Great Report seems caught in an iterative sort of deferral or stasis. Immediately preceding the next appearance of the Great Report, U. has a conversation with Petr about a potential treatment for his cancer. Petr describes iodine as a possible cure which works like a computer processing code: “[...] what it does, is it *recognizes* thyroid cancer cells and zaps them. Say each cancer-cell was like a coin – a certain type, from a specific period,

²² Referring to Gibson’s use of the term, described in the introduction.

with an exact denomination – well, iodine is trained to spot this coin and melt it back down, take it out of circulation. That sounds pretty straightforward, I said. You’ll be cured, then” (52). The solution to beating this cancer is described in terms of the systematic and accurate recognition of a particular model of cancer, of *Petr’s* particular cancer; if, in other words, this cancer is uniformly particular to Petr (his own personal formalism of death), it can be recognized and eliminated by the automatic processing of the iodine. There is, however, as Petr explains, a catch:

Well, he said, say one of these coins is degraded, or a little different, through some quirk of the mint – the way a machine-part was lying the day that it was pressed, a piece of grit that found its way into the mix, a hundred other permutation-causing factors we could mention: then the iodine can’t recognize it, since these variations haven’t been included in its recognition-software. So the coin, the cancer-cell, not only stays in circulation; it sets up its own mint and prints new copies of itself, each one corrupt, unrecognizable as well; and then these introduce new variations and mint-quirks of their own, until the iodine has no idea what it’s even supposed to be looking for [...] It’s a systems problem, Petr said. If we had a better database, then I’d be out of danger. (52)

This metaphor reveals the weakness of the iodine-program: the fundamental idealism of the cancer-cell model that makes the strategy possible. In other words, cancer is beatable, but only if it conforms to the abstract perfection (the photographic nature) of the models we have of it, and ourselves. The very *material* nature of the conditions of cancer are what allow it to elude this strategy; the *imperfection* of its mode of reproduction (understood here in terms of contingent materiality) is precisely what allows it to survive this iodine onslaught. The success of the iodine cure is figured here in the same terms as the Great Report: what is required to avoid death is a totally expansive report, a complete database of all its iterations and permutations.

This conversation is followed immediately by a scene of U. watching a video of roller-bladers in his colleague Daniel’s office: “How’s the Great Report coming along? Daniel asked. Oh, you know, I said: it’s coming along slowly; still finding its shape” (53). In this third iteration the Great Report takes on a photographic aspect; it represents temporal and spatial continuity, now defined in terms of the slowness of the development process. The thing (the ethos) that might save Petr’s life produces the same affective indifference in U. as conversations about the cancer itself; at the same time, it reveals itself increasingly as the rhetorical figure of the “final solution” to death. The Great Report holds the potential of such a complete database in reserve through its aesthetics of passage towards resolution; like the dream-like passage through Brutus’s interval, or the slow emergence of shapes out of the narrator of *Remainder’s* coma. The first two iterations of the Great Report are accompanied by the imagery or poetics of an insidious, cancerous, form of development. This third iteration is, rather, accompanied by both the

potential solution to cancerous progression (complete database; Great Report) *and* the logic of its material irrevocability. From cancer beneath the surface of the interval, to cancer exposed and named on the surface of interval, to the eventually explicit reliance on the accumulated data of the Great Report to stave off imminent death (the conspiratorial, semi-secret end of the interval). The third iteration is, therefore, not about secret or invisible progression or development, but about the erotic desire for, or fascination with, the cure for this formalism of death above and below the surface.

Despite the interest implied by asking about the Great Report (and implicitly the database needed to defeat cancer), both U. and Daniel immediately abandon the topic (as its inert politeness demands) in favour of watching a film Daniel had made of roller-bladers in Paris:

Look at the way they move, said Daniel, without turning his head towards me. I looked: the bladers' heads all angled forwards, focused on a spot beyond the picture's frame, some point on which they were advancing. It wasn't a race, there was no urgency to their pace. More like a Friday-evening meet-up (it was dark; the streets were lit), with most people just ambling forwards, or sliding from one side of the moving column to the other, or letting the column's body flow ahead of them a little as they waited for an acquaintance to catch up, or checked their phone for messages, or fiddled with the music they had plugged into their ears. (53)

In this instance the screen becomes a magic mirror, revealing something fundamental about both Daniel and U.: their fascination with the art of disappearance, which in this case is reflected back to them through the indifference to ends and destinations shown by the roller-bladers. They are effectively watching themselves and the Great Report, in the screen, both ambling forwards, not aimlessly, but without urgency, indifferent to the progression of Petr's cancer, absentmindedly enjoying themselves in their "*Manifestation sans Plainte*", or "*Demonstration With No Complaint*" (53). Without complaint, there is no end to be sought, simply the enjoyment of the passage through time and space conditioned by the interval. Though it first appears as simply a scene of bourgeois leisure, the subjects of this film quickly find themselves allegorized in the form of a dead parachutist that has come to fascinate U., killed by the planned failure of his parachute. The skydiver represents the precisely reversed conditions of Petr's survival: for the skydiver whose cords have been pre-cut, only the miraculous heterogeneity of an "upgust of ground-wind", some "soft, deep snow" or "the branches of a fir tree" (55) might save him at the end of his fall. It is precisely the abundance of diverse and heterogenous features on the landscape that might have saved his life; it was, in the end, not to be, the uniform featurelessness of the landscape he was flying over guaranteeing no miracle would occur. Considering his fate, U. describes the skydiver as a dead-man-walking in the days, hours or minutes leading up to the fateful jump, presuming that from the moment the cords were sabotaged the skydiver was already dead:

[...] he had (this is how Schrodinger would formulate it) *been* murdered without *realizing* it. I tried to picture him walking around in that state: already effectively dead, his body and his consciousness, his experiences, and, beyond these, his experience of his experiences – his awareness of himself, his whole reality – mere side-effects of a technical delay, a pause, an interval; an interval comparable, perhaps, to the ones you get down phone lines when you speak long-distance or on Skype: just the hiatus created by the passage of a command down the chain, the sequence of its parts; the interim between an action and its motion, like those paralytic lags that come in hideous dreams. (55-6)

The experience of the living-dead subject is articulated here as the “side-effects of a technical delay”, alluding to the delay in Schrodinger’s observation which suspends the difference between life and death but also to the delay described by McCarthy in terms of the interval or interim (*Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* 99-124); this technical delay that thematically opens the novel is not particular to U., nor to the span of time his flight was delayed, it is instead the technical interval of modernity described by Baudrillard in the introduction. In other words, the absent subject (understood here as living-dead) appears as the conditioned product of a temporal and spatial continuity described both by the video of the roller-bladers above, and the previously considered post-coital day-dream of gliding effortlessly along Paris streets glimpsing history caught in the frame between international coffee-chain store-fronts (*Satin Island* 61-62). These are modes of passage within the interval. The delay in which the living-dead skydiver is caught is, paradoxically, the mode of experience afforded to the roller-bladers: just the empty time, the dead time, preceding a pre-determined, pre-destined, but shrouded and undecidable, fate. Neither the roller bladers nor U. are conscious of the truth or appearance of this fate, but both have ideas that erase this absence/aporia of destiny within the mosaic of reality. The poetics of this section reiterate the poetics of delayed emergence represented in the rhetorical figure of “buffering”; where there is the appearance or experience of movement, but an appearance that paradoxically reflects confidence (and an excess of energy) through its meandering lack of urgency. What this is illustrating for us, therefore, is the particular formalism *given to*, or produced for, subjective performance within the spatial conditions and timelessness of contemporary capitalist society: the angles and vectors of passage no longer bound by the need for a destination. This is the textual, coded performance of life as the experience of an extended moment of buffering (or being buffeted by the winds of terminal velocity); this is the combined arms tactics of an ideological positivity that must be continually reaffirmed in the very moments of excessive cultural transparency and exchangeability that this ideology demands.

The text reinforces this affectively detached attitude (that of the interval, of the already-dead) particularly in the scenes with Petr, where U.’s attention drifts away from the serious topic being discussed, and where, as in *Remainder*, commonplace single-word utterances replace and signify the

affect that might normally attend such relationships and conversations. All U. can really say to Petr when he reveals that the goitre was cancerous was, "Shit"; an affectlessness repeated after Petr mentions that he'd be "oozing rays" during treatment: "Far out, I said again" (36-7). The living dead skydiver's experience of life has been reduced to the hovering incompleteness of the space-time between the command and its execution; a life that constitutes the performance of a conceptually absent but universal destiny that the subject will never truly experience, that will never actually appear; the destiny of "the passage of a command down the chain" (56) that constitutes the repeated passage from one moment of "*This is it, stirring, looming*" (4) to the next.

This "spot beyond the pictures frame" towards which all heads are angled is precisely the Archimedean point searched for by the Promethean project of modernity, according to Jean Baudrillard (*Why?* 10); it is precisely the aim of the aimless, the advertisement of the final iteration of the Great Report, the last bit of information missing from the total database. It is also the position of the absent subject of the novels, the position that is reflected in the abundance of formalisms or 'frames' in the novels. All of the roller-bladers, U., Petr, Peyman, Daniel, have their eyes set on this invisible point in the future, in the present; a universal destiny that no one seems to want to rush towards, because they already enjoy its presence (or perhaps because some part of them refuses to commit totally to its objective reality). This is a destiny they expect will be (or has been) accomplished in their absence (through their affective, sensory, and conscious detachment), which can perhaps *only* be accomplished in their absence, as if they (as subjects) were the malformed, individualist, cancer-cells being sought out and liquidated by the Great Report. This detached, calm, and meandering performance of subjectivity becomes the physical analogy or event of the slow processing of world into report, of negative into photographic image, of devotional ritual seducing the eschatological return of the promised saviour. Character development, in the context of *Satin Island*, takes on precisely this form: meandering, distracted, intellectual, largely affectless, and seemingly unfocused (or unending); and character, according to Herodotus, is destiny. As the nature of this goal becomes both increasingly clear, and in an iterative sense, increasingly familiar and banal, the rhetorical connection between the Great Report and the opening metaphor of the shroud becomes undeniable.

Peyman and the Ritual Repetition of Contemporary Power

This particular brand of destiny, the universalized ideological kind, the photographic kind which promotes the continuity of banality, of historicized and repetitive space-time, is the destiny offered as a gift by the aesthetic and linguistic power-relation of late capitalist society. Destiny in this sense is a gift that has the

potential to accommodate the desires of the most imaginative minds, while it soothes the insecurities of the dullest. This power-relation is rhetorically figured in *Satin Island* through the character of Peyman (Pay-man - the single source of purpose, income and inspiration); U.'s boss and the owner of the Company for which he works. This is the power-relation native to the space and time of "technical delay", native to moments of fascination with and erotic longing for the promised end; a relation which operationalizes language in order to name, record, and circulate seductive images and flashes of "*This is it, stirring, looming*" (4) which perpetually satisfies and at once stimulates the erotic desire for a true experience of the end.

Peyman constitutes a figure of power and authority in the novel, the particular power and authority of language and aesthetics in their combination with communication networks and corporate business logic, exemplified by his endless pontification on the nature of value in contemporary capitalism. For instance, U. begins chapter five with an attempt to explain what it means for an anthropologist to work for a corporation, as opposed to "*on it*" (39). His work is organized into a mobius strip structure: "It was the Company itself within whose remit I was operating. To whom did I report? The Company" (39). However, he makes clear that this shift in perspective to a kind of feed-back loop does not lead away from the origins of anthropological field-work, but rather directly back to those 19th century structures and tropes:

The logic underlying the corporation is completely primitive. The corporation has its gods, its fetishes, its high priests and its outcasts (Madison was right about that part – just wrong in thinking this makes it exotic). It has its rituals, beliefs and superstitions, its pools of homespun expertise and craft and, conversely, its Unknowns or Unspokens. Peyman understood this. When he first hired me he told me that the Company needed an anthropologist because its entire field of operations lay in analysing groups, picking apart their operations and reporting back on this, while at the same time both appreciating and refining its own status as a group, *de facto* subject to the same ongoing (and productive) scrutiny. At base, it's all already anthropology, he said. (39-40)

What Peyman understands, therefore, is the effect of reversibility in the hyper-aestheticized space of postmodernity. He is acknowledging, along with U., a kind of McLuhanian community of 'global villagers' where the progression of the "reality project" described by Baudrillard has turned on its own purported effects of rational development and enlightenment by reasserting the influence of aesthetics, ritual, belief and symbol. Peyman represents a figure of reversible, self-reflexive, unstable power: the power of language becomes the angles and vectors of a formalism in their combination with the structure of contemporary communication technology. This is made explicit immediately following the quotation above, when U. suggests that:

Peyman said lots of things. That's what he did: put ideas out, put them in circulation. He did this via publications, websites, talks at conferences; via the quasi-governmental think tanks he was constantly invited to head up, or the interviews he'd give in the trade press. His ideas took the form of aphorisms: *Location is irrelevant: what matters is not where something is, but rather where it leads . . . What are objects? Bundles of relations . . .* Each of these nuggets was instantly memorable, eminently quotable. [...] These aphorisms were his currency; he traded in them, converting them, via the Company, into tangible undertakings that had measurable outcomes, which in turn helped spawn more concepts and more aphorisms, always at a profit. The concepts were all generated in-house and collectively: that's how his outfit worked. (40)

Not only does this quotation literally suggest that Peyman's job is to 'say things', and then make those utterances both material and profitable, it repeatedly uses the term "via" as a way of describing both the 'real' (within the fiction of the novel) pathways necessary for this profitable aesthetic relation between utterance and reality, and as a way of reiterating the deconstructive, endlessly referential nature of the power he represents. In other words, the quotation also makes clear that while Peyman may 'say things' which eventually become profitable and quantifiable projects, these aphorisms are filtered through a series of nodal points, both in terms of "publications, websites", but also the staff of which U. is a part. Baudrillard alludes to a similar mechanism through one of his own aphoristic lines: "The real is the leitmotiv and obsession of all discourses" (*Why?* 63). Both outside (press, think tanks, masses) and inside (Company staff) are united by this aesthetic production process, and this creates a situation outlined by U. which distinguishes this context as contemporary, in terms of the absent or empty center of a mobius strip so often cited by theorists of postmodernity and late capitalism.²³ U. notes that "seeing these," collectively produced aphorisms in existence outside of the Company,

[...] was like encountering an amalgam of our own minds, our own thoughts, returning to us on a feed-back loop. Without Peyman, though, without the general – and generative – mechanism he had set in place and over which he constantly presided, we would never have come up with these thoughts in the first place: they were quite beyond us. Thus Peyman, for us, was everything and nothing." (41).

This firmly establishes Peyman as a rhetorical figure in the novel, a figure of the brand of power that necessitates this "feed-back loop" structure of reality, and which serves (as rhetorical figure) to exemplify the very power he puts "into circulation"; Peyman himself is the generative mechanism of the entire process. He is everything (like language),

[...] because he connected us, both individually and severally, our scattered, half-formed notions and intuitions, fields of research which would otherwise have lain fallow, found no bite and purchase on the present moment – he connected all these to the world of action and event, a world in which stuff might actually *happen*; connected us, that is, to our own age. [...] It sometimes seemed as though the very concept of "the age" wouldn't have been fully thinkable

²³ Jean-François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard in particular.

without Peyman; seemed that he invented, re-invented it with every passing utterance, or simply [...] by existing" (41).

Peyman (as generative of, and contained by, the formalism of technically mediated language) is both the medium of connection and expression, intellect and intuition, as well as event, action and possibility. Peyman is, through this figuration, the rhetorical figure of the operational state of language, in a constant (and digitally accelerated) process of emergence, distribution and (profitable) return (its formalism). Contemporaneity, the "present moment", the "feed-back loop", "our age": all of these are both the necessary conditions and consequences of the production process described by U. as the everyday functioning of Peyman's Company. In a sense, all of what U. describes here is already the "Great Report" and the form it must be compelled to take; in the form of "everything", language and Peyman become synchronized with the impetus and (lack of) urgency of the "Great Report" that Peyman wants U. to write.

The way in which U. then describes Peyman as "nothing" produces a powerful connection to the work of Jean Baudrillard, in particular as it relates to the subjective relation to appearance and disappearance:

He connected the age to itself and, in so doing, called it into being. And, at the same time, he was nothing. Why? Because, in playing this role, he underwent a kind of reverse camouflage (some anthropologists do speak of such a thing). The concepts he helped generate and put in circulation were so perfectly tailored to the age on whose high seas they floated [...] that you'd find yourself coming across some new phenomenon, some trend [...] and saying: *Oh, Peyman came up with a term for this; or: That's a Peyman thing.* You'd find yourself saying this several times a week – that is, seeing tendencies Peyman had named or invented, Peymanic paradigms and inclinations, movements and precipitations, everywhere, till he appeared in everything; which is the same as disappearing. (41-2)

If Peyman-as-everything constitutes the 'real' (the Great Report) as the "leitmotiv and obsession of all discourses", Peyman-as-nothing exemplifies the second half of that quotation from Baudrillard: "But are we not far less fascinated by the real than by its vanishing, its ineluctable disappearance?" (*Why?* 63-4). Baudrillard establishes a dualistic connection between appearance and disappearance, effectively suggesting that while, "According to the official version, we worship the real and the reality principle" (*Why?* 32), it may in fact be the case that we are *truly* captivated by the *disappearance* of reality behind our confidence in the expressive capacity of the formalism. In any case, Peyman as everything-and-nothing is precisely Peyman (language) *at work, as a productive circulatory system*; how might we understand this work in a way that connects it to the vanishing of the real and to a universalized destiny?

In one sense, the destiny of the company is to turn sign, symbol and image into profit, to materialize the value of metaphor, allegory and symbol, through its transformation into advertising,

discourse, policy, conversation, etc. As is made clear in the quotation above, Peyman is everywhere, in all the manifestations, texts, images, objects, performances, and enunciations of the ideas that come from the Company; he is not present in the individual ideas themselves, but in the very scope and variety given to them through techniques of distribution. His trace can be found in their very capacity to exist in the space and time they exist in. Though this discussion of Peyman and the Company comes before the scene of the origin of the Great Report, it is clear that the form of the Great Report is already in play, in general, through the figure of Peyman and the operations of his Company. If we recall, once again, the metaphor of the shroud that opens this novel, the following quotation from Baudrillard's *Passwords* outlines the operation of Peyman, his Company and the Great Report, and at the same time Baudrillard's understanding of the universal destiny of a world undergoing the processing of a "Perfect Crime":

Faced with a world that is illusion, all the great cultures have striven to manage the illusion by illusion – to treat evil with evil, so to speak. We alone seek to reduce the illusion with truth – which is the most fantastical of illusions. But this ultimate truth, this final solution, is the equivalent of extermination. What is at issue in the perfect crime perpetuated on the world, on time, on the body, is this kind of dissolution by the objective verification of things, by identification. [...] Literally, to *exterminate* means to deprive something of its own end, to deprive it of its term. [...] Such is the story of the perfect crime, which shows itself in the whole current 'operationality' of the world, in our ways of *realizing* those things that are dreams, phantasms, utopias, transcribing them digitally, turning them into information, which is the work of the virtual in its most widely accepted sense. [...] The perfect crime destroys otherness, the other. It is the reign of the same. The world is identified with itself, identical to itself, by exclusion of any principle of otherness. (*Passwords* 66-67)

Considered within the context of this quotation, the Great Report rapidly acquires the characteristics of an attempt at the "Perfect Crime", with Peyman and the Company both constituting rhetorical iterations of the same theoretical criminality (the criminal capacity of language to submit or pin-down reality). Hence, the universal destiny embodied in the *modus operandi* of the Company is not just the generation of profits, but the generation of profitable utterances into a mobius-strip field of structured sameness; this is a destiny that is opposed to the otherness of materiality, instead fostering an image of total collusion. Without expressly outlining the contemporary world as illusion, Peyman confirms this assertion of Baudrillard's by virtue of his mode of operation: turning the act of 'naming' into profit, power and reality. This "most fantastical of illusions", operates, like Peyman, on the basis of enunciation: "by identification", which, as we will see shortly, is precisely the nature of U.'s responsibility as regards the Great Report.

Peyman and his Company's version of 'operationality', described by U. above, is precisely the "*realizing*" of Peyman's aphorisms, or in other words, "those things that are dreams, phantasms, utopias"

made into highly communicable material events and profits. As we will shortly see, it is precisely the conditions of the contemporary moment that Peyman wants to “deprive [...] of its own end, to deprive it of its term”, to bring it to an immediate conclusion through the work of identification of the Great Report, and hence to give the contemporary moment the gift of a universal destiny: that of endless circulation to the end of endless value, a destiny whose lived poetics are that of endless buffering, endless waiting, endless deferral of the promised end (a mode of deferral highly conducive to the generation of aesthetic allusion to what is deferred). This connection between the “Perfect Crime” and U., the absent subject of this social context, comes in the form of an absence of destiny:

Today, what underlies the notion of ‘individual’ is not the philosophical subject or the critical subject of history, but a perfectly operational molecule that is left to its own devices and doomed to be answerable for itself alone. Having no destiny, it will have merely a precoded development and it will reproduce, self-identically, to infinity. This ‘cloning,’ in the most widely accepted sense, is part of the perfect crime. (*Passwords* 67-68)

Peyman in the quotation from the novel above is identified metonymically in the various iterations and manifestations of his ideas (of himself); his presence is felt by the subject who notes his molecular presence in everything they see, and the ubiquity of that material-yet-irresistibly-referential presence is precisely what constitutes his art of disappearance. U. notes that Peyman’s employees get the same sense of seeing themselves in a mirror when encountering their work at large in the world. All of modernity constitutes, for Baudrillard, a processing of the real into disappearance, into ubiquity, through the obfuscating idealism of the model, the code or image. Peyman is the figure of the aesthetic power of appearance and disappearance, and as such is compelled to display the indecisiveness of the interval: he is both everything and nothing, at once, and at all times. Peyman advocates the (languid) pursuit of the Great Report, while at the same time noting certain fundamental limitations which might make this pursuit seem endless (either already ended, or impossible to end). The Company’s logo, for instance, is “a giant, crumbling tower” (43); it “embodied one of Peyman’s signature concepts. Babel’s tower, he’d say, is usually taken to be a symbol of man’s hubris. But the myth, he’d carry on, has been misunderstood. What actually matters isn’t the attempt to reach the heavens, or to speak God’s language. No: what matters is what’s left when the attempt has failed” (43). This gives Peyman some semblance of self-awareness; in effect, it represents a theoretical self-awareness of aesthetic power. It knows it will fail, but cannot cease its efforts at completion and annihilation; endless failure is its road to endless (fiduciary) success. Peyman’s wisdom in this case evokes the obverse side of the power of naming: the poetics of reversibility or circularity, rather than progress or linearity. The tower represents the inevitable failure of nominative idealism (the power in naming); for a figure of self-awareness what remains of an attempted

idealism is the moment of contact between rubber and road, where things actually happen. No longer the symbol of failure in the form of an ending, the crumbled tower assumes an opposing meaning, that of the nature of human continuity: a continuity of side-effects, unintentional and impossible-to-predict consequences of the guaranteed failure of an ideal model. Peyman, therefore, should not be considered a character *per se*; he has even less of a past than U. (whose past is limited effectively to fragments of memories of childhood), and stands as both an element of a formalism and the rhetorical figure of the power of reversibility inherent to any hegemonic system sustained through the endless circulation of images and language which offer pleasing glimpse of an imaginary end.

Proceeding to the Beginning

“The Great Report: this needs explaining” (56). This is the line that immediately follows U.’s thoughts about the living death of the skydiver. Not only does it describe precisely what this section (6.8) and the next achieve, it also serves like the clever, self-reflexive title of the journal article that U. might fantasize about writing. It becomes a self-referential sign: the Great Report is itself an excessive or even glorified sign of the universally human impulse represented in the words “this needs explaining”. These words simplify and historicize the motivation for the Great Report, from top to bottom; it becomes yet another iteration of the very human, very anthropological desire for an explanation, or for “a bolt that secures the scaffolding that in turn holds fast the entire architecture of reality, of time” (4). Despite this clever brevity, we then get a lengthy explanation of the Great Report from Peyman:

It was Peyman’s idea. When he first hired me, as he shook my hand to welcome me on board, he fixed me with his gaze and said: U., write the Great Report. The Great Report? I asked, my hand still clenched in his; what’s that? The Document, he said; the Book. The First and Last Word on our age. Over and above all the other work you’ll do here at the Company, that’s what I’m *really* hiring you to come up with. It’s what you anthropologists are for, right? Could you elaborate? I asked. Well, he replied, finally letting my hand go so that he could gesticulate with his [...]. (56)

Peyman follows this instruction with his own version of what the classic anthropologist would have done: gone into the field, collected his information, and then returned to their Victorian study to “write the book: that’s what I mean, he said. Not just *a* book: *the* fucking Book. You write the Book on them. Sum their tribe up. Speak its secret name” (56-7). While connected to Peyman-as-figure-of-Power, while locked in a gesture of contractual agreement and co-productivity (the handshake), Peyman tells U. of the true purpose behind this connection, behind his inclusion in the project of Power: to write the Great Report, to write the book not on “them”, but on everything. The subject however, despite Power naming the goal (the object) of this project, remains confused. He remains confused up until the figure of power

dissolves the connection (the handshake) and assumes the aspect of an image through separation; its mass given motion, the material of the figure himself is put to use mapping out the gravity and meaning of his expectations with his body like a dictator, or like the mass of consumers who ritually vote with their feet and their wallets. Even still, U. is hesitant, and expresses this when he notes that the “characterization” (57) of the anthropologist deployed by Peyman is delayed, not contemporary:

But now there are no natives – or *we’re* the natives. I mean... I know, I know all that stuff, he said, cutting me off. [...] And its exactly the situation you describe, he carried on, that makes *our era’s* Great Report all the more necessary. Shifting tectonics, new islands and continents forming: we need a brand new navigation manual. But also, I tried to tell him, now there is no study [...] I mean, there are universities . . . Forget universities! he snorted, interrupting me again. These are irrelevant; they’ve become businesses – and not even good ones. *Real* businesses, though, he said, his hand describing in the air above his desk a circle that encompassed the whole building: these are the forge, the foundry where true knowledge is being smelted, cast and hammered out. You’re right, U.: there is no tranquil study. (57)

Peyman immediately acknowledges the truth of U.’s statement: the difference between the savage field and the civilized study, self and other, inside and outside, has dissolved in contemporary society. Power has now conceded that knowledge is no longer produced in the same fashion (dialectically) as his characterization of the anthropologist suggests. And it is precisely this breakdown of difference that Peyman insists motivates the need for a contemporary Great Report. Instead, knowledge, which is the foundation and content of the Great Report, is produced directly alongside profits, alongside *value*; they travel the same path, perhaps even as a kind of indifferent side-effect of value-production. Peyman, our figure of contemporary Power, both laments that difference has dissolved, and insists that capitalizing on this deteriorated or universalized field of indifference is the only way to resolve and stabilize this shifting state of affairs. Peyman goes on to describe the mechanism of the double-faced production of both knowledge and value in terms that are familiar to the pages of *Satin Island*:

But the Great Report won’t be composed in a study; it will come out of the jungle, breaking cover like some colourful, fantastic beast, a species never seen before, a brand-new genus, flashing, sparkling - *fulgurating* – high above the tree-line, there for all to see. I want it to come out of the Company. *We’re* the noblest savages of all. *We’re* sitting with our war-paint at the spot where all the rivers churn and flow together. The Company, he repeated, his voice growing louder with excitement, is the place for it to come from; you, U., are the one to write it. He carried on looking straight at me, into me. He was smiling, but the way his dark eyes fixed me made it clear that, smile or no smile, he was deadly serious. What I want you to do, he said, is *name* what’s taking place right now. To name it? I repeated; like the princess does with Rumpelstiltskin in the fairytale? Yes, he said: exactly. What do you want this Great Report to look like? I asked. What form should it take? To whom should it be addressed? These are secondary questions, he said. I leave it to you to work them out. It will find its shape. (57-8)

This quotation begins with language that reflects and reverses the poetics of the opening section of the novel: the poetics of suspension marking the “fish approaching us through murky waters or an image looming into view from noxious liquid in a darkroom” (3) becomes the “colourful, fantastic beast” found “breaking cover”, “flashing, sparkling – *fulgurating* – [...] there for all to see” (57-8). This mirroring effect, which is at once the origin and realization of the Great Report, is the ideological positivity native to this brand of power, exemplified by the self-referencing emphasis put on the word “fulgurating” in this section. To fulgurate: “To emit vivid flashes of light; to sparkle brightly”, used without an object, and a medical definition, “To destroy (tissue) by means of an electrical current” (OED Online). This word is, in a sense, the secret name of the Great Report (and of Baudrillard’s description of the “dual project” of the contemporary moment that ends *The Perfect Crime*²⁴), striking the eye in italics like the flashing lightning to which it refers, and at the same time referring to the corralling, the extermination, of “abnormal” growth through the assertion of a new “navigation manual” (57), or the “zap” (52) of Petr’s iodine cure. This secret name exhibits the fundamental duality of the energy of appearance (lightning) and disappearance (electricity as excision) turned to the ends of power: in the context of Peyman’s speech, both faces of this duality are compelled to serve and propagate life over death. Yet, even this dedication to life can be reduced to mere appearance. To fulgurate is to both name and exterminate, or “identify”, within the remit of the “Perfect Crime”: “It is to eliminate duality, the antagonism of life and death, to reduce everything to a kind of single principle – we might say a *pensée unique* – of the world, which could be said to express itself in all our technologies, particularly today our virtual technologies” (*Passwords* 66). In turn, this secret name becomes the ideological truth of Petr’s cancer treatment, the meta-narrative “zap” (52) of the iodine that will recognize and destroy all contemporary cancer cells: appearance operationalized as life-saving excision of death and irregularity. The lyrical and emotional nature of Peyman’s description is complicated with the sudden assertion of his “deadly serious” countenance which further alludes to the connection between the Great Report and Petr’s cancer. Aesthetic power is, through the force of its gaze (its appearance as image), imparting the truth of its materiality on the absent subject: its fractured, absurd, unpredictable, playful, imaginative, but at the same time *life and death*, materiality.

²⁴ *To sum up, we find ourselves faced with a dual project: a bid to complete the world, to achieve an integral reality – and a bid to continue the Nothing (of which the book is a part). Both are doomed to fail. But, whereas the failure of an attempt at completion is, necessarily, negative, the failure at an attempt at annihilation is, necessarily, vital and positive. It is for this reason that thought, which knows it fail in any case, is duty-bound to set itself criminal objectives. An undertaking directed towards positive objectives cannot allow itself to fail. One which pursues criminal objectives is duty-bound to fail. Such is the well-tempered principle of evil. If the system fails to be everything, nothing will remain of it. If thought fails to be nothing, something will remain of it.* (Perfect Crime 151, italics in text)

When Peyman tells U. that what he wants him to do is to “*name* what’s taking place right now” (58), he is inviting him to participate in the aesthetics of contemporary power; he is placing him *within* the Great Report as a performer of a kind of ritual “fulguration” at the same as being exterior to it as its author (a singular participant). He wants U. to excise and analyse “what’s taking place right now” in the same way that Petr’s goitre has been excised, analyzed and revealed as cancerous. Name it; fulgurate it; *expose* it in a flash of blinding light that both destroys and transforms its object into energy, like the radiation leaking from Petr’s cancerous body as a result of his treatment (“I’ll ooze rays” [37]), or like the release of U.’s labour, limited neither by appearance nor form nor time (by particularity). With its gaze and voice power (Peyman) has already named U. as anthropologist, “fulgurated” him into the very energy of the Great Report, excised the cancers of appearance, form and time that might have corrupted or mutated his effort and therefore its emergence. In this same vein, U. himself describes anthropological method as a mode of the *a priori* excision of the singular event: “To the anthropologist, as I explained before, it’s generic episodes and phenomena that stand out as significant, not singular ones. To the anthropologist, there’s no such thing as singular episode, a singular phenomenon – only a set of variations on generic ones [...]” (59). The method of anthropology itself negates the irregular and the exception, reducing it to ephemera and treating it as outside the scope of rational inquiry.

On the whole, this section demonstrates the duality of life and death in terms of the excision and analysis of “the contemporary” (the performance of ideology) to the end of bringing it to, not *its*, but merely *an*, end (the universal end of becoming profitable information): which is the end of endless reproduction and circulation. *Its* end is precisely the particularity denied by the photograph, or in Baudrillard’s terms, what is fulgurated is deprived “of its *own* end” (*Passwords*, Italics mine, 66), but not of the appearance of *an* end. What is being excised are the very conditions where doing what you are supposed to do (a performance in the context of the roller-bladers: neither conscious nor unconscious performers for the camera recording them) in the name of knowledge, life, and value (Good) constitutes the passive, patient, but erotically charged pursuit of an unnamed but universal destiny (the end of death, the final act of the performance that brings the audience floating out of their seats and into the paradise above, the “fulgurating” of a “brand new genus” out of the gloom of the digital jungle). Death is, in the end, in all its forms, perhaps the ultimate failure of the power of language to refer to the reality, to dominate the experience, of the thing named. The universal fate of death (which is a material kind of failure), a true end, is intellectually and emotionally deferred by the Beckettian logic of try, fail, fail better; death is the exception to this rule, an exception in the form of a material event capable still of being obfuscated behind the familial comforts of ritual repetition.

Death acquires the character of Peyman's disappearance; which is to say, it is positivized in the form of mass distribution (the death of Benjamin's "aura"). The fate of the subject in this context is to reach a point (and hover there) where language no longer seems to warp experience (where it aligns with it), where reality (and experience of reality) is given over to the stability and security of a predetermined code, a program whose execution is out of the hands of the human, a human whose greatest achievement amounts to the complicated technology of abdicating responsibility (Baudrillard's bourgeois art of disappearance). This extract constitutes the original form of the Great Report that was missing from the first three iterations, as it is their source. Yet it reveals little more than what a close reading of these iterations already surmised: U.'s understanding and effort is connected to the success of this endeavour only as much as the understanding and effort of Jesus Christ's devotees will determine the timeframe of his return (which is to say, they may *simulate* his return through their rigorous ritual devotion, but they have no contact with any mechanism of *actual* ending). Peyman understands this relation between subject and fate when he essentially rejects U.'s questions about appearance and form; Peyman knows from the outset that simply naming U. as the one in charge of the Great Report has set its eventual realisation into motion. And yet he also knows his own fate, the fate of power, of all future Great Reports: the fate of existence and emergence as an image, "like a fish approaching us through murky waters or an image looming into view from noxious liquid in a darkroom" (3): the failure to resolve the duality of fulguration into a high-definition image. Saddled with the burden of the Great Report (but without the load-bearing aid of particular form or appearance or audience), U. now sees, and must see, everything he encounters through the vision of an anthropologist, as everything he encounters must somehow be part of this formal burden of the Great Report.

Power and the Melancholy of the Same

U.'s relation to the burden of the Great Report is akin to the burden of the human to the parachute; they (operation/human, apparatus/human) exist in a state of what we might call mutual dependency. This is integral to what Baudrillard calls the "NORMAL" human:

Fundamentally, the NORMAL human being always lives in a state of dependency or counter-dependency; he is dependent on his model (whatever it may be: model of action, social or imaginary project), but, at the same time, permanently challenging that model. He is motivated and counter-motivated in the same moment. [...] As a consequence, human beings do always both what they need to for their model to succeed and all that is necessary for it to fail. [...] It is from their primal duality that human beings derive this antagonistic energy. This is the normal human being and everything that sets about reconciling him with himself [...] is of the order of superstition and mystification. (*Why?* 67)

The normal human is therefore the embodiment of a duality that generates potential energy: it is both the vector of completion and the very challenge that any attempt at completion must (hopelessly) attempt to confront. Given that completion in this case (of the cancer-database or the Great Report) equates to the stakes of life and death and self, the normal human constitutes both the life and death of its ideals and ideas. The abnormal human, on the other hand,

is the one who now lives only in a unilateral positive adherence to what he is or what he does. Total subjection and adjustment (the perfectly normalized human being). Countless individuals have gone over to reality, by eliminating all consideration of the dual and the insoluble. [...] What becomes at this point of the ventriloquacy of Evil? It is the same with the radicalism of yore: when it deserts the individual, reconciled with himself and homogenized by the good offices of the digital, and when all critical thinking has disappeared, radicalism passes into things. The ventriloquacy of Evil passes into technology itself. (*Why?* 68-69)

This is the human who participates in and celebrates the post-hoc annulment of this duality; the human disconnected from the normal development process, from the passage from negative to positive (analog film to photograph). Instead, the abnormal human sustains themselves in the moment of passage, the dream-like interval where the erasure of the negative is made possible by never encountering the contrast produced by arrival on the shores of the positive. These violent images (an endless series of images which constitutes the endless 'buffering' of inner monologue and fantasy) reflect the self-satisfied, self-expressing impotence of the individual who has given up all the tools of destiny to the automated processing of the world by technology. U. extends this metaphorical power-relation of the "abnormal human" into that of the 'shroud' in his visualization of the skydiver and his parachute:

And all this time, behinds these apparitions, another one: the image of a severed parachute that floated, like some jellyfish or octopus, through the polluted waters of my mind: the domed canopy above, the floppy strings casually twining their way downwards from this like blithe tentacles, free ends waving in the breeze. This last picture, for me, produces, even now, a sense of calm: no angry and insistent tow, no jerks and tugs and stresses – just a set of unencumbered cords carelessly feeling the air. This sense of calm, of languidness, grows all the more pronounced when set against the panic of the man hurtling away from it below. (*Satin Island* 77)

In this section, the "murky waters" and "noxious liquid" (3) of the emergence metaphor of the opening section becomes the "polluted waters of my mind" in which floats the parachute, "like some jelly fish or octopus" (77). The parachute assumes the position of *that which emerges*, on the screen through the murk; and yet it is different from the shroud metaphor of the opening pages. In this case, that which emerges, emerges from U.'s mind, rather than a simulation of the sacred or an "over-pixelated screen" (3). This emergence is more stable and defined. It is defined in particular by its freedom, its lack of burden; this absence of "an angry insistent tow" can be read in terms of the Great Report and the burden it places

specifically on U. but more generally on all abnormal humans. Like the roller-bladers, the parachute has been freed from the weight of urgency and responsibility, ambling forward (or downward) aimlessly, “carelessly feeling the air” (77), indifferent to the passing of time and space around it. This emergence is in higher resolution than those of the opening section; where the opening section tacitly admitted the transience and narrative undecidability of these forms of emergence, these forms of reality-architecture, in this instance we get a more complete image, to the point of evoking the “total subjection and adjustment” (*Why?* 68) of the abnormal human. Once again, we have the denoting of a multifaceted temporality in terms of affect: this in an image encountered in the past recollected in the kind of detached present-tense of the narration, a space-less and timeless present which is continuous with the past presented specifically in terms of a “sense of calm, of languidness” conveyed by this high-resolution image. This is the affective condition offered as relief by the perpetual ‘present’ of a power structure which aims to liberate the human from its role as vector for corruption, for destabilization, and for evil. The last line of this excerpt reiterates the temporal and spatial undecidability, or continuity, of the narration: the sense of “calm [...] grows more pronounced when set against the panic of the man hurtling away from it below” (77), but does it grow more pronounced in the dimensional void of U.’s narrative present, in the original event the (fictional) memory is referring to, or both?

While this question is left unanswered in the text, what becomes clear as this section continues is that U. relates much more to the parachute and its struggle against burden than to the man and his struggle to survive his fall from the sky:

He would have looked up, naturally, and seen the chute lolling unburdened and indifferent above him – as though freed from the dense load of all its troubles, that conglomeration of anxiety and nerves that he, and the human form in general, represented. Considering the picture, I found my focus, my point of identification within it and my attendant sympathy, shifting from the diminutive man to his expanded, if detached, paraphernalia. I felt quite happy for the latter, for its liberation into carefreeness. Parachutes, as a rule, are treated badly by their human masters: granted false release and then immediately yanked back into servitude, into yoked bondage. This one, though, had slipped the bridle – literally – and billowed out in a freedom that was permanent and real. Its existence would have been a good and full one from this moment onwards. (77-78)

In simple terms, U. identifies with the absent subjectivity of the parachute because he is himself the “expanded, if detached, paraphernalia” of an absent subjectivity put into play by the world that writes itself. The language of this excerpt explicitly iterates the tendency of the abnormal human to both desire and admire the “ventriloquacity” of evil, which is an indirect form of ritualizing the final liberation, the last ritual meant to confirm the freedom of the subject from its necessity for ritual. The second half of section 8.1 opens with the same premise of that abnormal individual who needs the parachute of reality to

eliminate “all consideration of the dual and the insoluble” (*Why?* 68), which is to say, to disconnect from “the dense load of all its troubles, that conglomeration of anxiety and nerves that he, and the human form in general, represented” (*Satin Island* 77). U. seems to hone in on freedom as the central component of the parachute’s appeal, but what kind of freedom is he identifying with?

It is the freedom from the burden of undecidability, of duality, of the burden of the human in its role as simultaneous vector and challenge. Though death is clearly central to the tale of the skydiver, it is the aesthetic and affective *deferral* of death as responsibility, its re-identification with positive objective liberation, that is central to this iteration of the skydiver image. Hence, despite his focus and his “attendant sympathy” coming to rest on the life-saving entertainment technology of the liberated parachute, and not the man flying at terminal velocity towards his inevitable fate, U. demonstrates the co-presence of both Baudrillard’s subject who is fascinated by the disappearance of reality behind the shroud (the parachute), and the subject who cannot free itself from a conceptual connection to, and attraction to, death in any form (their fascination by the art of disappearance). In other words, the human is liberated from that which makes it human: the potential energy of the (morally, ethically, semantically) undecidable. This energy is instead located in the object; and yet the memory of that burden remains with U., he has sympathy for the parachute precisely because some part of him recalls the difficulty of bearing this burden of evil but productive intervention in the world. This is an image of what Jerry Coulter, through an analysis of Baudrillard, calls reversibility, or poetic justice (Coulter, “Baudrillard and Holderlin and the Poetic Resolution of the World” 147): in this image the man comes to serve the parachute, he offers himself up to the breathless thrill of terminal velocity in order to liberate the parachute from its burden of purpose or use-value, to let it float aimlessly, “out into a freedom that was permanent and real” (78), which is an allegory of the state of the absent contemporary subject of hegemonic postmodern capitalism. For U., the parachute represents precisely the kind of liberation he seeks now that he is burdened by the Great Report (which is in a sense the burden of anyone confronted by a continually shifting field of information): the freedom from his being named anthropologist, from his one use-value to produce the Great Report, to name what’s going on, and thus to bring it to an end. At the same time however, this is the liberation that he has *already achieved*, the liberation at the heart of both his sympathies and his melancholy. This allegorical image of the parachute demonstrates the idealism of the contemporary subject whose realization is clearest in the past and future tenses; it is both the liberation already accomplished (the transfer of evil, or revolutionary energy, into objects), and the liberation whose erotic appeal keeps the life-blood of the present circulating. This is a rhetorical reiteration of U. watching television and lap-top screens in the airport lounge; it reiterates the “suspended” position of the narrator,

caught between certain doom and carefree existence of detachment from human vicissitudes, suspended calmly between the dream-like safety of the interval and the excitement generated by portents of its promised violence.

U. prefers to identify with the safety apparatus over the falling man because at some level he has already been integrated into its life-saving fabric through both his labour and his experience; his very mode of existence has been inculcated into the development of the Great Report, he sees everything from the position of the anthropologist, and as such has become operationalized to the ends of the Great Report. In the freedom of the parachute he sees both the potential of his own liberation and its container; the parachute is a figure of both reality (the autonomous will of the objective) and the freedom offered by technical containment. The parachute is the object invested with human will and agency. What U. is tacitly rejecting, therefore, is the burden of both his unstable humanity (bundle of nerves) and the burden of having to guide the parachute (and himself) to a soft landing. U. feels happy for the technology that is liberated from all human concerns other than its own liberation, because it constitutes the mirror-image of his implicit, and accomplished, desires. The parachute in this scene is a figure of *fatal* liberation, the liberation of evil from the human and its investment into the object.

U. therefore understands the benefits of this liberation more in terms of control, than in terms of life or entertainment. Though this liberation takes the form of detachment from responsibility, it also serves to unite the ideas in a reversible form: responsible detachment, or fatal liberation. U. identifies with it and feels happy for it because it represents the ideologically positive image of his universal fate: liberation from death, and death as liberation from responsibility. There is a positive consequence of death indicated in this image: liberation from burden and responsibility, the very use-value and purpose of the “memory-chambers and oblivion-cellars, walls between eras, hallways that sweep us on towards the end-days and the coming whatever-it-is” (3). Death-as-liberation is the paradoxical liberation of Proust’s reading-room: liberation by containment in a form, an “entire architecture of reality” (3); this is liberation in the form of the performative assertion of an indefinable fate, a fate contained, but ignored, in the figure of the falling man, the liberation of the “coming whatever-it-is” to express *itself* rather than be expressed by U.. This is the liberation of the human spirit of disruption and vulnerability from the materiality of life itself, the giving over of human fate to the now-liberated agency of the safety-entertainment apparatus. This is the metaphor of the liberation of death, the liberation at the end of ritual, the liberation of the final ritual performance, freeing the subject from the burden of ritual repetition. This same framework is present in the story of Ivan Maňásek in *Men in Space*: an artist whose

destiny is to seek the erotic reproduction of the Velvet Revolution (an historical event in the past tense of the novel) in the very materiality of his post-revolutionary present.

Erotic Ritual Repetition: The Fatal Strategy of Universal Destiny

Men in Space opens with a scene wherein one organized criminal (Koulin) is telling a story to another organized criminal (Anton) who is a more central character in the novel. The story being conveyed is the kind of story we can safely presume men like these (gangsters) share all the time, like the shop-talk of mechanics; it contains violence, the banalities of work, a beautiful nude woman, and vulgarity. It is precisely the mythic re-enactment of an ostensibly serious and violent memory for the purpose of laughter or enjoyment or personal connection. And yet no laughter results. However, it serves the narrative by establishing the theme of falling. The story begins with Koulin and his associate Milachkov arriving at the flat of a man who owed their boss money. The fulcrum point of the scene, however, is the entrance of a naked woman:

“She’s naked,” Koulin tells him. “Really lovely body. Brown hair down her back. Small round tits. When she sees us she starts crying and screaming *Oh don’t hurt him! Please don’t hurt him!* [...] And then. . .” He shifts his arm. “This bit is kind of difficult to explain exactly as it happened. . . Well she pissed herself. But what I noticed is a kind of dribble – no, I lie, it wasn’t a dribble: it was more like a bag had burst just on the inside of her leg. A bag that wasn’t there before [...] One solid mass. At least, it was solid till it hit the floor [...] Right: till it hit the parquet. Then it broke. Really bizarre. Because she was naked there was nothing to interrupt its fall. And this girl, this beautiful naked girl just stood above it, screaming” (4-5)

This scene is an aesthetically reversed version of the falling man and the parachute: in this instance, it is a human excretion that is falling to earth, liberated from the body. The urine, rather than being sympathized with and idealized (as the parachute was for U.), assumes the form of a vulgar, embarrassing, human excretion; the unexpected emergence of which is the uncontrollable consequence of both consumption and fear. The parachute is the technical excretion produced by the human desire to consume the human fear of being consumed, to turn the consumption of evil towards the production of excess good. Its tropic connection to the pulverized technical apparatus that fell in *Remainder* and the body that is suspended in terminal velocity as it awaits the death that was accomplished from the moment the cords were cut in *Satin Island* indicates the repeated aesthetic of reversal of the parachute imagery; the excess that *is* humanity in *Satin Island* is substituted for the excess *of* humanity in *Remainder* and *Men in Space*. Rather than appearing liberatory, or as an appealing symbol of liberation, falling urine represents the inevitable failure of these technical solutions (the parachute fold into the earth eventually), reduced (as in Serge’s wireless transmission room with its flatulence) in the end to “a big dark patch” (*Remainder*

5) of chemical traces on the floor, like the remains of Serge's comrade in the air corps (C 162). Unlike U., whose imagination cannot conjure the affect of the man falling at terminal velocity away from his safety apparatus, the naked woman who has unconsciously both produced and liberated this excretion is terrified and screaming; in this scene it is Koulin who steps in to replace the calm, pensive, even melancholy passiveness of both U. and the skydiver. This story becomes not an amusing anecdote shared among colleagues, but the tale of both the "authentic event" of modernity (its *récit*) and the universal destiny that awaits the final processing of this event (the fatal impact of the ideal in the material, the fate of the failure to bring nothing into existence, that leaves its trace in the material).

In the first half of this scene Koulin is expressing his uncertainty in coming face to face with a scene that borders on the sublime, and yet the content also seems irrevocably mundane or commonplace. Urinating on oneself in fear, though embarrassing, is hardly 'difficult to explain' (it is a comedy trope, and a mark of reality in drama or horror); this difficulty is a social one, the scene is difficult to explain not because it is complex but because it constitutes the kind of story the bourgeois criminal should not necessarily tell, an image with more meaning than referent. That the urine appeared as a "burst" as opposed to a "dribble" figures it as sudden and unexpected; the bag that burst "wasn't there before", and it is this quality that makes the story worth telling, makes the difficulty surmountable. It is this quality that brings it into contact with the poetics of emergence established in the opening pages of *Satin Island*, and in the final stages of *Remainder* when the armoured van arrives on the scene of the final re-enactment, "like a creature emerging from a cave or like a stain, a mark, an image emerging across photographic paper when it's dunked in liquid" (*Remainder* 262).

McCarthy's Reversibility of Late-Capitalist Power

The second half of the criminal's story rounds off the scene by focussing in on the actions of falling, breaking-up and spreading. Falling is an essential theme of McCarthy's work, and can be put in greater context when McCarthy's states in an interview that his novels have, "...no sense of development. In fact, it's the opposite; I'm interested in regression" (Eburne, Hart and Jaffe 671). And yet, I would argue that McCarthy's novel's understanding of regression is more nuanced than, for instance, the fear of cultural regression and devolution which was present in the literary and cultured circles of the late 19th century. Rather than regression as a kind of collapse or disintegration, I would argue that with this scene we get a sense of regression as a turning back to the predictability and solidity of older ideas and forms; regression as a mode of simulated progress. In McCarthy's work, regression doesn't just occur *alongside* massive leaps in technological or political development (as in the breakup of the USSR and the postmodern art

movement in *Men in Space*, the invention of the airplane and wireless set in C), it happens *through* them. This idea of regression is perhaps best illustrated through one of McCarthy's many non-literary art projects, called simply "Agamemnon – a Play in Two Acts"²⁵. In these two acts we get a crystallized version of the problem being illustrated in the opening scene of *Men in Space*. The play is a short-form illustration of the problem of idealism in human society; the block represents both that which secures the portal to the ideal comfort of the bath tub and the obstacle preventing Agamemnon from reaching that ideal (in language sympathetic to my reading of Baudrillard's work here, the duality of opening and obstacle is fundamental to the "event" of modernity itself and hence its internal re-iterations). Agamemnon then attempts to pass through the portal and trips over the block on the bottom of the frame; the stage is then left empty of everything except the obstacle and a slow-motion digital replay of the failure of the pursuit of this symbolic ideal makes up the remainder of the play. In the play, the doorway is the medium of transcendence, and its close structural relationship is the material substrate of the world which causes the actor to fall on his face in the pursuit of the ideal. Unlike Peyman in *Satin Island*, this instance of failure leaves no trace except for its video repetition in extreme slow motion; the singularity of the trace of failure is deferred in a kind of agonizing suspension that equates to the previously asserted poetics of the interval in terms of "buffering" or "floating" in suspension.

²⁵ **Agamemnon – a play in two acts**

Act One

Lights up to reveal the entrance to a house. This consists of a free-standing doorway (frame only) installed in the middle of the stage and facing along the stage right to stage left axis, i.e. at an angle of exactly ninety degrees to the audience. On the floor immediately to the doorway's left (stage right), a doormat bearing the word 'Welcome'. Several feet to the doorway's right (stage left), a bathtub. At the base of the doorway itself, a block of wood or metal three feet long and one and a half inches high. This must be firmly attached to the stage floor.

Enter, from stage right, **Agamemnon**, a man in his mid-forties. He walks from stage right towards stage left in a straight line that runs through the doorway. As he passes through the frame, he trips on the block and falls over.

Lights down.

Act Two

Lights half up to reveal a set cleared of doorway, doormat and bathtub, i.e. consisting only of the block. Across the stage's back wall the events of Act One, which have been filmed by a camera installed in front of the stage exactly in line with the doorway, are replayed by means of a video projector. The replay must take place in extreme slow motion, at such a speed that the sequence from Agamemnon's entrance to his arrival at a state of rest on the floor lasts forty minutes.

This is an allusion to the idea that the contemporary world is in an in-between moment of aimless passage, and it is watching itself in the slow-motion repetition of what has already come before it; it is also an allusion to the speed and mode of literature's inevitable failure. What is a novel but the slow-motion unfolding of its own ending, its own travels from fiction into reality and then back into fiction once more. Reading a novel is in one sense a slow-motion processing of the fact that language is both material and ideal, both an event to be experienced and a repetitive, banal act. Hence, we might argue that, like other humanist theorists who place literature at the center of Western civilization and subjectivity (Nussbaum, et al.), Baudrillard does the same when he states in the opening of the essay "Carnival and Cannibal, or, The Play of Global Antagonism" that, "we may see modernity as the initial adventure of the European West, then as an immense farce repeating itself on a planetary scale, in all those latitudes to which Western religious, technical, economic and political values have been exported. This 'carnivalization' passes through stages of evangelization, colonization, decolonization and globalization, which themselves are historic" (*Carnival* 3-4), a repetitious passage through history that is accompanied by,

[...] an extraordinary process of reversion, in which power is slowly undermined, devoured or 'cannibalized' by the very people it 'carnivalizes'. The prototype of this silent cannibalization – its 'primal scene', so to speak – could be said to be that solemn mass at Recife in Brazil in the sixteenth century, at which the bishops who had come expressly from Portugal to celebrate the Indian's passive conversion were devoured by them in an excessive display of evangelical love (cannibalism as extreme form of hospitality). (*Carnival* 4)

Understood here as an historical process, he elsewhere describes a similar process anthropologically and poetically in terms of the "art of disappearance" (*Why?* 10): "By their exceptional faculty for knowledge, human beings, while giving meaning, value and reality to the world, at the same time begin a process of dissolution ('to analyse' means literally 'to dissolve')" (*Why?* 11). This reversible process is the mythic origin of the postmodern *récit*, the myth that comes into speculative play every time McCarthy uses the imagery of falling, or rising, or floating; all threaten to refer back to the dualistic inauthenticity at the heart of things, of our era ("The Death of Writing"). This is the myth central to McCarthy's literary universe, it is the pulse of the story, the very figuration of the 'highs' and 'lows' of any real life or realist narrative. If this is how we choose to read the pulse of McCarthy's novels, the equally present themes of connection and transmission are destined to act like the skin that barely (but occasionally grotesquely) reveals the pulse of the equally vital and cancerous forces playing beneath the surface.

In an interview for the journal *Contemporary Literature*, it is revealed that McCarthy,

"[...] declares in *Transmission and the Individual Remix* that "no serious writer" has anything "to say." [...] Even his critique of philosophical idealism is, as might also be said of Beckett, tribute to an essentially comic vision of the universe. "We want to go up to the heavens as heroes," he says in an interview with Critchley, "but we trip over our shoelaces and piss ourselves" (*Mattering* 73). McCarthy doesn't see this as a tragedy; it's the slapstick of everyday life." (Eburne, Hart and Jaffe 660-661)

In other words, the life represented in the novels is a process of trying and failing, but it is one with a particularly dark comedic character which is present in the opening scene of *Men in Space*. This darkly comic position expresses its philosophical character when we consider the importance of falling to earth, coming apart, and the spreading stain. The fall of Agamemnon, the embarrassment of the failed hero who has tripped over his laces and embarrassed himself, are examples of what happens when, as Debord puts it when describing the society of the spectacle, "The illusory paradise that represented a total denial of earthly life is no longer projected into the heavens, it is embedded in earthly life itself" (*The Society of the Spectacle* 9). What he is suggesting is that while we used to express ideals in terms of idealism, into the heavens or into the future, in late capitalism this idealism targets the material expression of itself in the present, at the moment of its inception; this is like the profitable gentrification of idealism and the novel is a weak form of that material expression, risking as it does the revelation of the deconstructive vulnerability of the narrative form. Like the urine which falls from the idealized female, suddenly placing Koulin in the grip of a kind of sublime accident, Debord's ideal crashes against the basic constituent of matter and in doing so ceases to be ideal and becomes merely another element in the operational circulation of value. In Koulin's eyes this process is played out as the solid mass of urine was solid 'till it hit the floor', then making a 'big dark patch' where it landed. Not only, then, does the ideal break apart upon contact with the ground, but it finds its way into all the empty and open spaces available to it; disappearing into them, it demonstrates the movement of a 'dead' ideal, soaking into the parquetry in an allegorical illustration of idealism soaking into the brute materiality and circulation of late capitalism. Koulin obviously feels that these details of the story are what's important, and at the very least he has been thinking about them. But he never alludes to a greater significance or meaning beyond their self-evident significance as a 'interesting story' to be told to a fellow employee. The opening scene of the first novel he wrote opens McCarthy's literary account by prefacing it with an image of a particular brand of failure, one that is neither tragic nor comedic (it elicits neither tears nor laughter) but rather simply human; in this image, we can see the traces of the 'tale' that Jameson sees devolve into the "fait divers" of a story like the one we get from Koulin. Destiny in this opening scene is established as a conceit of realism that has dissolved into the pornographic, excremental "fait divers" or the salacious internet anecdote with its undecidable potential for titillation, embarrassment, outrage, sympathy, realism, etc.

In Simon Critchely's afterword to the 2012 Vintage Canada edition of the novel, he declares that Klara, a relatively secondary-seeming character whose words in epigraph form actually precede the novel, is in fact the key character in *Men in Space*. While Critchley cites the lines of her unpublished master's dissertation in the epigraph as a kind of map-legend of the terrain encompassed by the novel, I would suggest that the form she takes for the artist who commits the icon-forgery, Ivan Maňásek, is in fact more central to the ethos that emerges from the novel (and novels) than her statements about lines and space and realism (which clearly demonstrates the coming together of linguistic and technical formalisms). Our first real interaction with Ivan Maňásek is a brief excerpt from what the narrator calls his, "abiding memory of the revolution":

Yes, Ivan. . . yes, I'm. . . Klara, writhing, hands pushing back leaves, grabbing at them, snapping them and grinding them together as her hips shudder upwards. . . the one bare thigh where the tights have come half off all pink and goose-pimpled from cold and excitement. . . then her whole torso arching like a gymnast's, rising to a final jolt as the palms open to release a trickle of brown flakes, all skein and membrane run together, flowing back from her towards the ground as yes I'm coming now, don't. . . This is Ivan Maňásek's abiding memory of the revolution. (Men in Space 37)

Maňásek then explains that he has other memories of the revolution as well; the crowds, the sharing, the revolutionary ethos of the moment, the power of social disruptions, and even the details of his own participation in the revolution (delivering a letter on behalf of Vaclav Havel and being jailed for two days as a result). Upon his release, he finds the streets flooded with people, and runs into a friend who hands him some psychedelic mushrooms. He meets Klara and they decide to take the mushrooms in a cab on their way to a wooded park. Sitting in the park, hallucinating, the text then describes a kind of disembodied sexual experience, a redoubled investment in the feeling of sex by removing the physical connection of it:

*As the two of them sat in the woods, in silence, facing one another a meter or so apart, the middle finger of Ivan's right hand slightly twitched, as though coming into contact with some object. There was nothing solid there, but when Ivan pressed the finger gently forwards he felt an almost tangible pocket of energy forming around it, velveteen and warm. The shape and texture were unmistakable: these were labia. He slid his finger a little further in and felt a clitoris, which he started to stroke rhythmically. Almost instantly – and this was *really* weird – Klara started moaning, rubbing her hands over her thighs and slipping her tights down, Ivan undid his belt and moved towards her – but she stopped him, told him that it was precisely his *not* touching her that was getting her off, and to please just carry right on stroking this displaced, disembodied pussy. (38-39)*

What is important to take from this scene is the dual acceleration of sex (pleasure) and disconnection, of sex being enjoyable *specifically because* of this state of non-contact. This is a brief glimpse of the ethos of reality production and of the ideal disconnection from the material that underpins

this ethos as its ideal subject position. It also constitutes an allegory of reading in its dependence upon physical disconnection. As the revolution plays out around them, these characters are locked in a moment that acts as a literary-theoretical figure of all the political, historical and social flux happening in Prague; it is in a sense this *figure* or spirit which provides the invisible medium of their contactless but mutual pleasure. Inside the narrative ethos of revolution, no contact with the ground-level was necessary. In one sense this scene reiterates the idea of 'men in space', through the pleasure of the feeling of sex without the physical contact of space (space as void and as medium of frictionless friction, or contactless connection); the hallucination provided by the mushrooms have nullified contact and what we are left with is only the feeling of sex without the (corrupting, visceral, fatal, vulnerable) material substrate. This is the idealism of the revolution made manifest in the figure of pleasurable production: in this figure the mushroom-high is the revolution and the doubling of sex and detachment represents its secret desire, which is the capitalist bourgeois liberation of ideals from their irrevocable material substrates. The failure of this desire, this revolutionary project, has been pre-figured in the novel by the allegorical power of the opening scene related by Koulin: everything we produce falls to earth as tragedy, as farce or as a fascinating arc (formalism). *Men in Space* in this case would imply men in *nothing but space*, which is an image that reverberates with the theoretical language of Baudrillard's concept of movement liberated from its former restrictions of time and space. One of the main constituent premises of this concept of the 'void' is the idea of the 'orgy' and the kind of subjectivity and ethos which must necessarily engender the re-enactment of the orgy. This connection is illustrated in the lines which immediately follow those above, lines which move from the *figure* of the revolution to the problem of every revolution: what comes next?

...her pleasure was infecting him. It was as though an invisible third person, some nymph drawn halfway into existence by the day's events, were transferring energy between them. Their orgasms, like Havel's statements, arrived simultaneously. His was without doubt the best of his whole life. It was the best *feeling* of his whole life. Even before his spasms had died down, he knew that that was what he had been fighting for all this time: not civic participation, freedom of expression or the right to make bad abstract films and paintings, but this feeling, this moment, this limitless and overwhelming potency. (39)

This sex that wasn't sex, this pleasure without connection, this figure of the subjective experience of the revolution, produces 'the best feeling of his whole life'. Like when Baudrillard describes the modern orgy as "the development of the liberation of energy as an irreversible process" (*Transparency* 114), Ivan describes this experience in similar terms as the paradoxically finite experience of a 'limitless and overwhelming potency'. He makes clear that what he had been fighting for is precisely the liberation of his libido, the liberation of value and enjoyment and the disconnection of these things from what

previously bound and limited them; in other words, he was fighting for what most were fighting for, the ideology of capitalism over communism. What he finds however, is that the proposed *ends* of the revolution arrived when he did; his ideal end arrived at what was meant to be the beginning. As such, he desperately wants the feelings he felt on that day back, to actually feel the limitlessness and permanence the revolution had fought to set in place. To that end, he believes he has some connection to that 'nymph' which transfers energy between bodies, that he can seek her out again. Hence, what comes after the revolution for one of its direct participants is precisely the desperate search for the *ends* of that revolutionary moment again, in the present moment, as if their initial accomplishment had served to hide their continued presence.

We then pick up with Ivan as he laments his falling out with Havel and the other revolutionaries, in the process of seeking out drugs to purchase from the same friend who provided the mushrooms (for free) which led to his perfect orgasm. After taking some speed, he finds himself once again the grip of this nymph, this angel:

The sense of elevation's growing stronger: stars closing around him, gravity slipping away. . . His right hand rises from the table – and he feels, again, a tingling in his fingertips, that labial outline forming. . . Yes. . . it's back, that sense he had in Šárka. . . Which means *she's* there, somewhere nearby: that disembodied nymph who briefly inhabited the space in front of Klara's back in eighty-nine. She's back, he wants her: wants to have her now, tonight. . . (44-45)

Ivan has seemingly gotten high in order to gain access to his more fundamental addiction; while he is a user of drugs, what he is seeking like an addict is another taste of the liberation from the body and authority provided, not by chemicals, but by revolutionary ethos. What follows is a meandering trip through the city to try and re-discover this spirit that has obsessed him since that day in the woods in 1989. His tingling finger (an un-subtle reference to his phallus) draws him towards a tram, on which he discovers a young woman who he is convinced is somehow carrying this nymph-spirit with her. He follows her off the tram only to lose track of the woman herself; despite this he insists that "*she's* still here, somewhere close by" (46). He then finds *her* in the form of a stone statue of an angel holding a staff. He becomes aroused by the,

The angel's breasts [...] in her undulating shirt. From down here, Ivan can see up between her skirt's folds, up her legs [...] And yes, he feels her presence as he unzips, knows she's covering the worn and spongy stone like moss or dew, running in a sub-electric current round the angel's waist, her neck, her head. He points up at her, way up, pointing through her to heaven, to whatever's highest. . . Segments of leaf and woods and stars flash through his mind, a half-bare thigh, bandannas. . . (47)

What 'points' in this scene is precisely his phallus; like the heads of the roller-bladers angled towards some indefinable future in *Satin Island*, his desire is not for the stone-cold materiality that now contains this spirit, but it reside in that materiality as a vector of connection to "heaven", to "whatever's highest", to a 'high' that transcends the materiality of the drugs that led him to this statue, or this orgasm, in the first place. In this instance, the character in question almost gets what he wanted: Ivan orgasms at the feet of the statue. And yet, it becomes immediately clear that he remains dissatisfied with his efforts; this was not the return from absence of the orgasm of orgasms. His next move is to find a phonebox and call Klara, asking her after some initial small-talk and right before she hangs up on him, "Klara, were you dreaming anything erotic?" (48). His desire for this non-material and yet orgasmic connection persists beyond its ideal manifestation in the revolution (the descent of which into materiality is manifest in how Ivan is treated by Havel and the rest of his former companions once the revolution has succeeded), specifically because it seemed to have disappeared at the moment of its accomplishment. The simulated return of this original orgasm, in the scene with the statue, fails to satisfy this urge to return to the time and space of the revolution and reveals itself as an unsatisfactory simulation when he immediately seeks to confirm that, like in the revolution, he was linked immaterially in his experience of orgasm with Klara *in particular*; he wants to regain the feeling of accomplishing an ideal destiny (an individual-seeming destiny, in that it is bound up with a personal sexual experience).

The angel is therefore in a sense a kind of iteration of the seductive impulse of "*this is it, stirring, looming*" (4) of *Satin Island*. Like Baudrillard's post-orgy subject, Ivan is compelled to idealize revolutionary liberation and henceforth to seek out its ends as if they had gone into hiding after its success; in other words, his compulsive desire is to seek out a simulation of the revolution, a re-iterated and simulated liberation of 'limitless and overwhelming potency', despite the fact that this is precisely what has already been accomplished. This repetitive seeking of a return to the moment of revolutionary success amounts to a kind of cyclical regression, a perpetual consumption and re-production of an original event with its authentic affect; what ties this character-drive to the contemporary power structure (and Baudrillard's theory) is that this revolutionary and orgasmic spirit finds itself no longer contained in the human body. Humanity, post-orgy, post-revolution, has voided itself of this spirit, which can now be found only as a trace contained or sustained by the object, a "dark patch" like "moss or dew" (*Men in Space* 47), which may find itself at any moment projected or expelled onto any number of mundane objects or surfaces. As was discussed in the previous chapter, Maňásek continues on this path of repetition and regression when he takes on the job of copying the Byzantine icon, culminating in a fatal brand of iteration: his final performative iteration is that of the saint that has obsessed him, replicating his fall from grace in the form

of a fatal fall from his flat's window. Like Serge's comrade in flight training whose fall from the sky reduces the entirety of him to a smear of "battery chemicals" (C 162), Maňásek's fall from his flat reduces him to the very smears of paint, to the very medium of his obsessive and profitable copying. The reduction to chemicals in death seems to be a clear reference to a materialist, secular-scientific destiny, to an inevitability being indifferently progressed towards. But it is also the reduction to the "degree-zero" of culture according to Baudrillard, death by a thousand replications; Serge's comrade is reduced to the chemical fuel of his wireless transmitter, while Maňásek's death is painted by the transmissions of police surveillance technology. As such, the very universality of this human truth reverses itself, and the chemical trace of life comes to represent not a discernible destiny but an implacable present whose inescapable boundlessness demand the ritual invocations of the exteriority and difference which it consumes and expels as technological and consumer waste. It is this internal dualism that necessitates the devotional repetitions native to a technologically totalizing society.

Erotic Desire and the Birth of Communication at the *Fin du Siècle*

After Serge develops his black blockage during his sister's funeral, he is sent to a health spa in Kloděbrady for treatment. At the spa, Serge is attended by a masseuse named Tania, who has a hunched back. Serge's time at the spa culminates in the first time he has sex, with Tania, as they sit in "an indentation: a kind of mini-quarry where the ground's been hollowed out" (C 142). The language of this scene combines the erotic with the topographic (the formalism of the map), as a kind of precession of what immediately follows this section of the novel: Serge's strange relation to drugs, poetry, technology and death in the skies of WWI. The combination of material excess, decay and communication dominates the scene initially:

Some of the wine's escaped from the side of Tania's mouth [...] Serge reaches out his hand and spreads the wet film from her chin around her cheek. She doesn't stop him, or react in any way. [...] He brings his mouth up to her face and licks the wine from it. Her neck, beside his ear, emits a low, guttural sound, of the same character and pitch as low-frequency radio waves. He can smell the musty odour rising from her body – from its corners, enclaves, holes. (144)

This unification occurs through Tania's body: lacking in agency, stained with the accidental excess and eroticism of the spilled wine, the source of earthy smells and the sounds of technical transmission and reception (reiterations of Serge's wireless room), her body becomes an empty space of erotic unification: an erotic (but detached) symbol of materiality itself. Serge relates to her body through the formalisms of the wireless room, which in turn indicate the paradox of contactless connection described above through

the character of Ivan. After Serge removes the inert Tania's clothing, the narration and eroticism takes on a topographical tone, leading to a moment of (apparently) transcendent orgasm:

She turns. There it is, right under his face: the crook, rising beneath her shoulder like a ridge with alleys running down its side, flesh-rills held up by bones under the skin. He touches it, then runs his fingers up and down the rills [...] The guttural sounds in her neck increase in volume; the musty smell grows stronger, sharper. Serge shuts his eyes and, for some reason, sees the ruddy, marble eyes of the stuffed Spitalfield, the corrugated surface of his hairy skin. He opens them again and, looking straight down, sees the earth rising between Tania's fingers where her hands push into it. He runs his own hand down her back, so hard the nails puncture its surface, and moves inside her violently, like he's seen animals and insects do it. [...] A scream, or the echo of a scream, erupts from neither him nor Tania but, it seems, the night itself; and with it comes a tearing sound, as though a fabric were being ripped. Serge opens his eyes now, and finds that the gauzy crepe that's furred his vision for so long is gone – completely gone, like a burst bubble or disintegrated membrane. The surfaces of ground and woods and clouds are gone too, fallen away like screens, encumbrances that blocked his vision, leaving the hollow – not of the indentation but of space itself: an endless space in which he can now see with piercing clarity. What he sees is darkness, but he sees it. (144)

This sex for Serge removes the veil that had accompanied him since his sister's funeral; it is a moment of revelation. It draws both Serge and the reader's perspective beyond the veil of melancholy, of technical reproduction and transmission, of sexual abuse, into a kind of clarity that is defined not by materiality, excess or detail but by the paradoxical, but complete, visibility of darkness. A kind of completion is accomplished here that seems to liberate Serge from the intermediary forces of technology, sexual trauma, and death; a liberation that is achieved through close, personal and erotic proximity to symbols (sights, sounds, smells) of those very things. Serge now sees darkness. Which is to say, by replicating the sexual postures and behaviours he (unknowingly) witnessed between Widsun and his sister ("like he's seen animals and insects do it"), he comes to understand their relation to a clear darkness. Where Serge's vision was once screened-out by these things (technology, language, maternal-relation, sexual trauma), seeing darkness clearly might allude to conscious awareness of the brute reality he had up until now been screened-off from (his abuse by his sister, his sister's own abuse by Widsun, her suicide). While his sexual attraction and desire had up until this point had a clear connection to his sister and the trauma she both caused and shared, the path that led to the recreation of both her trauma and Serge's leads in turn to a pure darkness, a combination of materiality, decay and communication. Where Serge once was seduced, unknowingly, by these unconscious forces behind his childhood trauma, the accomplishment of orgasm by this path reveals not some kind of closure or completion, but the opening of his eyes to the clarity of darkness out of which these desires and this path emerged in the first place. This perspective on darkness closes the section prior to his military training and the war, where Serge has explicitly adopted the technical and the narcotic as modes of turning this clear darkness into movement,

light and life. For Serge, his entering the army becomes like the narrator's acquiescence to the demands of his coma voice-over commentary: to follow its lead and join the grand discourse of technical excretions. Human life, after this orgasm, is reduced to its bare essentials, to chemical fuel (C 162), and it seems that Serge has adopted a brutally objective and scientific vision of things. However, the technical form that animates this darkness (the aeroplane) is eventually invaded and inhabited by romantic poetry, then by narcotics and masturbation. In other words, though his first orgasm seems revelatory, neither sex with the prostitute Cécile nor the perspective offered from the seat of his plane prevents him from seeking out the veil that has seemingly been torn away from his vision, in the form of an irrational reading of the world at war that could lead only to death.

During Serge's brief stint as an aviator in the 104th squadron in WWI (163-238) we get a story of fatal but vitalizing repetition. Almost half-way through this episode of the novel, Serge begins reading a book of poetry by the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin. He is then confronted by the presence of an English poet in the hands of his comrades: A. E. Houseman. Those colleagues who encourage Serge to read Houseman make similar claims to its effectiveness:

"Calms me down," the operator tells him. "when the ordinance is falling, or taking off from here, or both. I think of Shropshire hedgerows. . ." [...] "It's deep," Watson insists indignantly. "He looks at the cherry tree and has a vision of time passing." [...] "You have no sense of poetry, Carrefax," Baldwick joins in. "These things can take you away from all the rage around you, keep you safe . . ." [...] "Why would I want to be taken away?" asks Serge. "Where danger is, there rescue grows." [...] "What?" [...] "Hölderlin." (188-189)

There is a clear distinction being made here between the poetry of the Englishman and that of the German. The former produces the same sense of safety as Proust's reading room, the latter on the other hand implies the poetic reversibility of the battlefield; the paradox of authentic life being only truly at home with death, the seduction of destiny (rescue) that is the product of putting your death into play, putting your life at stake. His comrades contain their fear in the words that make them feel safe, Serge on the other hand comes to ingest the words of Hölderlin and in doing so digests the fear of death, converting it into an opportunity to see the unseeable, to come into contact with that which is both denied by the experience of safety and control and sought after as the last step of the ethos of reality production: "Serge takes some of its lines into the air with him, though: they start jostling for space with the ones from the Pageant. He still hears the latter every time he shoots his gun; but when Gibbs turns, or dives, or pulls up suddenly and catapults him backwards to the sky, he hears the opening words of "Patmos": *Nah ist / Und schwer zu fassen der Gott . . .*" (190). While his gun shots carry the words of the Pageant designed by his technology and communication obsessed father, Hölderlin's poetry comes through the movements of the

machine that keeps him aloft. Though these lines have been translated to English as follows, “God is near / Yet hard to seize”²⁶, Serge performs his own translation through the sensations and attitude-adjustments of the aircraft: “He feels the *schwer* inside his stomach, tightening like gravity; the *Nah* is a kind of measuring, a spacing-out of space in such a way that distant objects and locations loom up close and nearby ones expand, their edges hurtling away beyond all visible horizons to convey and deliver the contents of these to him” (190). The words of the poem come together with the lines and movements of the formalism. *Schwer* on its own translates to ‘heavy’, yet in the lines of the poem it refers to difficulty. *Nah* is defined in isolation as ‘close’ or ‘near’. We might say then that these words acquire materiality during an experience of both difficult and serious nearness or proximity. Heaviness, or ‘the serious’, is connected to the “black bile”, or melancholy, which afflicted Serge towards the end of his sister’s funeral; seriousness, weight and burden are concepts internalized first as an intestinal blockage and now allegorized as the restrictive force of gravity called forth by technical movements. Closeness, on the other hand, is understood as a combination of increased focus and decreased definition; farther objects are seen in detail while the details of closer objects dissolve into the background and become the medium that serves to “convey and deliver the contents” of these further objects, “to him” (190). That which is near absorbs that which is far, and brings it to light; that which is far is absorbed and drowns that which is near in the light of details and difference. God in this poem is not divine, but rather “a point within the planes and altitudes the machine’s cutting through – and one of several: the god, not God. And *fassen* . . . *fassen* is like locking onto something: a signal, frequency or groove. The word speaks itself inside his ear each time he taps his spark set or amends his clock-code chart” (190). In these lines we get the crystallized structure of the nameless religion that seems to find its way into each of the novels. God becomes not one point, but many; the god of many points is not at the end of a single path or line, but scattered throughout the sky, suspended between planes and angles and interstices, suspended in the possibility of its emergence by the formalisms of modern science and technology. *Fassen*, which can mean ‘to take’, ‘to hold’ and to ‘understand’, acquires a homophonic meaning for Serge, a meaning that comes closer to the English verb ‘fasten’. *Fassen* comes to represent a connection to one of the many points of god, a temporary connection which exemplifies the meaning of the English translation, “God is near / Yet hard to seize”. The plane is never static, and yet in his two-seater above the battlefield, its movements bring Serge closer to the experience of this divine suspension, being in the presence of a god whose form is transient and ephemeral, but reproducible through repetition: the divine and ideal end of the art of

²⁶ <http://harpers.org/blog/2007/07/patmos/>

disappearance in the form of god-like presence and detachment. Serge *fastens* “arcing shells” to their target “each time he taps his spark set” (190); there is a poetics of erotic completion revealed in these lines if we recall the language of Serge’s childhood sexual trauma. As Serge observes the completion enacted by his act of connection (a reproductive metaphor), as he watches the shells obliterate their targets, another of Hölderlin’s poems “hums in the struts and wires, its syntax rattling and breaking with the pressure from the rising blasts: the line from “Die Titanen” about *der Allershütterer*, the One Who Shakes All Things” (190). These words manifest like the others in a manner particular to Serge’s understanding of his position in space and time:

He thinks of the sky he’s held in as an *Abgrund*: an abyss, a without-ground – yet one that’s all-remarking, *allesmerkenden*, scored over by a thousand tracks and traces like the fallen earth below him. Which makes him *der Himmelsche*, the Heavenly One, calling down light, causing it to burst forth and rise upwards, to the partings of the Father’s hair, so that [...] Here the sentences fade in and out, like wireless stations, before climaxing in a stanza that Serge once spends a whole night sitting on his houseboat’s deck translating:

Und der Vogel des Himmel ihm

Es anzeigt. Wunderbar

Im Zorne kommt er drauf.

And the bird of Heaven

Makes it known to him. Upon which,

Wonderful in anger, he comes. (190-91)

The “He” here is ostensibly Serge, though it could very well be Serge’s reading of Hölderlin’s thoughts. Hölderlin’s poetry allows Serge to experience the battlefield as a field of potential vital connections; between himself and the god, between shells and their targets (their shared destiny in destruction), between himself and the earth he floats above. Serge assumes the form of “the Heavenly One”, and in that guise he begins to reflect certain aspects of both Peyman and U. from *Satin Island*; he can call down the light of destruction (fulgurate in its vital, medical sense), causing it to reveal itself, to “burst forth and rise upwards”, like the Great Report rising out of the jungle, or the fish appearing momentarily through the murk. “Bursting” (like urine from Koulin’s nude woman) and rising (like the feeling acquired by the narrator of *Remainder* in his moments of trance) might in isolation allude to an erotic poetics, however when followed by the “climax” of the return of “him”, this erotic poetics acquires the character of simultaneously delayed and perpetual gratification, as if potential for perpetual gratification is precisely what causes the delay of ultimate gratification. “The One Who Shakes All Things”, “The Heavenly One”, are in a direct and practical sense mythical, romantic and poetic descriptions of

Serge's role as the connector of bombs and targets; however, extended beyond the brute reality of Serge's role in the war, they become (along with the fuselage that rattles these words back to him) references to the ultimate orgasm, signs of a monumental and violent completion, the return of an authentic and 'world-shaking' completion equal to the one (the absent original event of Western modernity) that has set all this violence and communication in motion. The thrill of modern technical suspension borrows something from the desire for a true ending; the true ending is paradoxically experienced as its own anticipation, the orgasm that "shakes all things" doled out in homeopathic doses from the bourgeois vantage point above the battlefield. Serge develops a desire for death that is precisely the consequence of his turning death from an object of fear to an object of vital potential and pleasure. Knowing that god is (somewhere) in the details, means that god is reproducible for Serge every time he takes to the air, every time he steps into the space articulated by his machine (wireless radio or wireless flight). But this repetitive function of the machine fails to sustain the potential of this reproducibility, and in its place arrives a combination of chemicals (cocaine) and poetry; Serge produces an even more explicit and erotic connection between things in these drug-induced scenes.

Prior to a mission to locate an artillery target, Serge mentions that the increased amount of smoke will make it difficult to see with his naked eye. His lieutenant suggests that he get some cocaine from the medical supply and rub some on his retina. When he does so, the drug produces an effect similar to that of the poetry:

It takes effect as they're clearing their own kite balloon, which starts beaming up at him taut and alert, a big white eyeball. The lines of tracer-fire stand out more starkly a few seconds later, their velocity and inclination bold, insistent. The mesh of trenches, the coloured flames of guns and flares, distant roads and railway lines, the markings on the ground: all these things come at him more cleanly, more pronounced – but then so do the Archie puffs, vapour trails and cordite smoke-clouds, not to mention the real clouds above him and the sky's deep blue. (197)

Like the poetry which seems to produce the double-effect of both obscuring and magnifying, of blending back- and fore-ground, the cocaine seems to simultaneously intensify and obscure detail, to increasingly reveal Serge's targets at the same time as strengthening their cover. The next time Serge goes up in his aircraft, he snorts the drug off a mirror to achieve an increased effect, an effect which comes across like an allegorical (drug-induced) acceleration to the terminal phase of communication networks in whose nascent period he finds himself:

The tracer lines this time are vibrant and electric: it's as though the air were laced with wires. Higher up, the vapour trails of the SE 5's form straight white lines against the blue, as though the sky's surface were a mirror too. Scorch-marks and crater contours on the ground look powdery; it seems that if he swooped above them low enough, then he could breathe them up

as well, snort the whole landscape into his head. Three hours pass in minutes. As they dip low to strafe the trenches on the way back, he feels the blood rush to his groin. He whips his belt off, leaps bolt upright and has barely got his trousers down before the seed shoots from him, arcs over the machine's tail and fall in a fine thread towards the slit earth down below. "For all the C's!" he shouts. "The bird of Heaven!" (198)

Whereas his first experience of cocaine produces a blurring of spatial boundaries, his second experience (a step in the name of excess, towards excess) blurs the aesthetic and semantic boundaries of this airborne perspective. Both the sky and the earth take the shape of the drug; two identical sides of the same coin, each becoming the digestible currency of acceleration towards an unknown end. Everything attains the potential of an exhilarating kind of information that can at any moment be snorted "into his head". Time escapes from Serge's experience of this "hell of the same" (Baudrillard, *Transparency* 129), until their mission of death passes close enough to the ground to drive Serge's arousal and orgasm into practically the same moment. Proximity to death (the ground) produces an irresistible erotic charge in Serge, confirming that the "slit" earth (the material) is both the life-giving receptacle and tomb of this erotic idealism of communication and reality-production. The relation between the erotic and death acquires a brief permanence in the guise of the veil when Serge asks a prostitute he has been seeing if he can use her dirty leggings under his helmet to keep him warm in the lead up to an important mission.

Conclusion: Destiny Without End

On the day before the "big push" Serge has been training for, there is an unexpected silence and empty skies; a scene Serge describes as "desolate and sad, as though aware that it's being spurned by beautiful machinery and at a loss to understand why" (210). The sky, the abode of the ideal, acquires a sense of isolation; without its material expression, a bridge, either technical or linguistic, it lacks a medium through which it might understand anything (including itself). The ideal is therefore established in an essential relation to the material, a dualistic relation where the one cannot sustain isolation from the other for very long (a relation of erotic longing, where closeness is desired up until the point it is achieved, when it reverses into disgust and the desire for distance). Serge takes the position of the ideal that is seeking an absent materiality: death. Death, however, in the romantic form of life-giving destruction that marks Serge's perspective on Hölderlin and his role as observer: "He can't explain it. What he means is that he doesn't think of what he's doing as a deadening. Quite the opposite: it's a quickening, a bringing to life. He feels this viscerally, not just intellectually, every time his tapping finger draws shells up into their arcs [...] or causes the grounds scars and wrinkles to shift and contort from one photo to another: it's an awakening, a setting into motion" (200). The ideal needs the material, which is the death of the ideal, in

order to live and to flourish in the world: this is the premise that underpins Serge's odd fascination and subconscious erotic relation to death.

Serge's orders for the "big push" involve turning his plane into a true relay node: his squadron has been ordered to "monitor", and "track" (211) friendly infantry and the progress of their assault, sending their observations back to "stations set up a mile or so behind the front for this very occasion, which in turn will relay the troops' positions back to HQ – where, Serge presumes, they must have a war-like version of the Realtor's Game laid out across a table, with helmets instead of top hats, trucks instead of cars and rabid, snarling dogs being shunted over flattened icons representing trenches, hills and machine-gun nests" (211). The last battle that Serge will be involved in constitutes the culmination of all the duties of his position as observer, and is irrevocably transformed by the framework of his childhood: his connection to two-dimensional perspective, his mother's addiction to laudanum, his technically inflected sexual abuse at the hands of his sister, the way they took the two-dimensional board from the Realtor's Game and injected it into the three-dimensional setting of Versoie. He enters the fray the final time perceiving the entire operation as an extension of a game being privately played on a board at HQ, reiterating the ease with which the rules of a (cruel, competitive) game can be embodied and performed when the immediacy and singularity of the board can be absorbed into the broader scene of the material world. While this appears to confirm that the social context (world) of the novels is one of blurred boundaries (temporal, spatial, semantic/aesthetic), Serge appears quite unperturbed by the plane's and the drug's ability to do so; for the most part he has come to see war as the stage of life, for living, as opposed to a more typical experience of terror, death, delirium and violence. If anything, the blurring of boundaries is for Serge an element of the "quickenings" he identifies with the destruction he rains from the sky; the reduction to nothing (death, destruction, the erasing of the landscape by endless shelling) is one form of vital unification. The moments where background and foreground merge (190), where sky and earth become mirrors and mediums of a kind of ontological narcotic sameness (198), constitute brief moments where Serge feels the affect of this technical and religious unification, where he connects with "the god", a connection whose erotic and bodily nature is first iterated by his drug-use and his orgasm while strafing the trenches, and is maintained by his use of the prostitute Cécile's leggings.

Though the drugs that help him see this unity begin as amphetamines, before the "big push", Serge moves on from cocaine to injecting heroin: "Serge, for his part, can't imagine flying without diacetylmorphine. [...] Back on the boat, he stabs a phial into his wrist, then, catching sight of Cécile's stocking, two round peep-holes snipped out of its fabric, picks that up and slips it over his head, brushing

his face briefly with a honey-like genital scent” (211). Serge’s drug-use has turned from a process of speeding up to slowing down, and this revelation shares the stage with the leggings, combining as an erotic/narcotic version of the caul of his birth, his mother’s laudanum-honeyed eyes, or the veil of information described in the opening of *Satin Island*. However, in this instance the veil is quite literal, and it has two eye-holes which would suggest that it offers, not an alternate view of the world, but rather offers the protection of a mask; in other words, it changes not his view of the world (the plane and the drugs and the wireless set have exceeded it in that respect), but the world’s view of him and hence his feeling of being in this world. There is, in a sense, a kind of progression from veil as obfuscator of clarity to veil as ally of transparency (with eye-holes); and this uniting of veil and transparency is accompanied by the incestuous and erotic tone of Serge’s relation to his older sister. We might say that this theme of merging the erotic and the ontological or perspectival seems at this point to be moving towards a moment of finality, alluded to by the language of the narrator:

He pockets two more phials on his way out, the pauses for a last look at the river and the poplars, still and impassive against all the excitement. [...] The diacetylmorphine takes hold as he glides back up the path and over to his RE 8 [...] Flying towards the lines, Serge has the same sensation as he had with Tania toward the end of his Kloděbrady sojourn. The whole front has a weekend feel. [...] It looks like the entire war effort has been stood down – or rather, put into casual mode in which formalities have been relaxed and, consequently, anything is possible. (212)

Serge takes a “last look” at an “impassive” landscape before the heroin kicks in; this is the clear vision of darkness that accompanies the loss of faith in the preacher’s words (100-105), a kind of inert realism laced with the potential violent finality of his aerial transmissions. Once the heroin kicks in, the clear darkness of nature begins to merge erotically with this sense of finality: it becomes the silent insinuations of dance-partners, the bodily promise of completion, the potential contained in the end of the night. The heroin turns the “whole front” into a stage for completion, for death and orgasm and the end of work (the weekend), a stage whose apparent lack of script or “formalities” creates a seemingly unlimited potential, equal to that described in relation to revolution by Ivan Maňásek in *Men in Space*. It, in other words, opens Serge to the unlimited potential of endless darkness and death. Serge becomes mesmerized by the unified potential of all the various new formations, strategies, and movements of the battlefield, to the point where he ignores a German kite balloon who “doesn’t bother to winch itself out of range, so intent is it on fixing its gaze on the dots massing on the far side – and Serge, caught in the same spell of anticipation, doesn’t bother to strafe it” (213). Out of the clear darkness of post-trauma revelation (sexual or military/technical) comes a universal fascination with, and anticipation of, something new, or different. Despite the release that accompanies moments of completion (the turn to a clear vision

of darkness), Serge becomes once again seduced by and drawn into the processing of a total image, a unified image, a singular experience, which must include death itself. And while this desire is expressed initially in the sideways manner of Serge's drug-use, techno-philia and self-destructive fascination with everything to do with the battlefield except his own survival, it becomes most explicit in the scene that culminates in its fateful denial.

When Gibbs, his pilot, screams at him to shoot the enemy fighter that has been tailing them, Serge does not respond: "Serge isn't going to shoot. He feels tranquil, passive. He wants the Albatros to come and pluck him from his nest and carry him away in a long, whispered rush of consonants" (217). Serge's erotic desire for contact with that one thing that remains beyond the purview of his airplane, his narcotics or his orgasm, is transmitted to the reader as a desire to be killed by language, for language to carry him away from life itself. Unlike his comrades, language for Serge is a medium of death rather than one of safety and simulated security. Instead, the Albatros kills Gibbs and Serge's plane crashes to the ground. When he comes to, "there's brown fabric covering his vision. Its right up against his eyes: a diagonal grid that stays still as he glances left and right. Inhaling, he breathes in again the rich and honeyed smell of cunt. [...] The peep-holes have slipped down towards his mouth; he gouges a finger into one of them and tears the whole thing off. His view's still blocked by fabric, though: the white, silky stuff that wrapped the machine as it fell forms a sac around it" (218). His unconscious pursuit of death after his vision was cleared by orgasm in Kloděbrady resolves itself here in the imagery of a specific kind of failure: the failure of revelation, of epiphany or transcendence. Serge is denied the experience of death he seeks by the white parachute which takes the place of Cécile's stocking after Serge tears it away from his face, removing the explicitly erotic iteration of the caul with which he entered the world. His erotic completion, his merging with the only thing left out of his clear vision (death), is disrupted by the uplifting, supportive interference of the parachute, which (when considered alongside the imagery of the other novels) can be read in this instance as an allegory of the same black excess acquired at Sophie's funeral, the life-saving technical excretion of *Satin Island* or the ugly excess of the opening scene of *Men in Space*. It is the positive denial of his desire for death, it is the literal actualization of Hölderlin's poetics; out of the fields of death Serge finds rescue, but a rescue that he initially resents for its automaticity, for the final experience that it has taken from him. Serge's desire for death, which is a side-effect of his unified concepts of sex, technology and poetry, is denied by an allegorical articulation of the very things which have coordinated to make death the only thing Serge retains any erotic or willful fascination with; the final frontier of his existence. The WWI section of the novel culminates with an explicit rejection of death in similar fashion.

Wandering around the battlefield, Serge is captured by the enemy. After spending some time in a POW camp, he and his fellow prisoners are being marched in front of a firing squad:

Now the sergeant's talking to the firing squad: he mutters something to them and they drop their guns. "Was passiert?" Serge asks, indignant. It's the subaltern who answers him, in English: "Finished. It's over . . ." He starts to walk away. "What do you mean it's over?" Serge calls after him. "It hasn't even started yet!" [...] Superimposed across the clearing, as though projected there, Serge sees the image of a boat pulling off from a jetty at a point where several canals intersect: as the boat draws away, it takes the intersection with it, leaving him behind. For the first time in the whole course of the war, he feels scared. "Hey!" he calls after the soldiers. "You can't do that. Wait!" (238)

Thinking that his final completion is at hand, it is torn at the last second from his grasp by the chance timing of politics and peace. The boat in this excerpt is precisely the war itself, withdrawing from his life as both the medium and field of potential transcendence, newness or completion; Hölderlin's rescue comes in the form of Houseman's safety, romanticism reduces itself to realism, the orgasm at the end of an erotic relation to the clarity of darkness is once again trapped behind an obfuscating veil of safety and technology. McCarthy establishes a clear signpost of the postmodern interval in this scene, through this reference to a particular experience of Maurice Blanchot's:

[...] his experience of facing a firing squad during the second world war – feeling, despite everything, a rush of joy as the soldiers, "in an immobility that arrested time," pointed their guns at him; then, when the actual shooting inexplicably failed to happen (he would live another sixty years), a perpetual sense of carrying "the instant of my death henceforth always in abeyance". (*Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* 112)

Like Maňásek's revolution which never reached completion (one that was ultimately satisfying in any case, as opposed to energizing and motivating), and as such continues to seduce his grasping for the feeling of completion, Serge's pursuit of death continues to unfold like the re-enactment of a revolution in slow motion (aided by drugs) through streets of post-war London, back to Versoie and off to colonial Egypt.

McCarthy's novels are precisely modes of illustrating the inbetweenness and unending reversibility of the postmodern mode. They are the novels of suspended power and the power of suspension. A mode of suspense whose pay-off is eternally deferred, and will be eternally deferred, and yet remains almost excessively productive of fascinating and seductive images and scenes. This is the suspension of the subject between fiction and reality, the eternal suspension between success and failure, the eternal suspension of the ritual evocation of consumption, the eternal suspension of a universal destiny (of all destiny). This suspension is that of the consumer-subject, suspended between the product in the past tense and the product in the future tense; the present is merely the empty space between the last

purchase and the next, a state of both post- and pre-satisfaction, an expression of faith that is both already confirmed and waiting to be confirmed for the first (and last) time.

Timelessness and spacelessness provide fertile ground for the development of possibility. The shroud, the caul, and the veil are no different than the “piercing clarity” of “darkness”; they all afford Serge the same potential, the same desires (to transcend the limits of this darkness). This is a power structure that is begging to be made material and substantial; it is begging for the return of what it once banished (the rule of sign and symbol and faith, including metanarrative and its politics of authority and totality), but with a nicer, more seductive, more pleasant appearance. An appearance whose seductive and absorptive power will make up for the violence and dehumanization it obfuscates. It is, considering the contemporary political context exemplified in the western democracy by Brexit, Trump, Putin, Orban, Erdogan, Le Pen, and Wilders, an unconscious invitation for the return of the rhetorical dictator (a vestigial visual-material organ of power reinvested with faith and energy) by all sides; all sides reel and spin in the potential of this battlefield, romanticizing it in the same fashion that Serge does with his battlefield, with similar impacts on perception and desire, and ending up equally fearful and dreadfully disappointed when one side (even one’s own side) wins and ends the conflict. The historical product of this postmodern bourgeois myth/récit is a tragic one. It is a story whose reproductive potential (of class, identity, history, ontology) is conditioned by the excessive ritual reproduction of failed attempts to sate seemingly personal desires (ideological, erotic, ontological), and the almost mystical sense of continuity (the experiential consequence of senses that are objectively detached or invested into machines) by which these repeated failures at satiation acquire their own ritual mystery; they acquire the very depth of existence denied to McCarthy’s characters. In a kind of reversal through the act of literary interpretation (reading), the detached intellectual, and in a sense comedic²⁷, existence of McCarthy’s characters is revealed precisely through their dependence upon interpretation in a battlefield of signs and symbols. It is the only thing that makes their relation to the world interesting, which is to say, their playful and erotic relationship to objects or material serves as the vector of what takes the place of their will to be, or to will: an erotic desire to ritually play with objects unto death. This is the catechism of the nameless religion fundamental to the contemporary moment, and to the network of relations that emerges from McCarthy’s novels. Both the fictional character navigating the lines of a novel and the contemporary subject navigating the waves of information are desperate to find the security of dry land, and yet at the same time the perpetuity of

²⁷ Comedic like McCarthy’s Agamemnon, Bergson’s *“something mechanical encrusted on the living”* (37), or Baudrillard’s farcical performance of Western subjectivity (*Carnival*).

interpretation that they seek to escape provides the terrain of thrill, challenge, conflict, and effectively of living (seemingly) with one's life at stake. The dissolution of that stake is what is set into place by the mode of the interval and the aesthetics of the formalism: the interval constitutes the absorption of violent potential by stasis, while the formalism performs the movements of passage and progress. This is the experience that U. of *Satin Island* longs for and idolizes in his narration (and as such lacks), particularly in the form of the Vanuatu dive ritual. It is the daily life of the devotee to the nameless religion both conceived of and performed through all his projects by the narrator in *Remainder*. It is the return to earth that is denied to the cosmonaut and hence promises to be fatal, in *Men in Space*. Death as fate remains eternally deferred in *Satin Island*; what defers it is the persistent (but detached) presence of its symbol and sign and U.'s ultimate refusal to set foot on the dry land of Statin Island (his seductive icon of blackness and death). Death as fate in *Remainder* is made certain in the form of a binary (either now or much later), but is left out of the story as an event. Serge in *C*, in a last ironic and tragic twist, experience's death wrapped in the silk parachute of sickness and hallucination, as a blend of dream and memory, an unfolding allegory of the connective and reproductive poetics of his narrative and not in terms of revelation or novelty. The conditions established by the novels are the conditions of Baudrillard's postmodernity, the conditions of the repetitive unfolding of the same that simulate the frictionless passage through time and space towards an ideal but unnameable end. In Baudrillard's postmodernity technical and aesthetic or linguistic formalisms are united under the auspices of information, merging to form a looping structure that maintains the perspective of passage within the ritualized deferral of ideal ends. In the section that follows I will outline certain linguistic and aesthetic formalisms or modes that facilitate the identification with non-identity sought after by McCarthy, not through the straightforward allusion to absence but through the absence sought after and obfuscated by the art of disappearance.

Section 2

Abstract

The following section addresses three formalisms which, when taken together, describes a literary mode of reflecting the absence of the subject from the novel: through the investment of its identifying marks and qualities inside objects that evoke the fluidity of language and the predictability of the machine. The poetics of bourgeois subjectivity that are revealed by its denial can be understood in terms of symbolism, a-signification (or the art of disappearance), and the formalism of melancholy. Symbolism in the novels indicates not a celebration of the subject as genius or discoverer of the universal, but rather determines what kind of symbolism emerges in the absence of a traditional subject. This is therefore not a mode that seeks to deny the subject, but one engaged in a constant attempt to produce and reflect it in its absence. Hence, in the novels, the poles of symbolism are reversed: the object world now reveals the universal in the subject (or more accurately, in subjectivity). Unlike late 19th century symbolism, which is traditionally a more subjective formalism, a-signification and the art of disappearance (behind the sign and information) are aesthetic and performative forms that valorize control and repetition through a poetics of reverence, fascination and awe. These late capitalist theoretical formalisms illustrate the gaze of the object in a mode of reversed symbolism: in its search for the universal in us, it reduces us to a mass of repetitive and monotonous confrontations with that which we both work to defer and to call forth from the darkness: the arrival of nothingness, the art of disappearance from the world, or death. McCarthy's at times frenetic but largely muted poetic register reflects, in my opinion, the symbolism of the object absent the subject.

Post melancholy is the term used here to describe the state of the absent subject of the novels. It is therefore a kind of melancholy without a subject, and hence expressed not through self-abuse, self-hate or self-loathing (there is no *self* to target with these things in the novels) but through an endless cycle of momentary relations formalized by symbolism and the technical art of disappearance. A social and historical mode defined by detached intellection, indifference, and a perspectival formalism, post-melancholy is a literary mode that engenders a poetics of loss defined by what appears to be constant, continuous, repetitive, always connected, and always potentially proximate. Post-melancholy represents the loss of *loss* that emerges from McCarthy's denial of the realist self or subject; it represents the loss of the "event" of loss, the happening of a broken relation that seems irreparable. Even the narrator of *Remainder* is able to distract himself from his apparent loss of authenticity, with the help of modern

medicine, money, mass communications networks and a sycophantic corporate structure. As such, the trace of the poetics of the perspective that persists beyond the absence of the self demonstrates precisely the world of writing without a subject, a world of objective symbolisms, the aesthetic formalisms the machine applies to us in order to identify us and describe us, the aesthetics of, as McCarthy says, the anthropologist: patterns, forms, structures, banalities, repetitions, commonalities and monotonies. The stillness of these patterns and repetitions (their fixity) allows for the expression of the middle-brow false consciousness McCarthy dislikes, perhaps even demands it.

Chapter 4: The Symbolism of the Absent Subject

Symbolism

Symbol and symbolism are terms that might evoke both clear and ambiguous definitions. Lea argues that the push for individualism and against communalism that came out of the Regan/Thatcher era created an “imperative to ethical self-determination, to the deliberate rejection of socially symbolic systems in favor of self-discovered or intuited models of being, has brought about a “simplified expressivism” whose primary tenet is to “find yourself, realize yourself, release your true self” (*Secular* 475)” (Lea 460). In other words, symbolic networks of communal relations or understanding are replaced by an objective self-obsession. Namwali Serpell suggests that in *Remainder*, “The basis for ethics is not a ‘shared experience’ between people but an abstracted ‘symbol of perfection’” (255), which leads to the narrator developing, “a synchronic synthesis, merging things that ought to remain separate into a single quasi-religious vision with one cause: himself” (257). In each of these instances, the symbolic is understood as a shared form of meaning, contrasted with the individualism of neo-conservatism in the first case and the refusal of “shared experience” in the latter. In an interview McCarthy himself suggests that, “Artists work from the moment they come out of art school at self-consciously negotiating the symbolic structures of their day, and at self-consciously negotiating their relationships with dead ancestors—referencing other work, sampling other stuff from the past or the present” (Eburne, Hart and Jaffe 677). The use of symbol in *Men in Space* is noted by both Lee Rourke and Alfred Hickling, and in *Remainder* by Patrick Ness, all writing for *The Guardian* website; we have seen here that the symbolism of the shroud runs through *Satin Island*, as well as a recurring engagement with symbolic blackness. Though Charles Baxter notes, in a review of *C*, that all of McCarthy’s characters “suffer from a variety of referential mania” (“Last Year at Crypt Park”) *C* emerges from McCarthy’s oeuvre as potentially the most symbolically laden text that he has produced, with its “immense symbolic superstructure” (Tayler). Hence, in what follows I attempt a lengthy analysis of the symbolism at the core of *C*. Though I believe that the symbolic structure revealed below is in its own way applicable to the other novels, and in a sense will be applied more readily to these in the following chapter, *C*’s position as an historical novel that begins at roughly the same time as a formal mode of poetic and artistic symbolism, combined with the explicit, repetitive and continuous use of this symbolic framework serves to justify the intense focus on this particular novel in what follows.

The symbolist movement ostensibly began in 1886 in Paris when Greek poet Jean Moréas published his *Symbolist Manifesto*. The manifesto engendered a variety of responses from the artistic world, though at its core it argued that, “romanticism, naturalism and the movement of *les Parnassiens* were over and that henceforth symbolic poetry “seeks to clothe the idea in a sensitive form” (cherche à vêtir l’idée d’une forme sensible)” (*Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory* 887). Often cited as a movement poised to counter the literary dominance of Naturalism, Symbolism emphasized the duality of appearance and disappearance, citing the artist, poet or writer as the one who might evoke the hidden idea through the appearance of symbols. In his manifesto, Moréas emphasized the “cyclical evolution” of art:

It would be superfluous to point out that every new progressive stage of art corresponds exactly to senile degeneration, at the ineluctable end of the immediately previous school. Two examples will be enough: Ronsard triumphs over the impotence of the last impressionists of Marot, Romanticism unfurls its royal flag on the classical debris badly kept by Casimir Delavigne and Steven de Jouy. It is because any demonstration of art succeeds inevitably in becoming impoverished, in exhausting itself; then, of copy in copy, simulation in simulation, what was full of sap and freshness becomes dried out and shriveled; what was the new and the unprompted becomes banal and commonplace. (Moréas)

Hence, the modern Symbolist movement is born out of an understanding of art as always caught in a cycle of *success-as-failure*: the success of any style or mode inevitably leads to its excessive reproduction as copy or simulation, which in turn reduces it to social and cultural banality. Moréas suggests that the emergent school of symbolism is the enemy of,

education, declamation, wrong feelings, objective description, symbolist poetry tries to address the Idea in a sensitive form which, however, would not be its sole purpose, but furthermore that, while serving to express the Idea in itself, would remain subjective [...] So, in this art, the pictures of nature, the actions of human beings, all concrete phenomena would not themselves know how to manifest themselves; these are presented as the sensitive appearance destined to represent their esoteric affinity with primordial Ideas. (Moréas)

In this theoretical context, the symbolist is a poet whose subjective intuition produces appearances that convey formless and “primordial” ideas, without, however, abandoning the subjectivity of the individual. The symbolist movement valorizes the literature or art of *ideas* as an expression of the relation between the subjective and the universal.

One of the many interpretations of this movement is expressed by the English modernist writer W.B. Yeats; his is a paradoxical style, combining individual (artist) and universal (Idea), as well as ideal and material. Robert O’Driscoll attempts to delineate the difference between the classic French symbolist movement and the understanding of symbol and symbolism that comes out of Yeats’ essays and writing, by first contrasting Yeats’ understanding of materialism and symbolism, arguing that the former produces

knowledge from observations of the world and “the analysis of impressions derived from the five senses” (10-11) whereas,

The symbolist [...] begins by positing the ‘absolute difference’ between the natural and spiritual order: he regards the world as the external expression of what lies hidden in the mind of each individual [...] indeed to him observation, sensation, and the external world are merely the means by which the inner world of the mind is revealed, ‘the symbols or correspondence whereby the intellectual nature realizes or grows conscious of itself in detail.’ To the symbolist external nature is the shadow, not the substance, the distorted mirror of reality, not the reality itself. (11)

It seems, from this definition, that the “symbolist” approach is a dualistic one, confirming two complementary sides of the same coin, which is to say, a divided but linked individuality or self. Paul de Man’s investigation of epistemological aesthetics comes close to this notion of symbolism. The idea of the world being the mirror of the self is reduced by de Man (through reference to Condillac) to the notion of the shared non-being (linguistic basis) of self and other. According to de Man, the words the individual uses to modify and name objects in the world constitute a kind of authoritarian violence which, at the same time, establishes the mind of the individual as the “*lieu de passage* through which all reality has to pass” (*Aesthetic* 44-45). Hence, much like Yeats’ idea that the symbolist world is merely a mirror of the reality to which only the poet has access, de Man suggests that the mind acquires being precisely through the “modifications” (language) it deploys to understand the world:

[...] they [*modifications*] are devoid of being, but by recognizing them as similar to itself in this negative attribute, the mind sees them, as in a specular reflection, as being both itself and not itself at the same time. The mind “is” to the extent that it “is like” its other in its inability to be [...] Being and identity are the result of a resemblance which is not in things but posited by an act of the mind which, as such, can only be verbal. And since to be verbal, in this context, means to allow substitutions based on illusory resemblances (the determining illusion being that of a shared negativity), then mind, or subject, is the central metaphor, the metaphor of metaphors. (*Aesthetic* 45)

The symbolism of Yeats therefore reiterates this notion of the world as reflection of the individual; which is to say, both de Man and Yeats understand the link between mind/self/individual and world to be metaphorical or verbal. The only context where the world is merely the place where the mind is revealed, or merely the reflection of mutual non-being that allows for mutual being, is on the pages of a book, or in the discursive universe of philosophy, deconstruction and the digital (e.g.: when the sky and ground become mirrors of the intoxicated Serge in battle). This connection is reinforced in the following lines by O’Driscoll:

To the symbolist natural manifestations are seen as the way in which the intellectual nature becomes conscious of itself, but intellectual activity in turn is seen as the way in which the

emotional finds expression. There are thus three great principles operating in the universe: the emotional, the intellectual, and the natural [...] All life, all art begins in a 'bodiless mood,' becomes then a 'surging thought,' and last 'a thing.' The thing, the physical manifestation or action, is significant only in so far as it is the expression of a thought or emotion. At the center of the universe, possessing neither 'form nor substance,' is the 'universal mood' which Yeats calls God, the 'truth self-existing in its own essence.' All intellectual and physical forms, all art and nature, the universe itself, are seen by the symbolist as expressions or embodiments of this universal mood. Art, therefore, is not an imitation or extension of nature, but uses the external world as a symbol 'to express subjective moods.' (11)

Hence, the Symbolist symbol gives access to the inaccessible, it gives access to and equates both universal and subjective 'moods' or 'truths' by converting them from bodiless mood to thing. Yeats' symbolism, therefore, maintains the Symbolist emphasis on the individual by establishing the truth of the individual precisely as an *idea* that is hidden (bodiless) prior to being revealed (mirrored, named, performed) by symbolist aesthetics. Individuality becomes in this context equated with the ineffable presence of God, or a bodiless "truth self-existing in its own essence" (qtd. in O'Driscoll 11). Symbolism, in this sense, is an artistic mode that seduces and makes apparent the invisible connections between ideas and object, connections that at least refer to (if not constitute) what is explicitly spiritual or religious in society (a form of belief). Yet, there is a dualistic difficulty embedded in Yeats' version of symbolism. In establishing this difficulty Yeats seems to echo, *avant la lettre*, the idea put forth by Zadie Smith in her article "Two Paths for the Novel", in that he establishes a sense of the direction that mainstream literature has taken in his time, before laying out two possible consequences of this commitment:

In [contemporary] literature, partly from the lack of that spoken word which knits us to normal man, we have lost in personality, in our delight in the whole man – blood, imagination, intellect, running together – but have found a new delight, in essences, in states of mind, in pure imagination, in all that comes to us most easily in elaborate music. There are two ways before literature – upward into ever-growing subtlety [...] until at last, it may be, a new agreement among refined and studious men gives birth to a new passion, and what seems literature becomes religion; or downward, taking the soul with us until all is simplified and solidified again. (7-8)

Yeats is writing after symbolism of the Moréas type has become commonplace, as its success begins to fade into replication and decay. What he is saying here is that literature at this time can turn upwards, towards the ideal and away from the material, and hence approach the form of religion, or turn back down toward the material and the marketplace. Yet in demanding, whichever direction is taken, that the soul must accompany us, he is demanding that we keep in mind the duality of literature, which is to say, its immutable position *between* the material and the ideal (its performativity). And yet, is there any real difference here between 'religion' and the 'simplified and solidified'? I would argue that religion is precisely the simplification and solidification, in icons for instance, of irresolvable questions (like that of

the existence of God²⁸), and as such these “two ways” constitute two paths leading to the same destination. And yet, this does not deny each path an historical or aesthetic particularity. If, for instance, we are in the process of working through the downwards turn of objective materialism and realism (“The Death of Writing”), then we must be aware that the soul “will for a long time be impatient with our thirst for mere force, mere personality, for the tumult of the blood” (Yeats 8); which is to say, when we are reduced to narratives of expression, personal energy, and will (what is primarily absent in McCarthy’s novels and what he labels as the commonplace of contemporary middle brow fiction), the soul we retain becomes impatient for the *ideas* that these signs and symbols dissolve in their material self-evidence. He is in effect reiterating the “cyclical evolution” of literature described by Moréas. According to Yeats, if the soul “begins to slip away we must go after it” (8); the soul, the meeting point of the ideal and the material, constitutes the persistent (but dual) capacity of the metaphorical and symbolic. Yeats’ symbolism thus acknowledges a back and forth rhythm leading to a single destination (religion/simplification leading to the death of the individual subject doing the writing), but emphasizes the in-between point, the soul, as that which must be held tightly by the subject or artist.

As the counterpoint of his warning about pursuing the material (force, personality, blood) too far through poetics, Yeats offers a similar warning about the consequences of committing too fully to the ideal: “All art is sensuous, but when a man puts only his contemplative nature, and his more acute desires into his art, the sensuous images through which it speaks become broken, fleeting, uncertain, or are chosen for their distance from general experience, and all grows unsubstantial and fantastic” (39). In other words, when the symbolist poetics abandon the materiality of the symbol in an excessive commitment to the ideal, the symbol begins to lose its ontological and epistemological tissue and floats free of that which once grounded it in reality (materiality). Jonathan Luftig, working through the greater context surrounding the extract above, offers a concise summary of Yeats’ relation to the soul of the writer:

This “choice of all choices” between upward and downward movement (or between poetic transcendence and a kind of earth-bound immanence) is complicated by the movement of a “soul” that may not necessarily follow the path one has chosen. [...] the poet must “see to it that the soul” accompanies. If, having chosen the downward movement of the “market cars,” we do not “have the soul tight within our bodies” and it “begins to slip away,” then to “go after it” can only mean to be torn in two directions. To deny entirely the possibility of moving “upward” is, however, to succumb to a worse fate, since “the machine-shop of the realists” allows for neither movement nor choice (and, moreover, deprives one even of the consolations of “beer”). Only by retaining the irresolvable antinomy that preserves the “choice of all choices” as a choice that is never decisively taken can poetry remain open to the sudden and

²⁸ Baudrillard posits that the function of Byzantine Icons was precisely to erase this question (*Perfect Crime* 5).

unpredictable counter-movement of the "soul." ("Rent: Crazy Jane and the Image of Love"
1119-20)

Though I would agree that when the soul "begins to slip away" produces for Yeats' writer a moment of potential internal conflict, I would suggest that Yeats is not advocating maintaining this "irresolvable antinomy" so much as advocating following the soul when it begins to slip away (presuming some kind of intelligence, or ideas, beyond his comprehension, along the lines of the symbolist premise). It is possible that Yeats is interested in *following* the rhythmic back and forth of this cycle, keeping in mind the consequences of following the soul too far from the earth or the sky, making this metaphor one of rhythm or cycle more than split. McCarthy alludes to a similar perspective on the split described by Smith in her essay, when he says that the, "dichotomy of realistic stuff and avant-garde stuff simply doesn't hold," (Haglund). Yeats describes the writer in the position that we find many of McCarthy's protagonists: caught perpetually between earth and sky (material and ideal). McCarthy's poetics establish this same cyclical form, but wound up tighter than ever in the context of the contemporary domination of digital information technology. The symbolist wants to reveal what is hidden behind the base certainty of realist description, scientific objectivity and clarity of linguistic signification (the "simplified and solidified" ideas of reality reduced to self-referential signs). For Yeats, it is God that is hidden by these things, and God that must be revealed through the poetics of the symbol. Like Serge, for whom God is not hidden but rather one of many points "within the planes and altitudes the machine's cutting through – and one of several: the god, not God" (C 190), our contemporary context of mass communication and free-flowing information problematizes the very notion of 'the hidden idea', seeking through the reality ethos to make the world transparent to itself. This begs the question: if artistic symbolism is meant to reveal hidden-but-universal ideas, what kind of idea can be both hidden *and* universal in the timeless void of late capitalism? *Men in Space*, for instance, revolves around two major events: the passage out of the communist era in the Czech Republic, and the theft of a Byzantine icon. The thieves want to send the painting to America, and in order to do so they have been instructed by an unnamed authority to copy it and to return the copy to the police, thereby erasing the trace of any crime. An attempt at the 'perfect crime' is concealed within the historical events taking place on the streets and in the cafes of Prague: the event of a significant historical shift appears as the continuity of social life, but the criminality of this smooth transition is revealed in the investigation into the stolen icon. Jean Baudrillard offers one possibility of how this crime might play out when describing the nature of appearances in their relation to the "perfect crime" of a completely transparent world:

For the nothing itself – the continuity of the nothing – leaves traces. And that is the way the world betrays its secret. That is the way it allows itself to be sensed, while at the same time hiding away behind appearances.

The artist, too, is always close to committing the perfect crime: saying nothing. But he turns away from it, and his work is the trace of that criminal imperfection. The artist is, in Michaux's words, the one who, with all his might, resists the fundamental drive not to leave traces. (*Perfect Crime 1*)

In this extract Baudrillard is effectively reiterating the symbolist conception of 'appearances', suggesting that if the world was absent appearance, then it would be a perfectly transparent world with no truth left to expose (through symbol). In this context, appearance constitutes the trace of what the self-consuming world will always fail to eliminate: the trace of its non-existence, which is to say in a de Manian sense, the sense of non-being shared by both mind and world/language. In de Man's reading of Condillac's epistemology, mutual non-being constitutes mutual ontological grounding and expression in language. This "non-being" of language translates in the extract above to the notion of "the nothing". In a world drowning in explicit and easily accessible information about itself, the only secret that remains, the only hidden truth to be revealed by symbolism, is the "continuity of the nothing" that constitutes the mutual non-being of both individual self and linguistically modified objects. All artists (or in the parlance of the digital West, all "content producers"), in this context, exist within the mode of the symbolist, reduced in their expressions of subjectivity/reality to revealing the only universal idea that both prevents the completion of the reality-ethos project (which the symbolist explicitly opposes in the literary form of naturalism) and compels it at once: the dualism of linguistic certainty and instability. In his analysis of Hegel's *Aesthetics* Paul de Man outlines the German philosopher's argument that, "the sign and the meaning do not share a common property and are therefore estranged [...] from each other. Whereas, in the case of the symbol and of art, the opposite is the case, and the estrangement has become a close affinity [...] The sentence says exactly what it means to say: the aesthetic sign is symbolic" (*Aesthetic 188*). In other words, in the context of a total or totalizing aesthetic of reality (Rocha de Oliveira; Han; Baudrillard), the sign goes from being indifferent to the meaning it refers to, to symbolizing an idea that is no longer capable of being hidden. In a very Hegelian sense, the artistic symbol in the contemporary moment contributes to the totalizing of reality, while at the same time endlessly revealing and reiterating the very ground of that reality as the unstable and invisible non-being of language. Perhaps the most monumental and compelling example of the power of contemporary symbol to both destabilize and rearrange or reproduce reality are the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001; entirely symbolic in their effect, the attacks mobilized the force of an economic and cultural hegemon, drawing the threat of Islamic terrorism out of the shadows of symbolic resistance and reproducing it as genuine 'existential threat'.

However imminent and expressive the signs of death, terror and the 'existential threat' may seem, the ideas and emotions they provoke are not recent developments in the human experience. Their media, and the appearance they might attain through those media, might have shifted, but even the 21st century anxiety over Islamic terrorism is merely an experience of history repeating itself, energising society based on the omni-presence and imminence of death at the hands of the other (like, for example, the "red scare" that prompted the anti-communist McCarthyist movement in mid-twentieth century America).

Any symbolic reading, one that connects ideas to aesthetics/symbols, is necessarily productive of what one has already read or known or lived; it is not epiphanic or revelatory of anything other than an idea or combination of ideas that are already familiar. Symbolism or symbolic reading is as such a mode of repetition, but one that produces a sense of novelty through aesthetic difference. Symbolic reading and writing constitute a mobius strip; they shadow one another, precede one another perpetually. As such, we must consider the symbolic as productive of the realm of the ontological, even in this most advanced (aged) stage of Western enlightenment.

It seems McCarthy's style could easily be called symbolist, but this then requires a reimagining of what contemporary symbolism entails. For instance, what, if anything, does McCarthy's symbolism oppose or tacitly critique? If we recall what McCarthy has said about middle brow British realism, he seems to have positioned himself as returning to a critical perspective close to that of the original symbolists, in opposition to contemporary realist expressionism:

"So the novel's not just dead—it's undead. The type that matters at least: the committed, engaged, self-aware novel that wrestles with the contradictions of its own condition. The middlebrow novel, by contrast, the type that doesn't acknowledge or address this situation, but just ambles along happily believing that a naive, uncritical realism could ever work in the first place, let alone now—that would be undead too, but in a way that somehow doesn't seem to really matter" (Tuten).

In turn, a historical regression to this critical (and yet at the same time, self-critical) literary position can certainly be understood as fulfilling the task of the novelist set out by McCarthy in "The Death of Writing", in terms of being a literary mode that is reflective of the general condition of global network-society (emojis, memes, profile pictures, etc.). If this symbolic style is both a formal and ethical choice on the part of McCarthy, in order to proceed with an analysis of its relevance we must acknowledge two points. First, McCarthy's novels are without doubt novels of ideas. Second, ideas appear in these novels in both explicit and implicit forms, which is to say, they can be clearly explained and stated by a character or narrator (as in *Remainder*, *Men in Space*, and *Satin Island*), or, they can be contained and expressed symbolically through dreams, images, object and text (present throughout McCarthy's literary oeuvre). Hence, there

is a mixture of languages and appearances at play in the novels, a mixture we can understand in terms of technical and literary or linguistic formalisms. Though Yeats acknowledges the symbolist as always between the idealist and the materialist, like Moréas, he eschews clear, direct or educational language. McCarthy does not shy away from language that is direct, explanatory or educational (Baxter), confirming the suggestion that his notion of authentic self “can only be articulated through the confluence of material and immaterial realms” (Lea 465).

I argue in what follows that McCarthy is revealing the idea of the duality and universality of symbolism as the formalism of reading/writing in contemporary global society. As such, symbolism will be shown in what follows to represent both the perspective of the absent subject as well as the perspective of the symbolist *world*: McCarthy’s Google, or Baudrillard’s world that writes itself, seeking the appearance of the universal in its automated attempt to name and trace the outline of the subject. He is revealing symbolisms’ essential connection to both the ideal and the material in a mode that is not critical, but rather melancholic due to the sense of paradoxical immobility and perpetual deferral that is consistently produced by the pursuit of reality through symbol or sign. In McCarthy’s analysis of Hergé’s *Tintin* comics, it is precisely his noting that a “huge symbolic register runs through the books [...] worthy of a Faulkner or a Bronte” which leads him to declare that Hergé’s oeuvre “forms a lens, or prism, through which a whole era lurches into focus” (*Tintin and the Secret of Literature* 10). The symbolic framework investigated below serves a similar purpose: to reveal the *poetic* conditions of appearance in the era in which it was developed. For McCarthy then, symbolism and the chains of tropes, images and words it produces, reveals the idea of an era, a moment frozen into a buffering ring in the form of a novel²⁹. However, where the symbolists have generally relied upon nature and human action to evoke their concepts of universal ideas, McCarthy refers to the work of Abraham and Torok to describe the origins of a kind of symbolic chain connected to trauma and repression. Though the connection between McCarthy’s third novel *C* and Abraham and Torok’s study of Freud’s “wolfman” has been well established (Nieland 572), McCarthy summarizes the basic structure of the relation between the wolfman and the symbolic chains he produces as follows:

Beneath what for Abraham and Torok is the almost-fictional character Sergei Pankajev, then, lies a story of ‘the taboo-forming experience of a catastrophe, and finally beneath the catastrophe, the perennial memory of a hoarded pleasure with the ineducable wish that one day it will return’. This experience, this memory and this desire have given birth to a secret

²⁹ This has been noted in particular relation to *C*, by Jennifer Egan (*Code World*).

speech whose words, often transposed into images, acquire the status of coveted objects.
(*Tintin and the Secret of Literature* 84-85)

There is a clear connection between Serge and Sergei, beyond their nominal similarity. This secret speech amounts to the silent and invisible voice of the world-as-symbol, or the world of the symbolists. McCarthy calls it “noise” (*Tintin and the Secret of Literature* 82), and this is echoed in Lee Rourke’s review of *Men in Space*, a “novel of ideas” that “rattles with noise” (Rourke). What this amounts to is essentially a mode of repression through expression, the symbolic expression of a trauma understood here as “the taboo-forming experience of a catastrophe”. The symbol, like the word, is dead materiality given life through its referential similarity to an essential idea; an idea whose universality and scope is enough to overwhelm the average individual (e.g.: trauma), and hence must be concentrated into a form that simultaneously welcomes and rejects the violence of interpretation. McCarthy explains that Sergei, like Serge in *C*, had an older sister who was, “a gifted naturalist [...] who also composed poems which their father compared to those of Lermontov, seduced him as a child, playing with his penis while telling him lewd stories about the maid and the gardener. She later poisoned herself” (*Tintin and the Secret of Literature* 77). The secret speech of Sergei is in another sense the secret speech of this ‘catastrophe’, speaking through images, words and sacred objects.

Christopher Tayler describes *C* as, “a 1960s-style anti-novel that's fundamentally hostile to the notion of character and dramatises, or encodes, a set of ideas concerning subjectivity” (Tayler). This speaks to the idea that McCarthy’s narratives are symbolic in that they reveal the universal that is hidden *in plain sight*, like the concept of the aesthetic that was dominant for centuries in western thought but left unnamed until the end of the 18th century (de Man, *Aesthetic* 92); they reveal an idea that is not concealed or invisible, but is instead forever responding to the challenge of being exposed and made disposable, by a high irresistible aesthetic of ontological value, operationality and positivity: technological transparency (Breton; Han). De Man describes this paradox of revealing the unconcealed in terms of an elusive but consistent element of literature: “It is not easy to discover the element, in literature, that can be suspected of interfering with its aesthetic integrity. The urge to conceal it is inscribed, so to speak, in the situation, and this urge is probably strong enough to block direct access to the problem” (*Aesthetic* 92). It is an idea which resists its own description because it is so clear, and that clarity is destabilizing. It destabilizes all ideas as a result of its own universality and immanence; it is always present in stability and always about to arrive again and destabilize. The idea revealed in both the signifying and asignifying symbolism of McCarthy’s narratives is the one idea that resists its own being, an idea that is both one part, and the sum, of the following series: language, non-being, nothingness, death. This is the

universalism perpetually located and revived by the symbolism of the object or world that writes itself: the universality of decay, self-sabotage and the logic of deconstruction.

Formalisms of Non-Being: Incest, Insects, and Melancholy

Derek Attridge notes that *C* is “A very different reading experience” (21) to the other novels. He mentions the sexual trauma of the opening section in passing, before commenting that he has yet to feel any particular affective connection to the characters. He identifies what I would call the symbolic excess of the novel in the following terms: “The thematic texture thickens further: webs and weaving, insect life (imbricated with sex), communication. And there’s the mysterious development of the teenage Sophia [sic], seen through Serge’s uncomprehending eyes. For the first time, I find the enigmatic quality of the writing a little frustrating: I’m being asked to do my own detective work on the basis of confusing clues. Does Sophie have sex with Samuel Widsun?” (24). Attridge is keyed in on the symbolic double-speak, formally similar to the secret language of the wolfman, which serves to both confuse and seduce the reader through its simultaneously banal meaninglessness and subtle hinting at continuity. The experience of the symbolic or referential density of McCarthy’s style has been noted in relation to all the novels (Hogan; Rourke; Tayler; Turner; Schillinger). The “urge to conceal”, that which interferes with “aesthetic integrity”, can be understood here in terms of what Baudrillard calls “our involuntary contribution to our own destinies” (*Perfect Crime* 14). Baudrillard understands this through Nietzsche, suggesting that, “this drive is so great in man that for fear of desiring nothing, he will prefer the desire for the nothing, thus making himself, by the deployment of a will without object, the surest agent of that continuity of the nothing” (*Perfect Crime* 14). The continuity of the nothing is precisely that which extends the reality-ethos-project, and which, as such, constitutes an internal opposition to it. If the idea represented symbolically in McCarthy through nature and the (reproductive) acts of humans is “the nothing”, or “non-being”, then what Baudrillard is suggesting is that this relation is mediated by the fear of desiring nothing, which is to say, the relation between these symbols and subjects is an erotic one. If this is the case then the desire displayed by the characters in the novels should be examples of plain, emotionless (objective) description and symbolic description which requires the sensing of a physical object being written or read as a symbol; disguising, but at the same time creating the potential for an idea to emerge as connected to (encrypted in) this symbolic object. This is once again an example of metaphor as the link or connection (movement of a formalism) which allows ideas to emerge and transmit from object to object or subject to subject.

Just as a metaphorical connection establishes the ontological reality of the self/mind, it also establishes the ontological reality of the idea in the physical matter of the symbol.

In McCarthy's novels, the act of returning or regressing is essential to interpretation or understanding. As such, we must recall the scene of young Serge's sexual trauma at the hands of his sister Sophie in order to understand the symbolic/erotic relation to death or the nothing that persists through to the final scenes of the novel. Young Serge's relation to the symbol begins with a brief illustration of the metaphorically violent power the symbolic holds to relate objects and humans. Playing on the carpet of a disused school room, Serge positions his toy soldier, takes one of his illustrated wooden blocks and,

[...] lifting it up above the soldier, slams it down hard onto his face. The soldier's legs and feet jolt upwards as the comparatively huge slab hits him [...] When he's done smashing him he holds the soldier up to inspect the damage. His eyes are unaffected, still vague and distant, but his mouth has been deformed, its plaster dented and chipped away. Serge scrapes at the ground-down surface with his thumbnail, lifting off more flakes of plaster. Then, to no one but himself since he's alone, he says: "Bodner." (C 26)

The violence of this act is symbolic of the "authoritarian violence" of de Man's "modifications", to which it metaphorically adds the materiality of these modifications in the form of the wooden block; Serge disfigures his figure by smashing it with material signs, and the particularity of this disfigurement allows him to identify Bodner, the deaf and mute gardener the family employ at Versoie (through the "vague and distant" eyes and the lack of a voice/mouth). Language, or name, is used here to identify Bodner as both like and unlike this disfigured figure: the process of disfigurement becomes a mode of identification that combines the formalisms of violence and language into the positive physical presence of the gardener. This scene is then intruded upon by Serge's sister and the aforementioned instance of incestuous sexual contact is performed by Sophie in the playful guise of operating a telegraph machine.

In the context of symbolic reading, this scene of incestuous sexual activity comes to refer to the origin of Serge's erotic desires. In this short scene childhood innocence combines with knowledge of a contemporary form of communication (the wireless) in a way that makes its highly contentious sexual content far more ambiguous and difficult to identify. The combination of technological and linguistic formalism and childhood sexuality threaten to drown the symbolism of the scene in themes that repeat throughout the novel; it threatens to decisively clarify the scene as merely one instant of aesthetic repetition among many. However, if read as symbolically revealing a single, universal, idea, then this scene serves to *begin* a long chain of symbolic illustrations that persist through to the final pages of the novel.

The Eroticism of Symbol and Death

George Bataille, in his investigation of eroticism, argues that there is a specific relation between death and sex. According to Bataille, the individual is *discontinuous*, which is to say, the individual ends at the horizon of its own body, and it ends in death: "He is born alone. He dies alone. Between one being and another, there is a gulf, a discontinuity" (*Eroticism* 12). More than just referring to the inevitability of death, Bataille is referring precisely to the gulf or depth of interiority that is mined by the individual but cannot ever be accessed by another (except when converted into modes of expression like metaphorical similarity). He continues: "This gulf exists, for instance, between you, listening to me, and me, speaking to you. We are attempting to communicate, but no communication between us can abolish our fundamental difference. If you die, is it not my death. You and I are *discontinuous* beings" (*Eroticism* 12). Communication, in other words, might establish a temporary connection, but it cannot eliminate this irrevocable discontinuity. Certain ideas or experiences, however, do serve to produce an effect, or perhaps even an affect, of *continuity* for the discontinuous individual. For Bataille, two of the primary forms of accessing continuity are through death (whether in idea, image or personal experience) and sex (*Eroticism* 14). Though the lines describing Serge's sexual trauma in the novel do not explicitly illustrate sexual reproduction, they do symbolise reproduction as an ambiguous idea: "He reaches between her legs, pushing through the pleated fabric [...] "Stop it!" Serge shouts. "Why? I've seen Miss Hubbard do it. She did it with the man from Lydium. 'Dear Man from Lydium,' *tap-tap*, 'please send more charcoal and wipers for our school class,' *tip-tip-tip*" (C 27). The symbolism of this first line is clear in terms of referring to the act of sexual reproduction, yet the following lines by Sophie blur this straight-forward reading. This scene moves from literary innuendo to a combination of technological and sexual rhetoric that may cause the reader to question whether Sophie is referring to observing a sex-act, or, as is alluded to through the use of capital 'M' for man and italicised actions of the scene (*tap-tap*), simply observing Miss Hubbard work the wireless machine (which would imply that the sexual element of this scene is not a result of mimicry, but rather the expression of an unspoken and essential idea³⁰ conveyed through the movements of technical operation). Reproduction in this scene takes on a double-guise: both sexual and technological reproduction have merged in the symbolic formalisms of communication and sex. Just as Bataille illustrates any attempt to communicate as an attempt to grasp at continuity by discontinuous beings, so is the act of sexual reproduction "a kind of transition from discontinuity to continuity. Sperm and ovum are to begin with discontinuous entities, but they *unite*, and consequently a continuity comes into

³⁰ This idea of both the taboo against, and the persistence desire for, incest, in Bataille's terms (*Eroticism* 40).

existence between them to form a new entity from the death and disappearance of the separate beings” (*Eroticism* 14). Hence, whether technological or sexual, the reproductive symbolism of this scene alludes to the essential desire for continuity by discontinuous beings, even to the point of being symbolized in the ostensible innocence of children; the idea conveyed through this symbolic writing is precisely Bataille’s concept of the erotic, as a paradoxical unity of life and death.

That this scene of traumatic sexuality is symbolic of the erotic is confirmed in the two decisive moments that are played out over the next four pages. The first is Serge’s encounter with a wasp trapped in honey, the second is his brush with drowning. Though I have dealt with these scenes in the first chapter as they regard acceleration, in this context they will be investigated in terms of the relation to death or nothingness they evoke. After Serge escapes Sophie, he makes his way to his mother’s side, where he finds a wasp struggling in a pool of spilled honey: “Serge watches it for a while, then takes the phial and presses it down across the insect’s body, using its rim to slice apart the bridge where thorax meets abdomen. The wasp’s legs continue their treading and its mandible is drawing even after they’re no longer joined. Its thorax throbs, then stiffens and is still” (C 30). For Bataille “death means continuity of being. Reproduction leads to the discontinuity of beings, but brings into play their continuity; that is to say, it is intimately linked with death [...] death is to be identified with continuity, and both of these concepts are equally fascinating. This fascination is the dominant element in eroticism” (*Eroticism* 13). This is the first example of Serge’s (universal anthropological) erotic desire expressing itself. He is first fascinated by the struggling insect, then, without explicit reasoning, kills it. This act of killing becomes symbolic of an unspoken eroticism if we allow that death, as an aesthetic symbol, “means continuity of being”. This “continuity of being” is complemented by a kind of continuity of symbol, illustrated by the separated insect-parts continuing on (moving and eating) beyond the point of their bisection and death. Not only is death “fascinating”, but this fascination amounts to “our obsession with a primal continuity linking us with everything that is” (*Eroticism* 15). To bring death into play, in this instance through the death of the wasp, is to momentarily enact the imperative of continuity. Extending this concept of our “obsession”, Serge moves on from the death of this insect to an encounter with his own mortality:

Eventually he arrives at the stream that hems in the Crypt Park on the side furthest from the house [...] He crouches down close to it and sees the slope of Telegraph Hill and the bright sky above it reflected in the water. He leans forward and catches sight of the top of his own head, his eyes, his nose and mouth. Then he takes a block from his left arm and places it gently on the surface of the water [...] Serge floats a second block, then a third [...] He leans out after them, so far that he can see his whole torso reflected in the water, right down to his knees, with the blue sky revolving above it like a turning lid . . . And then he’s in, tumbling and turning like the blocks as water rushes up his nose and burns his throat. (C 30-31)

These lines combine the principles of symbolism with the eroticism of Bataille and a metaphorical act of communication: Serge launches signs and symbols into the stream that reflects to him his being. Like the form of signal his sister will eventually take after her suicide, little Serge is performing the life of the dead subject: releasing his modifications, his disfiguring figures, into the meandering stream, almost to the point of his own disappearance into the honeyed murk of information. In a kind of precession of his narcotic experience of sky and ground as mirrors (C 198), the stream becomes a symbol of the medium of symbolism. Nature begins as a reflection of itself (symbolic of a kind of materialism), proceeds to reflect the features of young Serge's face (reflecting the idealism of the self, or mutual non-being) and ends as a reflection of a more complete self that results in an almost-fatal experience of continuity. This particular episode ends with the following lines: "Women look over at them from the Mulberry Orchard. Behind the women, shapes and pictures drift flat and unnoticed on the stream as it emerges from behind the Crypt Park's walls and oozes silently along its course" (C 32). The stream begins as the border of death (the Crypt Park), and ends emerging like ooze from the terrain of death (the Crypt Park), reiterating the cyclical mode of literary symbolism as well as the aimless paths of digital information.

The crypt in *C* is the symbol of a kind of reversibility; like the reversibility of literary modes described by Moréas, the crypt here is a symbol of paradoxically enclosed movement. In his work of theory, McCarthy cites Abraham and Torok, for whom the crypt is that which, "buries, and in doing so generates noise, coded speech [...] The crypt's walls are broken; it oozes, it *transmits*" (*Tintin and the Secret of Literature* 82-83). This "noise" is in essence the secret symbolic speech generated by Serge and Sergei's experience of sexual trauma. This is the same kind of reversibility that is described by Bataille in terms of the relation between taboo and transgression. Continuity in the form of death and sex is pursued by the discontinuous, but only within the boundaries of the taboos on incest and violence. Bataille argues that "What we desire is to bring into a world founded on discontinuity all the continuity such a world can sustain" (*Eroticism* 19), in this scene with the stream young Serge has discovered the limits of continuity, or, "all the continuity" his young world "can sustain"; in testing this limit Serge has symbolized his eroticism in terms of Bataille's opening formula, as "assenting to life up to the point of death" (*Eroticism* 11).

The parade of erotic imagery continues into the first three pages of the next chapter. It opens with another reference to reproduction and continuity, this time in the guise of a mythic lineage. When visitors to Versoie, through "politeness or [...] genuine curiosity", ask about "an early daguerreotype – one of the very first", they get a short story of Jacques Surin, the founder of Versoie: "a tale that Versoie's

residents have heard so many times it's taken on the aspect of a biblical fable involving plagues, exoduses, and long lines of "begot"s" (C 33). Maintaining the aesthetics of reproduction and continuity, young Serge, now seven years old, "Surin's several-times-great-grandson", enters into the "Hatching room" to observe female moths laying their eggs (34). Though the narration here begins with a close description of the labour process involved in the reproduction of the silk-producing moths, we quickly notice that this fascination is purely narrative; it is not (in this moment) the object of fascination of seven-year-old Serge. Rather than observing the labour of the moths, he enters the room and,

is now standing still behind the kneeling women, watching them. Their faces, turned away from him and propped up on their forearms, are held just above the boxes, which make the skirted waists that they present his way ride up into the air. The skirts' fabric folds and pleats around their thighs but smoothly hugs their bottom's curves. Serge focuses on these, shifting his gaze from one woman's haunches to the other's. After a while he turns around and watches a third kneeling woman, bent over like the others but occupied instead with placing hatched larvae on a mat. This woman is facing him. Her arms are spread, her shoulders pulled back as she manoeuvres the slug-like creatures into place. She lays them out in rows, her hand returning to each row to neaten it the way a baker's hand returns to rows of unbaked pastries on a tray. Each time she does this the top of her blouse falls half an inch or so, giving Serge a glimpse of breast. The larvae stir and wriggle slightly, their greyish-brown flesh soft and wrinkled, like the trunks of miniature elephants. (35)

The poetics of these lines, when considered to be symbolic of death and sex, seems much less ambiguous than that of our previous examples (implying accumulation or progression). Again, "The skirt's fabric folds and pleats" symbolize female genitalia, but this time there is a more explicit fascination and narrative focus on the erotic elements of the women's bodies. This initial perspective (from behind the women who are kneeling) is a symbolic precession of how Serge will have sex throughout the novel³¹. The third woman reveals the blind-spot of this first perspective: once again we have a symbolism combining human sexual reproduction and the figure of insects that are being bred and used for specifically economic reproduction, the production of silk. Though the erotic elements of the female form are here made explicit, the male sexual response (as yet affectively absent from Serge) is symbolically figured in the larvae that "stir and wriggle slightly, their greyish-brown flesh soft and wrinkled, like the trunks of miniature elephants" (35). In this short extract we have two layers of reproduction (sexual and economic), symbolized simultaneously by both human figures and insect figures. The overarching symbolism here seems to relate quite straightforwardly to eroticism and reproduction (the latter being at stake both erotically and economically), and hence, to continuity, in the form of the metaphorical similarity between the female workers and insects. However, this symbolic network is interpreted through the framework of

³¹ A reference to, and literary simulation of, the sexual proclivities of Freud's wolfman.

the formalism: the ideas or universalisms that emerge from this narrative style evoke not the god-like universalisms revealed by the subjective interpretation of nature, but rather the degraded and negative universalisms of the subject revealed in their symbolic interpretation by the formalism itself.

Disguised, perhaps, by the preponderance of linguistic and technical formalisms of communication technology, the scene of Serge's trauma, when set beside the scene above, indicates continuity in the form of repression. It is precisely the incestuous nature of this first scene that remains largely silent behind the overt technological language Sophie uses. Bataille, through Lévi-Strauss, suggests that the incest taboo (a universal phenomenon identified by anthropology) signifies the transition from nature to culture, or the transition from animal man to human man (*Eroticism* 198). Far from reflecting a natural or universal aversion to the incestuous act, "Lévi-Strauss is at pains to show that the reverse is true as psychoanalysts agree. Incestuous relationships are a universal obsession as dreams and myths show. If this were not so, why should the taboo be so solemnly proclaimed?" (*Eroticism* 199). In other words, the incest taboo is in constant conflict with incest as a "universal obsession". How, in this case, does this obsession persist in the imagery of the novel? One way of pursuing this universal idea is through its relation to human economic reproduction.

Incest is one form of sexual reproduction that is natural to the extent that it is uncontrolled by language; in other words, it operates freely when cultural or social restraints are absent in regards to reproduction. Incest is in effect an anthropological formalism tracing lines or vectors of reproduction: put symbolically, it represents a pre-cultural (pre-thought), unconstrained process of reproduction. Exogamous sexuality, on the other hand (sexual reproduction constrained by the incest taboo), forces the male to seek a partner beyond a certain level of kinship, and this form of sexuality enacts marriage as an economic structure based on the necessity of reciprocity; if you must refuse to mate with your sister or daughter, and give her to another man, then you can expect that he must do the same, and reciprocate by making his sister or daughter available to you (*Eroticism* 209-210). Exogamous sexuality, symbolized here through Serge's fascination with the bodies of the workers, is itself symbolic of *controlled* reproduction, in the same way as the third workers' motions combine with her sexuality and the insects' movements that symbolize Serge's nascent sexual desire (which silently respects this incest taboo). It seems at this point that this symbolic chain leads away from the pre-cultural incestuous (unconstrained) form of reproduction to the post-cultural (constrained) form of both sexual and economic reproduction. However, the idea of incest as universal obsession is symbolically and erotically reiterated through Serge's

fascination with the moths in their sexually indifferent and economic (incestuous *and* exogamous) reproduction:

Serge walks over to this, kneels beside it and sees something he's not paid too much attention to on previous visits to this room. Walled in by wooden planks, scores of white moths are coupling. Some are crawling around, their antennae twitching as they seek out partners; some are bumping blindly into one another, wrestling a little before moving on; but most are slotted into other moths. The males crouch above the females, thorax stacked above thorax, wings resting over wings. Once joined, they froth around, vibrating, as though trying to unhook themselves again, or to travel somewhere in this new formation. (C 36)

Serge is now fascinated with the undifferentiated copulation of these biological machines, these living elements of the production process. Incest persists symbolically through the deployment of sameness and reproduction; moth couples with moth, sameness merges with sameness, thorax with thorax, wing with wing. Despite producing a specific economic value, these moths represent the purely sexual mode of incest through their aesthetic sameness. The aesthetics of sameness persist into the final lines of this scene:

He picks the male, or perhaps female, moth up and, pinching its thorax in the fingers of one hand, plucks first one and then the other of its wings off. He sets the denuded torso back inside the pit to stagger around as it did before while he holds the wings up for inspection. Their markings, seen from close up, look like anemic reproductions of the ones on the mulberry leaves [...] He holds one up to his eye, a moth-wing monocle: the Hatching Room, its wooden beams and kneeling women all sink behind gauze. They look like a daguerreotype, pale and sepia. Serge, seven and splenetic, thinks: this is how this scene would look in years from now, if someone were to see it printed onto photographic paper – anaemic, faded, halfway dead. (36-37)

In his initial attempts to trace the movements of the reproducing insects Serge can only locate a pattern once they have joined together; afterwards, the entire scene comes into focus through the formalism of the photograph, the very object that has been identified by the text as the portal through which Serge's continuity might be traced backwards. The photographic quality of Serge's vision speaks to the unity of the three types of eroticism identified by Bataille: physical, emotional and religious, all of which are concerned with the substitution, "for the individual isolated discontinuity a feeling of profound continuity" (*Eroticism* 15). In his illustration of the concepts of continuity and discontinuity, Bataille contrasts the reproductive mode of asexual single-celled organisms with the sexual reproductive mode of "complex" organisms. He argues that,

I had to admit just now that it might seem irrelevant and pointless to consider the reproduction of minute organisms. They lack the feeling of elemental violence which kindles every manifestation of eroticism. In essence, the domain of eroticism is the domain of violence, of violation. But let us ponder on the transitions from discontinuity to continuity of these minute organisms. If we relate such transitions to our own experience, it is clear that there is most

violence in the abrupt wrench out of discontinuity. The most violent thing of all for us is death which jerks us out of a tenacious obsession with the lastingness of our discontinuous being [...] We do not find it easy to link the feelings of tiny creatures engaged in reproduction with our own, but however minute the organisms may be, we cannot visualize their coming into existence without doing violence to our imagination: existence itself is at stake in the transition from discontinuity to continuity [...] Not only do we find in the uneasy transitions of organisms engaged in reproduction the same basic violence which in physical eroticism leaves us gasping, but we also catch the inner meaning of that violence. What does physical eroticism signify if not a violation of the very being of its practitioners? – a violation bordering on death, bordering on murder? (*Eroticism* 17)

These first few scenes have been symbolic of physical eroticism, the eroticism of sex and death, projected into the text by the world which, like visitors to Versoie, seeks Serge's subjectivity in the formalized depths of the photograph. In other words, if we follow Bataille's logic, Serge sees in the indifferent copulation of these insects a certain violence being done to him, a violence or violation not unlike that perpetrated by Sophie. This is first indicated by the indifference of the sexes of the moths, like Serge and Sophie, made continuous (and incestuous) through the play of signals, genitals and repetitive movement. Next, Serge rips the wings from the moth he grasps; not just a reiteration of violence at the heart of continuity, but also an act of "denuding", implying, before he puts the wings to his eyes, metaphorical similarity to their role as covering, as material. Bataille sees "Stripping naked", as, "the decisive action. Nakedness offers a contrast to self-possession, to discontinuous existence, in other words. It is a state of communication revealing a quest for a possible continuance of being beyond the confines of the self" (*Eroticism* 17). Serge is doing, physically, to the moths what Sophie symbolically or metaphorically was doing to him, turning him into a symbol of the erotic quest for continuity at the same time as a symbol of the conditions prior to the imposition of the incest taboo that gives this quest its impetus. This silent obsession with incest constitutes a silent desire for both regression and continuity, a desire that is played out in a formalism of reproduction (insect and economic) connected to the incestuous by virtue of a lack of eroticism (pure reproduction for reproduction's sake, unrestrained and hence not erotically charged by the potential for symbolic transgression). Death is present in these scenes symbolically in the form of violent continuity: the connectivity and continuity of communication, the continuity of the flowing stream, and finally the mindless continuity of the insect coupling, even after being maimed and "denuded" by Serge. Through the formalisms of insect, human and economic reproduction the text attempts to illustrate Serge's perspective (because Serge is himself the blind-spot of the novel), and in doing so reveals the universality of death or absence that is at the heart of this subject. As a way of repaying the violence done to his sense of discontinuity, Serge rips the wings from the moth. The wings themselves become the physical symbol of his repressed longing for continuity, and in looking through them he generates yet another symbol of continuity aesthetically and formally separate from

sexuality or eroticism: the photograph. The photographic quality of looking through the “gauze” of the wings is a symbol that moves backwards and forwards through the novel; back to the caul of Serge’s birth, and forwards through a variety of iterations already mentioned in previous chapters. Serge is definitively caught between his longing for the violence and violation of continuity and his attachment to discontinuity which performs his respect for the incest taboo. It is the breaking of this taboo as his first experience of violent continuity which places him in this “splenetic”, which is to say, melancholic, in-between position, reminiscent of the position of the symbolist described by Yeats. Serge’s thoughts make the photograph into a symbol of this perpetual inbetweenness; always caught between unsatisfying discontinuity and traumatic and regressive continuity, his violent play produces the screen through which his own circumstances are revealed as “anaemic, faded, halfway dead”. We might even say that this sets the groundwork for Serge’s personal condition, largely affectless and detached as it is.

Serge and Sophie: Symbols of Regressive Continuity

The first words that follow the scene in the Hatching Room reiterate the consequences of seeing things through the detached wings of the moth: “A ghost’s heading towards him, looming white and large behind the veil. The ghost lacks decorum: far from being awash with ghoulish dread, its face wears an expression of bemused derision. “You look stupid,” Sophie tells him. Serge drops the wing and tells her: “So do you” (C 37). Despite this vision of Sophie as the living dead being connected to Serge literally looking through the wings of the moth (the formalism of the photograph), it is an aesthetic that persists through to the scene of her funeral, and is always looking backwards to the caul of Serge’s birth. This same kind of narrative regression is symbolized after Serge and Sophie unintentionally create an explosion with their chemistry set. Like the moment of incestuous transgression, this explosion seems both amusing and pleasurable to Sophie: “A gasp comes from her mouth; then another, then a shriek of pleasure [...] but he throws up right then, on the floor [...] Sophie looks at it, then back at him, then shrieks again, her shoulders shaking as the shrieks turn into sobbing laughs that judder her whole body” (46). The movements and sounds of the explosion, and Sophie’s reaction, symbolize orgasm and comedy at once; in this sense they are reiterations of her bemusement in the trauma-scene. This experimentation and explosion as such symbolizes a return to the same taboo-breaking violence of their previous incestuous encounter. And this symbolic returning, or regression, back towards the scene of incest is further symbolized in terms of death and trauma when:

Their father opines later that there must have been some contaminant in the cup to cause such a violent explosion. He ventures, further, that Serge and Sophie’s proximity to the point of

detonation kept them from harm: had they been standing three feet from it, the force of the expanding air would have been enough to kill [...] He plots diagrams showing the explosions vectors through the room [...] and tries for several days to ascertain the exact nature of the compound inadvertently concocted by his children. Serge and Sophie, for their part, spend weeks, then months, trying to reproduce the blast. They use means more intuitive than their father's – mixing elements together at random, heating, cooling and remixing them – but have no more success than he did. All they ever get are small-fry *phutts* and *phizzes*, unsatisfying placebos. (46)

Simeon Carrefax employs the formalism of the scientific model (lines, vectors of force, chemical compound) in order to get to the bottom of what caused the explosion, and yet this series of formalisms is precisely the mode through which the scene's backwards reference is both enunciated and obfuscated. Continuity, for both Serge and Sophie, assumes the paradoxical aesthetics of regression; a procession of attempted reconstructions, or returns, to an original trauma, like those obsessed over by the narrator of *Remainder*. This entire extract is a symbolic retelling of, or return to, Serge and Sophie's incestuous moment. Like this explosion, what marked the original trauma here is the contamination of sameness in the sexual combination of Serge and Sophie. Like the explosion, it was their proximity to one another, their kinship and sexual connection, which constituted the very trauma that allowed both of them to persist in a kind of repressed ignorance of what had happened; in other words, they escaped harm by virtue of being too close to the violence. Their father, Simeon, tries to reveal the "compound" that caused the explosion, and in his role as scientist and engineer, is looking in precisely the wrong direction; the two of them together are the compound. The symbolic regression of this scene culminates in the final lines, revealing in what Serge and Sophie continued to do, precisely what they were doing in the first place: trying to get back to that moment of violent continuity and death that they cannot access precisely because of their proximity to each other and it. Each successive scene in the novel that has followed that one, up until this point, has constituted a series of symbolic "*phutts* and *phizzes*, unsatisfying placebos" (46), symbolic failures to return to or clarify the nature of that original trauma. That this scene illustrates a symbolic connection to the trauma in question does not deny its capacity to equally represent a refusal or critique of symbolism in its capacity to relate the subject or object to an idea, specifically when that idea is as taboo and traumatic as incest. The symbolism of C demonstrates both the success and failure contained in the cycles described above.

Immediately following the scenes of their mutual education by their tutor M. Clair (the centerpiece of which is their adoption and extension of the "Realtors Game"), the reader is introduced to Samuel Widsun, "Simeon Carrefax's old university associate" (55). Widsun arrives at Versoie in the midst of rehearsals for the school's pageant, whose theme is, "Persephone: the Pageant is to represent her

rapture by and marriage to Hades, and subsequent coronation as Queen of the Underworld” (55). The theme of the pageant is a symbolic precession of the events that spike the narrative up until Sophie’s suicide, and at the same time, reiterate the present-ness and prescience of Serge’s after-death vision of Sophie through the veil of the moth wings (which is to say, the continuity of the photographic formalism).

Sophie, figured as half-dead, symbolically preceded by the mythic plight of Persephone, is at this point in the story, “almost-adolescent” (37). She is temporally positioned in an in-between state of physical and sexual development, a position that both represents and confronts the reader with a certain ambiguity. However, what follows is not ambiguous in its relation to Serge and Sophie’s ‘original crime’. Widsun is employed at the ministry of defence, and his expertise is in coded communication. At breakfast each morning he locates and breaks codes placed in the newspaper’s personal notices, messages sent between illicit lovers. This immediately draws a response from Sophie, in the symbolic language of the erotic and the formalized language of the code:

“What are they saying?” asks Sophie.

“Hmm, let’s see. It’s a three-line rail-fence, a, d, g, . . . d-a-r-l . . . Got it: ‘Darling Hepzibah’ – Hepzibah? What kind of name is that? – ‘Will meet you Reading Sunday 15.25 train Didcot-Reading.’ Reading you all right, you idiots.” [...] “This one’s using atbash at least,” Widsun continues.

“Tell me what he’s saying!” Sophie chirps, creaming her dark cup and sliding from her chair to wander over to his. [...] Sophie leans on his broad shoulder, peering over him into the page as his pencil flicks between the encrypted text [...] “Righty-ho: ‘Rose. Smell of your bosom lingers on my clothes and spirit. Must meet again next week. Advise when Piers away using this channel.’ The saucy scoundrel! I’ve a mind to give him a reply.”

“Oh, let’s!” she squeals, patting her hands across his back. “You can teach me the code.”

“My delightful child, nothing would give me greater pleasure.” (58)

The erotic may seem to be figured most clearly here in the language of the narrator: “Sophie chirps, creaming her dark cup [...] Sophie leans on his broad shoulder [...] as his pencil flicks [...] she squeals [...] “You can teach me the code” (58). However, if we return to the notion of nakedness as understood by Bataille, what really comes to symbolize the erotic in this scene is precisely the formalized aesthetic act of coding and decoding. Sophie and Serge’s regressive pursuit of continuity exemplifies the paradoxical character of coded communication; communication which constitutes a secret containing (both displaying and concealing) the key to its own deciphering. Sophie, prior to Serge developing an erotic connection to the codes of the wireless machine, is erotically seduced by the symbolism of the code, symbolizing, like stripping naked, “a state of communication revealing a quest for a possible continuance of being beyond

the confines of the self" (Bataille, *Eroticism* 17). This describes both the purpose of the lovers' codes being decoded (denuded) by Widsun, and the act of decoding itself, which, if considered a metaphor or formalism of "denuding", offers yet another chance for Sophie to return to the scene of her original transgression (which is to say, the violence and violation of taboo continuity).

Widsun then, "whisks her away to his room, where they spend the whole morning" (58) learning various cyphers and forms of code. They are accompanied by Serge, who at this stage does not share his sister's erotic attraction to codes; instead, he plays with Widsun's "personal seal and ink set" (58), with another technical formalism alluding to individuality or particularity. Sophie, as when Serge stood fascinated by the erotic outlines of the worker-women's bodies, seems to be drawn to the possibility of an experience of exogamous continuity; both Widsun and coded communication are external to her kinship group, as her father hates, "the notion of codes, ciphers and encryption. "Goes against the whole principle of communication" (58). This seems the case particularly when she demands that Serge "Go and do something else" (58). The question confronting the reader at this point becomes: is Sophie aware of, and in control of, her erotic desires? Or, is she still motivated by the silent interference (the noise, the symbolic matrix) of her invisible transgression? The ambiguous description of her current state of physical and sexual development only serves to problematize any attempt to answer this question. What becomes clear, through what amounts to the coded language of the narration, is that Sophie and Widsun's shared love of codes eventually transitions into an explicit sexual relationship, a relationship that Serge is aware of only symbolically, through the imagery of castration:

Serge, still fiddling with his guillotine, pictures Bodner's mouth again: the undulating lips, the shrivelled trunk of tongue. He thinks of ox-tongue, sliced and laid out on a plate. It makes him swallow, and his spit tastes bitter. Sophie prances into the library and straight up to Widsun.

"I've found seven of them!" she sings, thrusting a spread palm and two fingers from her other hand right up against his face.

"Seven of what?" her father asks.

"He puts messages in the papers every day, and I have to crack them and reply in the same code," she announces in a voice that's guilty and defiant at the same time.

Carrefax looks daggers at his guest.

"I'm training her up as a spy," Widsun confesses [...] "I'll be a double agent," Sophie purrs, bunching up her hair, "a double-double agent. If I'm caught, I'll poison myself before the enemy can make me spill the code. (60-61)

This game that Sophie and Widsun are playing, perhaps unbeknownst to her, is simply a game of "stripping naked", a game that amounts to the repetition of the violation of Serge and the incest taboo, a game that

constitutes a coded communication of the potential for erotic continuity. This game however, quickly transitions from a symbol of denuding, into a veil covering up actual sexual intercourse: “She spends the next few days scurrying between her lab and Widsun’s room [...] Serge, no longer allowed into Widsun’s room with her, hears shrieks and squeals each time she finds or breaks a cipher, mixed with Widsun’s deep roars of approval. Occasionally she passes him in the corridor as she emerges with her hair messed up and ink spattered and smudged across her face” (61).

Like their sexual rendezvous, Sophie and Widsun’s coded relationship enters into a phase of barely concealed secrecy in the text. During the performance of the pageant, Serge notices Widsun,

[...] who’s making hand signs. He’s not using the vigorous language that his mother and Bodner sign in, but more surreptitious signals formed by simply opening and closing the fist that rests across his lap in bursts either long or short. His eyes are pointed at the stage, but his hand is facing Sophie, who’s kneeling six or seven yards away from him [...] and using the same barely perceptible Morse to signal back at him” (66).

The pageant has become a multilayered coded formalism, an over-arching symbolism that conceals both the sexual affair that leads Sophie to her fate, and expresses the underlying idea behind this symbolism, through the infatuation of Hades that amounts to Bataille’s concept of the erotic: “Now death itself’s infected by desire,” Carrefax explains” (66). The combination of performance, sexual desire, code and death conspire form a symbolic latticework that is beyond Serge’s vision: it is the text that identifies the universals in Serge, and in doing so treats his absence as the presence of anthropological patterns of the kind identified by Bataille.

The code comes to represent that which disguises the continuity of the repressed desire for erotic transgression (if we recall her physical ‘almost-adolescence’, transgression in the mode of pedophilia). This symbolic expression of coded or concealed transgression continues to aesthetically shift after the pageant ends in humiliation for Simeon Carrefax³². Serge witnesses, seemingly without knowing it, Widsun and Sophie having sex, presumably as a result of their coded exchange:

It’s quiet: the only sounds Serge hears are the slow oozing of the stream and a kind of rustling that he thinks at first must be a badger or hedgehog in the undergrowth beside it. It’s a rhythmic scratching, a rubbing chafe that carries on its back a higher sound, a squeak like the noise of an unoiled gate being opened and closed repeatedly. As Serge moves across the lawn he realises that the sound’s coming not from the undergrowth but from somewhere much closer. (75)

³² Widsun is mistaken for the patriarch of the pageant proceedings.

The first section describing this encounter relies heavily on the sounds and signs of nature, but unlike Symbolism, they do not convey the universality discovered by a poetic genius, but rather the universality that would be illuminated by a machine: the textured sounds of rhythm and mechanical repetition. These few lines demonstrate symbolism reversed; the material/natural becomes a vector for a “higher sound”, higher like the religious symbolism described by Yeats, or simply closer to the ideal than the material. This kind of symbolic matrix amounts precisely to the veil imagery so consistent throughout the novel; the veil is the novel being written by the world, and the medium of its transmission to its protagonists. This process is confirmed as the paragraph continues:

He looks around; although there's no moon to light up the lawn a small glow is spilling from a lantern someone's left behind the sheet. When he comes face-on to the sheet he sees what's making the noises – or, rather, sees its shadow, cast on the sheet's far side by the lantern so as to be visible from this side, like a film made up of only silhouettes. It's some kind of moving thing made of articulated parts. One of the parts is horizontal, propped up on four stick legs like a low table; the other is vertical, slotted into the underside of the table's rear end but rising above it, its spine wobbling as the whole contraption rocks back and forth. The thing pulses like an insect's thorax, and with each pulse comes the rustle, scratch and chafe; with each pulse the horizontal, low part squeaks, and the vertical part now starts emitting a deep grunt, a gruff, hog-like snort. The grunts grow more intense as Serge comes closer to the sheet; the squeaks grow louder. The front part has a head; the back part too – Serge can make this out now, rising from broad shoulders. The thing's rocking and wobbling faster and faster, squeaking and grunting more with every pulse. (75-76)

The symbolic matrix extending from nature to material culture in the first instance, now acquires a metaphorical similarity to a film being projected onto the sheet, the same experience which had almost immediately replaced the experience of stream or grasshopper in their ontological immanence. Inside the form that now represents the reversal of the symbolist perspective (it is now the object that seeks the universal in the subject), Serge witnesses (without understanding) the depleted, two-dimensional expression of his taboo erotic desire arises before him as if conjured for an absent audience, in the form of a machine/insect hybrid. Both of these figures convey, through their presence in the text, the symbolism of incestuous reproduction that alludes to Serge's traumatic origins: the machine represents the desire for a controlled continuous, untrammled, inhuman reproduction, while the insect refers back to the wasp and the moths, to death, continuity and uncontrollable reproductive activity (made economically productive).

The stream of symbolism offered by this text seems at this point to be approaching excess. The symbolic images seem to be piling up on one another, leaving no space for the particular but rather drawing the reader ever further into a world of powerful aesthetics referring to certain anthropological universals. The sheer presence of the symbolic presented here presents its own problem: each proceeding

example serves to strengthen itself at the expense of the rest of the chain. It begins to stumble under the weight of its accumulated dependence upon metaphorical similarity, and the aesthetic consistency of the whole begins to suffer. It seems reasonable to suggest that this is perhaps one instance of that de Manian element in literature which disrupts its "aesthetic integrity". This very notion is expressed as Serge approaches the edge of the screen and notices the heads on each end; the grunts and squeaks of the scene begin to pile onto one another temporally speaking, drawing Serge to move around the side of the sheet to see what is behind it. Right before he does, however, the maid Maureen is heard screaming over the dead body of the family cat, Spitalfield. As the sex approaches completion, as Serge approaches the reality shielded from him by the screen of objective symbolism, Maureen's scream imposes itself on the scene, signaling the horror that is supposed to result from the transgression of any taboo, be it incest or death. Symbolism itself, in this repetitive and reversed condition, may constitute an expression of this literary element that defies aesthetic stability, inasmuch as the symbol's relation to the idea it illuminates is a metaphorical one, and hence depends upon the stability of metaphorical similarity in the emergent world of codes, machines and information (links that seem far firmer than metaphor). Maureen's scream represents the horror that Serge and ostensibly Sophie ought to feel in relation to the transgression of sexual taboo; Bataille identifies eroticism as coming out of an alternation of "fascination and horror" (*Eroticism* 211). However, this horror is made invisible to both the siblings and the reader; transgressive sex is made invisible behind the screen of communication technology and codes, precisely due to the horror cultural taboos against it engender; the horror is too much to experience, but the ethos of reality production demands universal revelation. As such, the negative is replaced as an anthropological constant in the objective narration of the world by the aesthetic positivity of technical and linguistic formalisms. Sexual completion and subjective revelation (seeing what is behind the screen of Serge's traumatised mind) in this scene are both delayed and disrupted by death, a physical example of discontinuity and at once an expression of erotic continuity (in its persistence beyond the edges of the screen that fascinates Serge).

The symbolic chain tentatively leading Serge to what lies behind this screened-off sexual transgression is, at once, interrupted and extended by the appearance of a corpse; a possibly revelatory *conclusion* is deferred. A dead body is a symbol of our universal and irrevocable destiny (Bataille, *Eroticism* 46), it evokes the horror of violence and discontinuity: "For each man who regards it with awe, the corpse is the image of his own destiny. It bears witness to a violence which destroys not one man alone but all men in the end. The taboo which lays hold on the other at the sight of a corpse is the distance they put between themselves and violence, by which they cut themselves off from violence" (*Eroticism* 44). From

this perspective, we can infer a certain difference between the siblings' and Maureen's reaction to the presence of a corpse. Sophie, for example, takes Spitalfield's corpse into her laboratory and reanimates his limbs with electric current, laughing wildly at the resultant twitching movements (77); she demonstrates not only the absence of horror, but laughter and delight in its place. Serge demonstrates a kind of placid impassive reaction to Spitalfield's death and reanimation, sustaining the general indifference he has portrayed until now. This indifference is perhaps related to the indecisiveness with which Serge has already encountered the aesthetics of death: he has seen his sister in the guise of the "halfway-dead" already, through the screen of the moth wings, and he has seen her in the guise of an insect-machine hybrid. This happens once more, when from his attic wireless station he notices,

a white figure gliding over the Mulberry Lawn, skirting the Orchard's border as it heads towards the Crypt Park's gates. It looks like Sophie [...] The experience startles him – not least because it plays out in the real and close-up space around the house an aspect of some scene that he occasionally intuits but never quite pins down when riding the dial's highest reaches: vague impressions of bodies hovering just beyond the threshold of the visible, and corresponding signals not quite separable from the noise around them – important ones, their recalcitrance all the more frustrating for that reason. (85)

The pairing of the "white figure gliding" towards the gates of a "Crypt Park", combine as symbolic references to death or the dead that are masking the rotting materiality of a corpse through the appearance of a spirit or ghost and engender fascination as opposed to horror, making them erotic symbols. What comes out of this vision for Serge is not the horrific awe demanded by the presence of a corpse or death, but rather a sense of, once again, the symbolic poetics of technology (like that which appears to banish death from the corpse of Spitalfield) and their potential to shield the mind from violence, trauma or death while allowing for the experience of enjoyment. Rather than causing Serge to think of death itself, to locate the universals at play in the world around him, he is reminded of the erotic continuity that replaces the aesthetics of death in his vision: bodies and his connection to them paradoxically made present but frustratingly kept in reserve as potential by the noise that carries them to him through the formalisms of communication technology.

These "vague impressions" are, however, perhaps less vague than the text here suggests. In the first scene of Serge with his wireless set, immediately preceding this gliding vision, he begins metaphorically "seeing" the bodies behind the coded information he is receiving: "Serge sees a man clutching a kitchen knife chasing a politician across parched earth [...] Serge pictures gardenias tucked behind girls' ears, red dresses and the blood of bulls. He hears news forwarded, via Port Said and Rome, from Abyssinia, and sees an African girl strumming on some kind of mandolin, jet-black breasts glowing

darkly through light silk" (83). Serge notices some metaphorical connection between this vision of Sophie as a ghost returning to its crypt, and the erotic and violent images conjured by the wireless signals he received (once again iterating McCarthy's reading of Abraham and Torok's 'crypt'). Like the sounds of nature that began the scene of screened off sex, these signals carry others "on their back"; in this case it is precisely the violence of death (in images of politics, sacrifice and sexuality) that is both carried and hidden from view. Despite having some sense that death is hiding behind these signals and the "vague impressions" they conjure, despite knowing that this hidden element of violence is "important", the symbolic cladding that serves to obscure death is itself nearly transparent: Serge continues to see things flat, to see people through the wings of the moth, as if they were mere photographs, half-dead already. This is precisely what is implied here: Serge is not only *not* horrified by death, he is erotically attracted to it as it represents both the end of the interval and the continuity denied the subject. The vision of Sophie threatens to reveal this attraction by connecting it to his visual and erotic impressions of the wireless signals. This is what "startles" him: the erotic charge he gets from the *symbols* of death that hide the materiality of the body or the corpse threaten to reveal his incestuous attraction to his sister. His connection to the anthropological universal of incest is never *his* connection acquired through his conscious symbolic expression, but rather is the product of a symbolic network meant to convey the positive absence of his subjectivity and particularity. Even Serge's childhood trauma is evoked in the poetics of symbolism, and represents not the particular formative experience of an individual, but the trauma of modernity and the art of disappearance as Baudrillard understands it. The symbolism at play from the beginning has been narrated from the perspective of the world of objects (of the dead), and the lack of personality, depth, affect, and compassion we note in Serge can be accorded with the fact that the world of objects does not know these things and hence can only create alibis for their absence. For Serge, the absence of horror in the face of death is manifest in the presence of either indifference or erotic affect.

This is illustrated by Serge's reaction to discovering Sophie's corpse after her suicide, and his response to her funeral. After seeing Sophie-as-ghost several more times floating through the grounds, and making half-hearted attempts to ask her what she was doing, Serge enters her laboratory one morning:

Sophie's sitting in a chair holding a glass in her hand, but the glass is lolling at an almost horizontal angle. Sophie's hand is stiff; its middle finger points in the direction of the chart. Her eyes are open: it seems that she's trying to show him something among the sprawling web – some new word, or figure, or associative line. It's only as Serge turns his eyes up to it that he registers, like an after-impression, the flecks of brine that cover Sophie's lips like bubbles blown by a departed insect. (95)

Though Tayler suggests that Sophie's death, "which is partly an allegory for lost philosophical certainties, can also be read as taking on an emotional weight that goes against the grain of the novel's ostensible scorn for squishy psychologising" (Tayler), this emotional weight is not taken on by Serge (or Attridge in his reading). Unlike Maureen, from whom we would expect a scream at least, Serge displays no real response to the discovery of Sophie's corpse. If anything, that she already represented the violence and continuity of death is reinforced here by another reference to the photographic quality of the half-dead, "like an after-impression". Once again, death and communication are symbolically combined in this scene; they appear simultaneous and irrevocably connected in the poetics of the narration. Horror is absent because an attraction to information, codes and communication takes its place; the awful negativity of death is replaced by the awesome positivity of communication and technology, creating a fascinated indifference to the corpse (and the impression that even the dead might continue their task of interpellation and communication).

This line of symbolic reasoning continues with Sophie's funeral. Serge is again denied direct access to his erotic desires, which is to say, his erotic connection to death, violence and incest has up to this point been screened from his awareness by their symbolic manifestations and expressions; as such, he is always erotically seduced by the act of symbolic veiling, whether it is in the form of coded communication or, in this case, the machine meant to both conceal and inter Sophie's body without the need for human work: "Carrefax has devised an elaborate construction whereby Sophie's coffin will be lowered into the ground beside the Crypt, slid along rails into an enclave burrowed out beneath the edifice itself, then slightly raised so as to slot into its designated space between the bodied of two ancestors, with the communicating tunnel to be filled in once the manoeuvre's completed" (95). Machines and codes have become, at this point, the symbols of containment and control (taboo), and at once the symbols of reproduction unhindered by human interference; another double-image indicating the duality of a world absent the subject. Serge has caught up to his sister in terms of his attraction to machines and codes. This is reflected in Serge's erotic response to the functioning of the machine that enacts the ritual of burial while at the same time denying it its visceral and symbolic materiality. With the combination of coffin and machine, the funeral is simultaneously a symbolic denial and idealistic celebration of death; a denial of its gross materiality and its irrevocable discontinuity, and a celebration of the erotic in the form of ideal continuity (the art of disappearance).

The aesthetics of this act of denial bring about an erotic response in Serge:

He looks at the flower and insect embossed on the coffin's drape. The drape's thin, and it fits the coffin loosely; sunlight, after passing through its fabric, bounces back up off the coffin's copper handles to travel back up through it from the inside, making its white silk luminescent and its insect and flower dark, like silhouettes; they seem almost to move across the fabric's surface, as though animated. The sunlight's also spilling across the large earth-piles by the trench, blurring their edges; it looks as though tiny clumps have broken loose and are slightly levitating. The steel rails in the trench glint blue and silver. They seem to hum, like railway lines hum when a train's approaching in the distance, just before you hear the train itself . . . The sensation of humming, real or imagined, grows: Serge can sense vibrations spreading round the lawn. He feels them moving from the ground into his feet and up his legs, then onwards to his groin. They animate his own flesh, start it levitating. He can't help it. He crosses his hands in front of his crotch and looks about him [...] (101)

The act of symbolic obfuscation is mixed here with the act of symbolic representation: Sophie is both represented by and hidden behind the shroud with the insect and flower emblems. Her corpse is both hidden by and represented by the coffin. The machine used to inter her is in its turn a symbol meant to hide nature (death) from the proceedings behind the veil of technological automation and labour. Sophie's shroud comes to symbolize the screen beyond which she and Widsun were having sex, with the insect and flower symbols coming to perform the erotic movements of their silhouettes. Sophie becomes present in this scene of her internment specifically not through the spiritual universal of the soul, but through the universality of illumination through the screen; the objective narration does not symbolize death in terms of ending or stillness here, but instead reflects death through the vitality of machines, screen and images. The static machine and its humming rails remind Serge of "when a train's approaching in the distance", like the theoretical trains of his military entrance exam (about to catastrophically collide), or the well-known scene of a train heading straight towards the audience in the 1896 film by Auguste and Louis Lumière, *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat*. Regardless of the nature of the reference, this symbolic network of sights relating to the control over death and sex erotically excites Serge. Melancholy and horror are at first replaced by arousal. Then, as the machine is turned on and the coffin makes its slow way under the earth, a malfunction occurs. Quickly attended to by their father, "The coffin slides right through the curtain now, which falls back into place behind it" (104).

At this, Frieda, a maid, declares, "She's gone!" (104). However, it seems as if this reveals to Serge a certain truth:

Serge, still hard, can't stop himself from smiling: the coffin's not two feet from where it was before. If they moved round to the side they'd see it, dumb and wooden and unaltered. It strikes him that this whole event's more amateurish than the Pageants – more contrived, more sloppy. The curtain's just a curtain, and a badly designed one at that. His hand still covering his crotch, he runs his eyes beyond it, to the Crypt's wall. Is that meant to be the edge, the portal to beyond, the vicar's heaven? And its far wall, then: would beyond stop there? He runs his eye on further, to the grass beyond the Crypt, moist and stringy and no different from the grass

they're standing on back here – then onwards, to the dung-filled, sloping field beyond the water, the telegraph line on the hill. He pictures the cars beyond that, then the boats, the towers, the stations, the archipelagos . . . (105)

This extract seems to suggest that Serge has come to understand the role of the symbolic as a veil; even the motion of moving “round to the side”, as he was about to do with the screened-off sex before it was interrupted by Maureen’s scream, is articulated here as the simple step that would lead the rest of the mourners to Serge’s objective conclusions. He seems to understand the trick of the symbol that allows it to both reveal and conceal at once. And yet, what does he find once his eyes move beyond “it”, which is to say, beyond the “curtain” shielding death from view? His eyes embark on a reiteration of a symbolic chain, moving ever onwards, encountering, not a series of veils, but an absence of boundaries that symbolize the scope and depth of the emergent technologies of code and communication that have erotically obsessed both Serge and his sister. These forms of symbolic boundary or veil have yet to be recognized by Serge as such (once again confounding the notion of Serge as symbolic narrator), and hence continue to relate to an erotic desire for incestuous continuity. We get a final illustration of this dynamic when, after this pseudo-revelation, Serge “feels a heaviness enter his stomach, as though something foreign were being lodged there” (105); the seemingly boundless vision that now occupies his eyes correlates with a further repression of his erotic connection to Sophie and to death, the screen of the moth wings concentrated and repressed into a ball of internalized black matter (excrement³³). This is the moment where Serge acquires a specifically melancholy condition, in being able to see both sides of the metaphorical or symbolic relation, something that will be explored in more detail in chapter six. Both Sophie and death, in his explicit phrasing now familiar to the reader here, acquire the continuity of Serge’s technologically unbound perspective: “for him, this shoddy, whining spectacle has nothing to do with death, nothing to do with Sophie either. Both death and she are elsewhere: like a signal, dispersed” (105).

Continuity and Symbolic Exchange

This funeral scene seems to offer Serge a sense of clarity that he had no access to while Sophie lived. However, that clarity comes with a kind of religious awakening into the cult of communication, along with the physical internalization and repression of excrement, which is to say, the repression of taboo and repulsive materiality in general. Though this revelation regarding the “sloppy” spectacle of the funeral has allowed Serge to internalise the materiality of the symbolic veil (and hence remove it from his vision),

³³ Which has similar taboo connotations to the corpse for Bataille.

seemingly to the end of acquiring an unbound vision of the world, this internalization of materiality returns once again to infect his sight:

It's hard to describe. Fur's not quite right. It's more like filaments. The closest thing he could liken it to is one of his mother's silks – the really fine, dark ones – held right up to his eyeballs and stretched out in front of them, making the world gauzed: dark-gauzed, covered in fleck-film. It's been like this for months. When it started, he'd try to blink a hole in it, or wipe it away, peel the veil back; but that only ingrained it further, lodging it beneath the surface of the eyes themselves. He tried washing them, but this just made the filament-mesh run and strain, gauzing everything he saw before he'd even looked at it. (115)

The nature of this new eye-gauze is symbolically relevant. Having previously been articulated through the nature/culture hybrid of the moth-wing-photograph, the language used to describe the gauze here repeats the nature/culture dualism of the gauze-symbol in terms of animal fur and filaments, and then in terms of the silks that are both natural and human (industrial). However, words like “filament” and “filament-mesh” offer the reader an increasingly cultural, and technological, symbolism more akin to the grid of “ribbed wire cage” that envelops the world envisioned by the narrator of *Remainder* (*Remainder* 36), or the perspective of “seeing things shroudedly” (3) that opens *Satin Island*. One way of understanding the symbolism of veiled vision is in terms of mediation; like the symbolic matrix of insects, machines and corpses (ghosts) that mediated Serge's erotic attraction to death, incest and continuity, this new technically-inflected veil is a symbolically mediated experience of the black blockage causing Serge's illness. The overtly technological symbolism of the visual manifestation of Serge's blockage continues when he later passes by a display of “stuffed otters, eels and pikes”, comparing his vision to “the glass of their cases: it has the same clouded quality, the same fine-filamented graininess as everything he sees” (C 116-17). The symbolism of this visual manifestation is described in increasingly technical or processed terms; in this instance, it acquires the character of two media of display: glass cases and the cloudy grain of film that distinguishes it from the resolution provided by unmediated human vision. The boundless visual clarity achieved through a moment of aesthetic criticism at the funeral, only a few pages later, yields to yet another materiality through which the world is perceived. The persistence of the veil-symbol beyond the moment of revelation represents Baudrillard's notion that:

[...] the world, then, is a radical illusion. That is, at least, one hypothesis. At all events, it is an unbearable one. And to keep it at bay, we have to realize the world, give it force of reality, make it exist and signify at all costs, take from it its secret, arbitrary and accidental character, rid it of appearances and extract its meaning, divert it from all predestination and restore it to its end and its maximum efficacy, wrest it from its form to deliver it up to its formula. (*Perfect Crime* 17)

The radical illusion of the world, in other words, “is the way things have of presenting themselves for what they are when they are not actually there at all” (*Perfect Crime* 17). This is symbolised explicitly in the moments where Serge appears capable of envisioning things “when they are not actually there at all”, as when the wireless signals produce erotic and violent images, or when the revelation at the funeral allows Serge to see, beyond the horizon of his vision, “the cars [...], then the boats, the towers, the stations, the archipelagos . . .” (C 104-105). That Serge’s vision is almost immediately occupied by yet another shroud, and that this shroud is the manifestation of Serge’s repressed erotic desire for continuity (death, incest), speaks to the idea that, “At all events, illusion is indestructible. The world as it is – which is not at all the ‘real’ world – perpetually eludes the investigation of meaning, thus causing the present catastrophe of the apparatus of production of the ‘real’ world, so true is it that illusion cannot be combatted with truth – that is merely to redouble the illusion – but only by a higher illusion” (*Perfect Crime* 19). This higher illusion is exhibited here by the co-presence and cooperation of Serge’s intestinal blockage and this technical veil of glass and wire-filaments; this higher illusion is that of the nascent technology of the (film, television, computer) screen.

The screen becomes a symbol symbolised by the duality of repression and expression, or in Baudrillard’s terms, the screen is the symbol of “the sign and reality sharing a single shroud” (*Perfect Crime* 18). The processing of this dualism of blockage and vision-shroud at the Kloděbrady Spa is precisely the conversion of radical illusion, the nothingness of the world, nature-in-itself, turned into the predictable formulas of health sciences; the repression of evil, of nothingness, of the erotic continuity of death, converted into the physical reality of “chronic intestinal problems [...] A blockage. Stagnant. You are having autointoxication” (C 113-14). Reality, the veil through which we see the world, cannot help but continue to symbolize the incest taboo that drives Serge’s eroticism; the blockage is a doubling, the physical manifestation of a persistent and inescapable but invisible presence, the very horrific nature of which must always be kept at an objective and aesthetic distance from Serge’s thoughts (must never be accessed except symbolically, in a sideways fashion that presents something ‘solid and simple’ in place of the ineffable and invisible horror of transgression). The world that writes itself illustrates the negative and the absent, but refuses to reveal it. We can understand this symbolic persistence at first in terms of McCarthy’s style, especially in regards to *C*. At the same time, this persistent style is perhaps referring to the idea of what Baudrillard calls symbolic exchange: “Symbolic exchange is the strategic site where all the modalities of value flow together towards what I would term a blind zone, in which everything is called into question again. The symbolic here does not have the usual sense of ‘imaginary’, nor the sense given to it by Lacan. It is symbolic exchange as anthropology understands it” (*Passwords* 15). It is quite possible

to apply Yeats' understanding of the symbolic to this description, in its inevitable return to the dogmatism of either religious idealism or scientific materialism. Though Baudrillard states here that his version of the symbolic relates to an anthropological understanding of the term, the "blind zone" he refers to shares the quality of 'beginning again' that is implied in Yeats' understanding of simplification and religion as the outcome of a committed symbolism; symbolism when extended and popularly accomplished, eventually returns to establish the kind of ontological certainty (religion, solidification, naturalism) that it first opposed. In other words, symbolism and symbolic exchange are both cyclical modes (humanist modes) of processing the world; which is to say, their success always ends in failure, and in the return of that which has been offered up, banished or repressed. By working through a series of symbolic images of incest, insects and desire in *C*, we will return, precisely (and regressively), to a blind zone for Serge, from which everything "is called into question again", and must therefore be re-processed by the world that writes itself.

This blind zone arrives at the end of Serge's sojourn in Kloděbrady, and assumes a form that is the equal opposite of the boundless vision that Serge experiences after Sophie's coffin passes beyond the crypt curtain. Serge's time at the spa town culminates in what is, for him but not for the reader, his first explicit sexual experience, with a young nurse named Tania who had been attending to portions of his treatment:

The wine's making him warm; he feels the silky hotness moving outwards from his stomach, to his arms, his legs, his head. [...] Some of the wine's escaped from the side of Tania's mouth; it runs down her chin and dribbles onto her blouse. Serge reaches out his hand and spreads the wet film from her chin around her cheek. She doesn't stop him, or react in any way. [...] Her neck, beside his ear, emits a low, guttural sound, of the same character and pitch as low-frequency radio waves. He can smell the musty odour rising from her body – from its corners, enclaves, holes. He tugs at her blouse and, meeting no resistance, pulls it off completely, then does the same to skirt and underclothes.

"Turn around," he says. "I want to see your back."

She turns. There it is, right under his face: the crook, rising beneath her shoulder like a ridge with valleys running down its side, flesh-rills held up by bones under the skin [...] The guttural sounds in her neck increase in volume; the musty smell grows stronger, sharper. [...] He runs his own hand down her back, so hard the nails puncture its surface, and moves inside her violently, like he's seen animals and insects do it. He thighs push back at him, pulling him further in. He closes his eyes again and feels a burning growing in his stomach.

"*Poisonberry*," he says, barely audibly.

The word hovers in a small gas-cloud of breath over Tania's skin before spreading outwards, dissipating. The burning's spreading outwards too, just like the wine; it's spreading beyond his body, moving out to fill the hollow, and beyond that too, across the fire-break to the woods on either side. A scream, or the echo of a scream, erupts from neither him nor Tania but, it seems,

the night itself; and with it comes a tearing sound, as though a fabric were being ripped. Serge opens his eyes now, and finds that the gauzy crepe that's furred his vision for so long is gone – completely gone, like a burst bubble or disintegrated membrane. The surfaces of ground and woods and clouds are gone too, fallen away like screens, encumbrance that blocked his vision, leaving the hollow – not of the indentation but of space itself: an endless space in which he can now see with piercing clarity. What he sees is darkness, but he sees it. (143-44)

This scene opens with a reference back to the scene of the exploding chemistry set, with language that describes the contents of Serge's stomach (this time wine, previously the poisonberry fed to him by Sophie) first, "blossoming, expanding" (45) and then "moving outwards" (143). This is then followed by another reference backwards: the wine that finds itself smeared on Tania's face recalls the post-coital ink that was "spattered and smudged" (61) on Sophie's face upon leaving Widsun's office³⁴. Tania's body is a conveyor belt of symbolic reference to Sophie, to death, to technology and continuity: the narration recognizes only her symbolic potential, her regressive markings, as opposed to her particular being. The "low, guttural sound, of the same character and pitch as low-frequency radio waves" emitted by Tania recalls the sounds Serge heard coming out from the behind the kinoscope screen, and at the same time the symbolic erotic continuity evoked by wireless signals. Her smell is "musty" and reminiscent of the subterranean; her back, turned to Serge like the worker-women he ogled as a child, becomes a topographical terrain of undulating earth, the container of the dead and of Sophie, a field of inert matter narrated by an equally inert field. Her sounds and smells increase in intensity at once, and like the signals he received from across the globe on his wireless set, begin to cause images to emerge seemingly out of nothing, images of Spitalfield the stuffed and reanimated cat. These signals (natural and technical in their description, lacking in subjectivity) draw the image of Spitalfield because Tania is a figure of death (eroticism and continuity) given artificial life; she represents at once the incest taboo (the dualism of nature/culture) and the particular brand of economic reproduction that the taboo gives life to. As Serge repeats the movements of animals and insects (and as such, Widsun and Sophie), the text reiterates the essential source of erotic energy in the natural, which is to say, in the taboo on incest.

Tania in this final scene symbolises precisely Bataille's *return* of the exogamous female, which at the same time symbolically constitutes the return of Sophie. For Bataille, exogamy as opposed to incest constitutes a form of ritual exchange, "the potlatch of women, exogamy, that is: the paradox of giving away the coveted object" (*Eroticism* 211). Women in this anthropological perspective are the "sacred objects" that are desired and yet given away, according to the principle of reciprocity (guaranteed by the

³⁴ The wine is also a symbolic representation of Bataille's understanding of champagne as an object, like daughters and sisters, whose use value is only enacted when it is given away or shared (*Eroticism* 205).

universal taboo against incest) that ensures their eventual return, in the form of women made available and hence “given away” by a sufficiently distant kinship group. As Bataille describes it, “For a close relation to renounce his right, to forego the enjoyment of his own property: this is what defines human beings in complete contrast to the greedy animals. As I have said, such renunciation enhances the value of the thing renounced. But this is also a contribution to the creation of the human world in which respect, difficulty and reservations are victorious over violence. It complements eroticism which heightens the value of the object of desire” (*Eroticism* 218). What he is saying here is that the taboo against incest produces in the exogamous partner a patina of symbolic reference to the pleasure/reproduction rights given up by the male in the form of sisters and daughters. As such, if the idea being conveyed through this symbolic chain continues to be the erotic relation to death/continuity, then Tania is symbolized here as both the exogamous partner that respects the incest taboo and as the symbol of the erotic desire repressed and controlled through that taboo. This is, however, an objective symbolism being deployed here, a universalizing mode not dependent upon God, but upon pattern and repetition. Sex in this context amounts to a momentary experience of continuity in a world of discontinuity, or a “process of dissolution” in which:

[...] the male partner has generally an active role, while the female partner is passive. The passive, female side is essentially the one that is dissolved as a separate entity. But for the male partner the dissolution of the passive partner means one thing only: it is paving the way for a fusion where both are mingled, attaining at length the same degree of dissolution. The whole business of eroticism is to destroy the self-contained character of the participators as they are in their normal lives. (*Eroticism* 17)

The passivity of Tania and the activeness of Serge are repeatedly made explicit in the passage above; this passivity corresponds to the overall aesthetics of Tania herself. Tania constitutes a symbol in the sense that she at once represents the passivity of nature (and as such in the classical symbolist sense a potential container of “God” or of ideas) and the *idea* of regressive continuity (continuity as always aiming backwards). What is repressed by the incest taboo is paradoxically returned to precisely by the avenue opened up and conditioned by that taboo: Tania is symbolic precisely of what Serge *cannot* recognize, alluding to the notion that this symbolic matrix is derived not from Serge, but is rather applied to him from without. This repression is symbolized here by the black blockage that begins to dissipate into the greater space of the world, in a material metaphor of the path that Serge’s vision takes at the end of Sophie’s funeral. As with the practice of exogamy (which paradoxically makes available females representations of the daughters and sisters that are off-limits), Serge’s repressed erotic desire for incest is now encrypted into the narrative landscape in general. The symbolic exchange that represents the mode

of dealing with his initial trauma (by keeping it at a symbolic distance) has led to a moment of symbolic and physical continuity, blending the prophylactic distance of symbolism with the material continuity of sex. This confluence of reference to invisible ideas and their containers leads Serge precisely into the “blind zone” described by Baudrillard, a territory of “piercing clarity” and “darkness” at once. In this blind zone that is a mid-point of symbolic exchange (both an ending and a beginning), Serge’s symbolic gauze “is gone – completely gone, like a burst bubble or disintegrated membrane. The surfaces of ground and woods and clouds are gone too, fallen away like screens, encumbrances that blocked his vision, leaving the hollow – not of the indentation but of space itself: an endless space in which he can now see with piercing clarity. What he sees is darkness, but he sees it” (144). Like the apparent boundless vision that occurs after Sophie is buried, Serge’s vision once again becomes unbound; this time, unbound by materiality and form, leading to the darkness of Baudrillard’s blind zone. This blind zone ends the Kloděbrady chapter of Serge’s life and leads into the war chapter, where Serge’s experience of the symbolic veil (the reversed symbolic relation) “gets called into question again” (*Passwords* 15), taking on an explicitly religious and technical tone.

The Sun and Death

Serge begins the next chapter of his life, that which leads him into the midst of WWI, engaging with the nothingness that he glimpsed in his moment of sexual release. “Everything is called into question again” in his experience of clear darkness, but this absence of certainty lasts only as long as the experience of darkness itself. The blackness that was the material manifestation of his repressed eroticism has been released; it has moved from an internalized form to an external one, the world, which has acquired the hollowness of “space itself”, or the “non-being” of Serge himself. The undifferentiated space that emerges out of this sexual experience, the world “called into question again”, is answered immediately following Serge’s successful air corps entrance exam, in a meeting with Lieutenant General Widsun. Discussing which particular skills he has been learning, Serge mentions that,

It was mainly theory. We did mapwork, and learnt how to use compasses, correctors, [...] principles of gunnery: line, elevation, aiming points and mean points, all those things [...] We were led more down the artillery side of things. They’d give us distances and ranges, and we’d have to calculate the angle of sight from the horizontal; then we’d have to set this off against the error of the day, and work out the trajectory and angle of descent and [...] (152)

To which Widsun responds:

“I never had you down as a mathematician.”

“Oh, I don’t think of it as mathematics,” Serge replies. “I just see space: surfaces and lines . . . and the odd blind spot . . .” (152)

The darkness of Serge’s post-coital blind zone has taken on the spatial form of mathematics; the clear darkness has been overlaid with the coded language of the formalism, forming a commonplace symbolic grid of “surfaces and lines . . . and the odd blind spot” in a reiteration of his wire-filament veil erased through erotic release, or the narrator of *Remainder’s* global grid (36). Mathematics as a symbolic matrix constitutes a shift from its previous manifestations, in the sense that it represents the vacating of the interiority (blackness, metaphor) that had given other manifestations their meaning. This is a commonplace or consensual symbolic matrix, one that reflects the movement of the blackness out of Serge and into the world at large, its immense spatial and semiotic scope threatening to drown its erotic symbolism in seemingly objective and functional information or language.

Caught in the extended blind zone of his first sexual experience, Serge responds to this darkness with a seemingly objective certainty about the materiality and operability of life; he understands human life in terms of its chemical (C 162) and mechanistic basis (206). He exhibits a preference for being moved by machines (156) or for moving the world *with* machines (156; 200), a lack of interest in detailed narrative (180), and he seems more comfortable with the function of codes and coded communication than ever before (153). Yet, in the midst of his most explicit erotic relation to materialism, technology and science, he comes to appreciate the capacity for the idealist poetry of Friedrich Hölderlin to merge the fields of mechanised life and the potential for life contained in fields of death (a symbolic return to Sophie’s funeral-machine, hiding death in mechanical life is the literary mode of the world that writes itself). As he has answered the question posed to him by the blackness of the blind zone with mathematics and physics, he begins to understand their performance through machines as, “a quickening, a bringing to life” (200) of that dead field of black matter once contained in him. Connection to the world through the power and violence of war machines establishes itself as his new erotic relation, the continuity of Serge’s experience and the objective narration of the world, this time referring to Bataille’s religious eroticism of murder and sacrifice.

Serge thinks of the destruction he helps rain from the sky as giving life to the life-less landscape and objects below him,

He feels this viscerally, not just intellectually, every time his tapping finger draws shells up into their arcs, or sends instructions buzzing through the woods to kick-start piano wires for whirring cameras, or causes the ground’s scars and wrinkles to shift and contort from one photo to another: it’s an awakening, a setting into motion. In these moments Serge is like the Eiffel Tower, a pylon animating the whole world, calling the zero hour of a new age of metal

and explosive, geometry and connectedness – and calling it over and over again, so that its birth can be played out in votive repetition through these elaborate and ecstatic acts of sacrifice . . . (200)

The poetics of this extract reiterate clearly that Serge now sees himself as an object (he is narrated as such by the war and the space he occupies) participating in the acts of repetition that constitute for Baudrillard the farce of modernity replaying itself over and over. In turn, Serge's clear identification with giving life over causing death situates him in the interval described by McCarthy and explained in the introduction here; death is promised as the end, but the dream-like stasis of the interval denies its accomplishment. That the act of destruction or bringing death onto the scene is an erotic one (relating to the reproduction of life) seems clear at this stage of the analysis. Yet, in the language used here it is not human life and death that Serge connects to through his "tapping finger", but rather the act of giving life to, or "setting into motion", the lifeless matter of world and technology. In his giving motion to the motionless, like the kinoscope, Serge has become at this point both an example of this lifeless matter, set into motion through his symbolic-erotic relation to death and reproduction, and a relay of this energizing erotic relation "animating the whole world". He explicitly thinks of his role as a religious and repetitious one, "calling the zero hour" of an age that has already been set into motion, but that must be called into play "over and over again", in ritual fashion. This "zero hour of a new age" is like a kinoscope film being played over and over again on the universal screen (world) of modern western society; it is a literal "zero" hour, an hour unbound by measured time, a single hour of film set on repeat, an hour that cannot be escaped because it symbolises the total absence that marks the time before beginning and after the end (the time of the interval). This world of mechanised war and communication is the symbolic terrain of symbolism itself, structured in terms of the mobius strip of success-as-failure; it constitutes the religious paradox of an ordered transgression, or the unity of nature (transgression) and culture (taboo). In Bataille's words, "As soon as human beings give rein to animal nature in some way we enter the world of transgression forming the synthesis between animal nature and humanity through the persistence of the taboo; we enter a sacred world, a world of holy things" (Eroticism 84). Serge's war constitutes precisely such a world: a world of profane technological violence in the background of which remains a symbolic or aesthetic trace of the continuity erotically charged by the taboo being religiously transgressed. What follows these thoughts repeats the poetic structure of an objective symbolism established here (a cycle of rising and falling):

And in the background of these iterations, like a relic of an old order, the sun: intoxicated, spewing gas and sulphur, black with cordite smoke and tar. As the summer months draw on, it seems to sicken. Rising beneath him on early-morning flights, its light's infected by the ghostly pallor of the salient's mists, driven a nauseous hue by green and yellow flashes. It darkens, not

lightens, as each day progresses and the puff-balls, vapour clouds and tracer-lines build up. Its transit through the air seems laboured, as though the whirring mechanism that dragged it along its tracks were damaged and worn out. As afternoons run into evenings, it becomes so saturated with the toxins all around it that it can no longer hold itself up and, grown heavy and feeble, sinks. Serge watches it die time and time again, watches its derelict disc slip into silvery, metallic marshland, where it drowns and dissolves. When this happens, a chemical transformation spreads across land and sky, turning both acidic. In these moments, he feels better than he's ever felt before – as though his rising were commensurate with the sun's sinking. As space runs out backwards like a strip of film from his tail, the world seems to anoint him, through its very presence, as the gate, bulb, aperture and general projection point that's brought it about: a new, tar-coated orb around which all things turn. (201)

This extract describes something piggy-backing on the technological “quickenings” of the world, something much older, a story of the irrevocable dualism of rising and falling, of cyclical continuity, that has been obscured by the material excretion of machines that have accelerated and operationalized this ancient religiously-ordered transgression of the death taboo. In other words, the signals being sent, in the background of this technological “quickenings” of the world, point to the foundation myth of Serge's newfound objective and material clarity: the back and forth movements of transgression and taboo, or of symbolism and “simplicity and solidity”. McCarthy is no stranger to the sun as a literary symbol: *Tintin and the Secret of Literature* contains no less than eleven indexed references to it (210). Citing Derrida, he describes this symbol in its relation to metaphor:

all metaphors are heliotropic: they turn towards what is supposedly absolutely present and visible, and what is more absolutely present and visible than the sun? Is not the sun the very pre-condition of all presence and all visibility? And yet, the sun is never wholly present within language; how could it be? It, too, turns, via all the figures, or ‘tropes’, of light and vision that pervade philosophy's rhetoric of knowledge and understanding (clarity, insight, perception, illumination – they are everywhere). (*Tintin and the Secret of Literature* 147)

The sun is a symbol of an irrevocable presence and visibility, in this case referring to the obsession with incest and Sophie that marks the narration. It makes this reference in this case by virtue of what has come to conceal it: the formalism of mathematics, vectors and planes, the aesthetic waste of industrial warfare (tracers, cordite, tar, vapour clouds, etc.). What the poetics of this extract symbolise is precisely the “spirit of transgression” that has turned its back on its ancient human origins and assumed a form of technical excretion and trace. The sun, an anthropological universal in terms of symbolism and myth, is replaced by Serge, who has acquired the ‘tar-coat’ of technical excreta; where the human once imbued the sun with the potential of language, the world now imbues the human with the potential of the machine. This spirit of transgression, according to Bataille, “is the animal god dying, the god whose death sets violence in motion, who remains untouched by the taboos restraining humanity” (*Eroticism* 84); but, like Serge's belief that his finger-tapping is a quickening rather than a deadening, this mechanised shroud

is a gift of new life to the very notions of irrevocable visibility and appearance that it seems to be dissolving. Watching the sun die each day excites Serge, “as though his rising were commensurate with the sun’s sinking”; this recalls the erotic, and darkly comedic, charge that Serge felt at Sophie’s funeral. This is a reiteration of the funeral scene that saw Sophie (the sun, the sacred object) fall beneath the weight of, and be buried by, the formalisms of scientific classification, education and codes, and Serge (in phallic terms) rise. In this instance the sun constitutes the sacred, the animal, god, women; as the sacredness of these objects is obscured and removed by the detritus of industrial and scientific technology (tar, smoke, tracers, etc.) Serge rises out of this darkness in the form of the “aperture” of an ideological camera, one which projects and produces this new (transparent) gauze onto objects rather than carrying it in its vision.

Rather than evoking or reveling in the symbolism of return, Serge has reached a point where he has replaced the light source of the world, the thing that gives life through illumination, life that takes shape as a system of organized (symbolic) transgression. He has replaced, as a technical object himself, both the sun that once gave life to the world (the natural order) and the taboos that gave life to the social order. Technology organizes transgression in the sense that it offers the user proximity to, and to a certain extent control over, an experience of continuity which in the “old order” would have been restricted to sexual activity, murder/war, and religious ritual. All these forms of organised transgression have been symbolically reduced to an experience of mechanistic continuity, a form which began at a distance from its origins (the violence of sexuality, murder, and sacrifice) but whose progression has paradoxically returned the violence of these things into a prophylactic proximity in the form of the screen³⁵. As Byung-Chul Han puts it, “Technology creates the illusion of total containment” (Han; back cover); it serves to perform the respect for taboo that socialized humans must always attempt, and to a certain extent, always fail at. Serge in his scene with the sun is established as a willing sacrifice; like the animal that knows nothing of taboos on murder or incest, he is the only ritually acceptable choice. Serge, now the anointed “tar-coated orb” (C 201) at the center of this new transparent veil, is consumed by the eroticism of his technical vision and violence, the violence at the heart of transparency, at the heart of his boundless vision. Since his entry into the armed forces Serge has become explicitly the subject of a kind of “Compulsion for transparency” which “flattens out the human being itself, making it a functional element within a system. Therein lies the violence of transparency” (Han 3). Serge’s love of signals replaces his difficulty with written language, becoming for him a “Transparent language”, that, “is a formal, indeed, a

³⁵ The screen being a form of veil or gauze that is necessarily transparent; physically but not visually present.

purely machinic, operational language that harbours no ambivalence” (Han 2). He has taken the place of the sun, or the sacred, in its absence, like the deified “self” of middle-brow fiction that McCarthy dismisses as “false consciousness” (Eburne, Hart and Jaffe 675). The more cavalier his relation to death becomes, the more clearly he assumes the position of the sacred object that must be sacrificed; he is forced to enact this sacrifice himself, as both subject and object of a new cult. However, his sacrifice is thwarted, his desire to move beyond the bounds of his spatial blind zone fails, and he is nestled in a cloud of silk, signals and safety (C 218-24); as his chance at death (completion as transgression) is ripped from his grasp, once again, the symbolic matrix, this time of transparency, signals and technology, returns Serge to a “blind zone”, where “everything is called into question again”.

In the pages before his death, we find Serge in Egypt, at an archeological site called Sedment. He is there as part of his job scouting locations for radio transmission towers for what will eventually become the BBC. He is accompanied by a young woman named Laura, who guides him through the complex of excavated, ruined and “processed” tombs. It is in these tombs that Serge meets death³⁶, but is distracted from it by its symbolic presence in the tomb and erotic expression through sex with Laura. Death is held at bay both by the interval time of the novel, and by the objective narrative perspective which, because its voice animates everything, does not know the difference between life and death. The symbolism of death, violation and encryption has continued all the way to the end of the novel. This time, unlike with Tania in Kloděbrady, the lovers find themselves not in a “hollow”, but actually beneath the earth, in a literal crypt. This subterranean complex is covered in writing, “They’re spells, for executing functions [...] All surfaces had these things written on them: amulets, masks, even bandages” (366), and the entrance to these crypts are marked by “Stelae [...] as a kind of visual portal to it” (368); ancient Egyptian versions of programming language and the screen. The metaphorical reference to contemporary communication technology becomes less and less ambiguous, and in this increasingly apparent symbolism can be seen the transparent language of objective narration. In a parallel movement, as they go deeper into the crypt complex, the erotic imagery and symbolism intensifies and gets increasingly explicit (transparent). Laura takes on an animal quality, “like a rat” (368); as they continue to descend, Serge once again notices an expanding feeling, “Look: it goes on further!” Serge gasps, catching sight of yet another opening in the wall. The excitement’s spreading in him, spurred on by the darkness, or the depth, or both” (369). In the lowest level they reach, the erotic tension breaks as Laura reads out some of the hieroglyphic inscriptions

³⁶ Like the skydiver in *Satin Island*, this is where Serge dies, where his cords are cut, though he will continue to live for a short while.

on the crypt's wall: " 'Ra-something, master of . . . ' " reads Laura, narrowing her eyes; " 'his sister, his beloved, in his heart . . . words spoken by . . . do not . . . ' " (370). Like Sophie with Widsun, "Her forehead's got black stains all over it. Her cheek too"; like Tania and the worker-women, "Serge moves round behind her", "kneeling upright like her" (371). Though the rest of this scene plays out in metaphorical similarity to that with Tania, there is a distinct lack of epiphanic urgency to the text; in this scene, Serge gains access to nothing new, there is no calling into question again. Instead of revelation, we find obfuscation, the same kind of obfuscation implied by Bataille. Death, in its relation to sex, is hidden by the erotic desire being satisfied:

He starts taking off her clothes, then his. Peeling away his sock, he's aware of a small tickling sensation on his ankle. Then he's in her, his hands sliding down her back while hers grab hold of debris, bitumen and bones. His knee slips on some object, whether organic or not he can't tell; then his hands, too, fall to the floor and find there other hands, not only hers. It feels like an orgy: as though the two of them, their bodies, had become multiplied into a mass of limbs, discarded wrappings and excreta of a thousand couplings, a thousand deaths. She drops the flashlight at some point; it flickers against the wall, then, just before their final gasps spill out and echo round the rooms and corridors, goes off. They crawl around on hands and knees afterwards feeling for it, for their clothes, each other . . . (371)

Serge's last sexual encounter stands as a symbol of his regression into the "simplified and solidified" realm of transparent reality; the banal repetition of a 'thousand couplings' implying the impersonal perspective of the machine. As he removes his final piece of clothing, the last step of self-denuding, death silently arrives on the scene, in the form of a "tickling sensation". Even the reversal of symbolism serves a symbolic purpose here. The feeling of an orgy refers both to the continuity of the sex-death relation and the multiple layers of writing and history that they are deeply embedded within. It involves the indifference of the organic and inorganic, the multiplication of the self in its techno-sexual continuity; this is Baudrillard's post-orgy society coming transparently into view, where all historical modes are co-mingled and accessible, where self-expression and self-reproduction are dogmatically encouraged. As the orgy reaches completion, all that remains is a single source of light illuminating a wall covered in text and image, before "their final gasps spill out" and they return to utter darkness. Total darkness, in this case, is not poetically startling or exceptional. The entire scene speaks at once to continuity and finality; they are surrounded by symbols relating to death and by the remains of the dead themselves. Despite this, the most explicit sense of continuity offered here is the physical continuity of the orgy and the communicational continuity of a space, a hollow, ubiquitously lined with written language. Though Serge has erotically pursued death throughout the novel, he has missed experiencing the real thing in favour of ritually performing it in the crypt with Laura. Like the skydiver in *Satin Island*,

he is at this confirmed as the same as Sophie drifting through the grounds of the Crypt Garden: already dead.

After this sex scene, there is no filling or voiding of his vision or his stomach, merely the retreat to the light of the surface and a return-trip home. Instead of resulting in clear blackness, or a gauzy veil, this sex scene leaves Serge's vision effectively unchanged, alluding to a state of transparency, of the world continuing to appear to be itself (the world as symbol of continuity). This is the irony of transparency, of the return of symbolism to the realm of realism or expressionism: a transparent relation to the world is no relation at all, it is, "a dead one, altogether lacking attraction and vitality" (Han 4), it is merely the frame that reveals the nothing, into which *something* must flood or "ooze". The symbolism of *C* enunciates the play of transparency and symbolism, of self-evident and metaphorical reality, in the world's attempt to narrate itself.

Conclusion: The Naked Era

Nakedness defines the subject and object of the 21st century. The bourgeois digital subject and object, stripping themselves naked at the narrative behest of information, attempt to absolve themselves of the burden of self (particular discontinuous being), by locating in the banality of communication the objectivity of the world narrator: the narration of the digital communication network comes in the form of information that, "is at the same time what one uses concretely when communicating and the ultimate goal to be attained" (Breton 57). This is what McCarthy is doing as well, stripping the novel of the bourgeois self, or attempting to, as Vermeulen argues. The symbolism of *C* in particular represents the dualistic ubiquity of both taboo and transgression: the novel constitutes the being and non-being of transgression, it constitutes a coded and (barely) concealed attempt at literary transgression. Like *Remainder* transgresses against the "pieties" of trauma fiction (Vermeulen, "Critique" 550), *C* transgresses against the boundaries established by Symbolism, not by ignoring them, but by demonstrating their reversal. One way to do so is to make the character merely a conductor and distributor of symbolic action: gestures and scenes in which the character both observes and generates for the reader, or narrator, symbolic objects (without necessarily knowing what is being symbolized). *C* constitutes a formal transgression against symbolism through its deployment of a subject (Serge) largely absent the interiority that is meant to combine with or express the universal or ideal. The symbolic poetics discussed here are the symbols that express the "universal ideas" of a subject that is thought of as a meaningless arrangement of chemical and physical functions; they are the symbolic expression of the self-less self, or we could say, the art of disappearance (behind the black tar of technical materiality). That this literary

mode is regressive is stated by McCarthy himself, but it is made explicit in the final scenes of *C*. Serge's story ends in a symbolist melange of dream imagery referring like the text back to its origins in incest and coded communication, back to the fundamental patterns that trace the outline of an absent subject.

The sheer volume of symbolism contained in Serge's death-fantasy defies analysis here. This is because, for the most part, Serge's final relation to death is as a return to his origins, as a return to the symbolic experience of desire. Serge's death is described as going over a well trodden path again, for the first time. Though it by no means escapes pollution by technical objects and products (quite the opposite), this dream sequence reinforces the notion that Serge's dominant desires (sex, death and communication) can all be understood to refer to Bataille's irresolvable duality of taboo and transgression, to certain fundamental patterns of human behaviour. In his pursuit of these things, he is seeking regression to a pre-cultural phase of human existence, to the unregulated forms of sex, death and communication that define, for Bataille, nature as opposed to culture. A paradox arises in Bataille's work, though it is a productive one, when it becomes clear that restricting sexual reproduction or violence gives birth to erotic desire, which itself can be said to give birth to symbolism as one way of approaching or experiencing these taboo desires. This eroticism is played out, these taboos are transgressed in a controlled fashion, through symbolism and ritual. War, for instance, was at one point a ritual form of transgression; now, says Bataille in 1957, modern warfare, "that has travelled such a long way from the original organised transgression of the taboo, is the only one that would leave humanity unsatisfied" (*Eroticism* 80). It leaves humanity unsatisfied because it is arguably a sanitized version of the unbridled cruelty and violence of animal nature; it offers less access, which is to say far more indirect access, to that state of nature that our regressive desires yearn for. The same can be said of machines. When machines, signals, codes and sounds come to symbolize (provide the reader access to) these taboo desires, the access they offer is paradoxically too easily accomplished to fulfil its traditional function. If taboos are so easily transgressed, then transgression devolves into a state of nature; for transgression to be erotic, it must be countered by an equally strong compulsion to conform to and respect the taboo. If machines accelerate and nullify the eroticism of transgression, if they endlessly create the experience without the blood and the violence, if it is they who conform to and respect the taboo and us who relinquish that responsibility, then the erotic consequences of transgression diminish and transgression becomes merely the status quo of a relation (subject-object) that has seemed to banish it completely.

C establishes a symbolic structure that is able to show Serge what he wants (continuity relating to sex, violence and death) at the same time as always keeping it in reserve. This symbolic structure is at the

same time a narrative structure, in that it represents for the reader of McCarthy's novels the rhythm of the story itself. If there is a single, universal, idea that is referred to by the symbolism of McCarthy's novels, it can be thought of in terms of non-being, nothingness, and death. Like Serge's sexual trauma, the accident in *Remainder*, the mystery of the dead skydiver in *Satin Island* or the surveillance officer's insignificance in *Men in Space*, these ideas are, for the most part, too disturbing to confront for the subject, even symbolically. Hence, their symbols acquire a double character, similar to that described by McCarthy in relation to Abraham and Torok's crypt: they provide access to the hidden idea, but do so through an appearance (language) that problematizes this symbolic reading, threatening to (out of psychological self-defence) reduce the symbol to an object or event that is merely a sign of itself (and thus lacking the depths where the origin of trauma may lie buried). The scene of the chemistry set explosion in *C* exemplifies this principle. Though I believe in my reading of the incident as a symbolic reiteration of sexual transgression, it also serves perfectly to frame how we will come to know Sophie as a (perhaps over-) committed scientist. The idea has the potential to be revealed by symbolism, or it may be obfuscated by the reader's desire to ground Sophie's 'self' in the text. Like Yeats' and Moréas' understanding of Symbolism, this scene compels the reader to follow their soul (reading) into either idea or character. McCarthy's symbolism acquires this dual quality by its reflection of contemporary conditions: the sheer saturation of symbolism in the world of both the novel (the text) and the contemporary digital subject. I would argue that *C* reflects this dualistic brand of McCarthyan symbolism at its furthest extension, comparable only to *Satin Island* (particularly in its use of blackness as a dominant and repetitive symbolic form). The dualistic symbolism employed by McCarthy in all the novels reflects the Batailleian anthropological condition described here, and links this condition to a certain *literary* mode described by McCarthy through de Man: "For de Man, irony is a literary mode in which we see something fundamentally inherent to literature itself: its experience of time, of language and the world all revolving around the question of inauthenticity and various doomed attempts to overcome it. Other modes may be more bombastic, more intense, but irony seems to provide a channel that runs beneath all these, enabling them" (*Tintin and the Secret of Literature* 177). The reversal of the traditional symbolic structure that spans each of the novels reflects this literary mode by producing a saturation of symbolic language whose imminent continuity both challenges the capacity to overcome inauthenticity, and creates the field in which inauthenticity of this type might be overcome. In the following chapter I will pursue this notion of concealed transgression into the other three novels, through an analysis of the asignifying language of machines and Baudrillard's concept of the icon.

Chapter 5: A-signification and the Presence of Absence

The Iconic Relation

C explicitly establishes the symbolic as both the precursor and the mode of technological transparency. Its dominant symbolism reveals the hidden sources of Serge's desire and fascination in the form of the dualism of taboo and transgression. When Serge symbolically assumes the position/role of the sun he becomes the thing that can or does ignore human culture in the form of taboo; he assumes the form, given to him by the narration, of the divinely inhuman. He acquires this position by virtue of being wrapped up in, or traced by, technical detritus; tar, ink, and signals. This detritus, in the form of a surface derived from machines and technology, takes the place of the human: it becomes that which enforces control over the taboo, that which that exercises control over this duality. Absolved of this responsibility towards boundary and taboo, Serge is caught in the continuity of the interval, within which the only thing missing, the only thing worthy of a quest, is death itself. The perpetuity of this experience is poetically figured by the spacelessness and timelessness of the crypt. Wrapped completely in the shroud of continuity, Serge's own experience of continuity (sex with Laura) becomes an explicit reiteration without becoming explicitly meaningful or intellectually impactful for him; it seems there is nothing left to reveal. Transparency dulls the experience of the erotic without eliminating it; dulls it and continues it through repetition like Ivan of *Men in Space* and his pursuit of the erotic spirit of revolution. Under the regime of transparency, the metaphorical relation between symbol and idea (determined by the presence of the poetic genius) becomes the obfuscating relation of the icon and the irresolvable (the poetics of the formalism). The irresolvable relation between taboo and transgression, the material undecidability and irresolvable nature of metaphorical similarity, is resolved by the iconic relation as described by Baudrillard. And yet, this relation is still a mythic one (as the ancient Egyptian imagery of *C* alludes to); the resolution of the irresolvable is the mythos of the transparency society, which is to say, this goal of resolution is a myth. Unable to resolve Bataille's duality (because the narration contains no subject to do the resolving), the symbolism of *C* resorts to the deferral of this responsibility of resolving the unresolvable onto the backs of signals, machines, sounds and rhythms. This implicit strategy of deferral is born out of the impossible scope of horror contained by the taboo on incest and the technically constrained mode of death in WWI; it is implicit in the power of technology to project, transmit, and circulate signs and symbols of death, sex and violation. The ease with which these symbols are encountered and produced through

technology erases their capacity to transmit meaning to the characters (to point to the idea of the universal duality of taboo and transgression). These technical products come only to represent a process of “denuding” reality: they offer a promiscuous continuity that has detached itself from the violence of sex and death and attached itself to the functional positivity of the ethos of reality production. The symbol is stripped naked (revealed as paradoxically dualist) by McCarthy’s techno-poetics, at the same time as it is stripped naked by mass communication technology; the symbol is injected into an automated production process of the experience and promise of continuity. The symbol, with its role as conveyor of subjectivity through universal and hidden ideas, is converted into the icon, with its capacity to reject the irresolvable relation between the individual and the universal, in its aesthetic appeal to the form of reality.

The icon begins life in *Men in Space* in the antecedent space where the novel itself has no being. The extract from Klára’s MA dissertation that is presented prior to the title page of the novel (before and outside of it), is like the narrative object that reflects the subject back to it in its non-existence. This is a material object (a chunk of text) whose aesthetics inform the being of the novel. Simon Critchley has noted its importance to the novel in the afterword of the 2012 Vintage Canada Edition³⁷. This text appears to describe the formal and technical rigour of the Bačkovo Masters, however, the only direct reference to their mode of art is found in the title of the MA dissertation:

Despite the richness of their colour, it is the line that is the basic means of expression in the work of the Bačkovo masters. Executing a rigorous set of formal procedures, lines never allow themselves to become mere accessories to the expression of volume, to imply depth or confer realism: instead, they help present the world they depict as unreal, flat and dematerialized. Using inverted perspective and multiple points of view which they place within the painting itself, the Bačkovo masters set up a continuous style that enables them to represent several moments of a story on a single panel. As for the human figures, their sensory organs are drawn out and isolated, relinquishing their biological functions as they become sanctified. Their faces, serene and concentrated, are not configured to produce dramatic effect, but rather to foreground their owners’ elevated sorrow.

Klára Jelínková, *Murals of the Bačkovo Ossuary*

(Unpublished MA Dissertation, AVU, Cz:1986, pp.8-9) (*Men in Space*)

The bulk of this small extract establishes the aesthetics of the Bačkovo masters as that of the technical mode of writing, or the formalism; its description of the power of lines to depict the unreality of the world, its flatness, along with the concept of “inverted” perspective and “multiple points of view”, all point to the art of disappearance, which is to say, the aesthetics of the novel form, the panels of a *Tintin* comic

³⁷ “Indeed, I think that Klára is the key character in *Men in Space*, and her words can be read as a commentary on both the form and content of the novel that unfolds on the following pages.” (*Men in Space* 281)

strip, the shuffling frames of a film-strip, or the endless stream of perspectives to be found and accessed on the digital screen. We might read this notion of an inverted perspective in terms of the “transparency society” described by Byung-Chul Han. Han illustrates the control mechanism of the transparency society as follows:

[...] we are not experiencing the end of the panopticon, but rather the beginning of an entirely new, *aperspectival* panopticon. The digital panopticon of the twenty-first century is *aperspectival* insofar as it no longer conducts surveillance from a central point, with the omnipotence of the despotic gaze. The distinction between center and periphery [...] has disappeared entirely. The digital panopticon functions without any perspectival optics. That is what makes it efficient. *Aperspectival*, penetrating illumination [*Durchleuchtung*] proves more effective than *perspectival* surveillance because it means utter illumination of everyone from everywhere, which anyone can perform. (45)

The accumulation of perspectives, times and spaces within and through the lines of the masters’ formal rigour is precisely a reiteration of the formal aspects of the “*aperspectival*” digital panopticon. This is the poetic structure of the spaceless and timeless, where space and time have been encrypted into the aesthetics of the masters and redistributed as invisible signals of existence, irrevocable marks of being spanning and transgressing the boundaries of time and space in order to be co-present in the image and screen. The masters use line to establish a “continuous style”—this is representative of an endless attachment to and expression of continuity. God is not *expressed* here (as universal idea through a symbolic body or object), but is rather contained and distributed like signals from a crypt; made irrevocable in their ubiquitous presence in all moments and all spaces. The iconic crypt makes God into a product capable of being connected to, if ports and connectors match. This is the “tar-coated” god that Serge identifies as “a point within the planes and altitudes the machine’s cutting through” (C 190), the idea of which is derived from the symbolic presence of Hölderlin’s words that “hums in the struts and wires” (C 190). A co-presence is established between this god and the act of connection in the line that follows, repeating the pattern of deriving universal ideas from symbolic language: “And *fassen* . . . *fassen* is like locking onto something: a signal, frequency, or groove” (190). God in this passage “is”, whereas *fassen* (fasten) is “like”: the existence of god appears certain, whereas connection to it requires a metaphorical relation, a metaphorical leap of faith. The god is denied a hidden or uncertain being through its being transmitted in this way. This style echoes the continuity offered by communication technology like the film or the television: each constitutes a demonstration of the world continuing without you, metaphorically living after your death. Like the ritual of sacrifice, the screen offers an experience of continuity, but an endless one, establishing continuity as a state of being, inverting Bataille’s notion of life as discontinuous. Transgression loses its impact as it can be witnessed seemingly endlessly through the

poetics of transparency; transgressive violence and transgressive sex can each be simulated and witnessed online at the whim of the user. Transgression is inverted, like the perspective in the murals, and acquires the character of discontinuity; of stopping, halting, even altering the course of this endless stream of continuity (like the Chinese government's control over internet access is viewed in the West as a transgression against all that is good about the internet). This is part of the reason that duality, or co-presence or co-embodiment of opposing ideas (representing the absence of the subject) is the taboo of the transparency society, as well as its foundation.

If the taboo on incest enters humanity into the realm of culture and out of the realm of nature, then the taboo on duality enters humanity into the realm of (objective) reality and out of the realm of fiction (of culture). In the realm of transparency and objective reality, the figures in the mural find their "sensory organs [...] drawn out and isolated, relinquishing their biological functions as they become sanctified". This line makes the organs in question into metaphorical machines, detached from the body in terms of function, from the biological imperatives of survival, and enters them into the sanctified mode of the already-sacrificed, those objects which sit outside the realm of respect for the taboo on duality. This establishes human perception in its dependence upon surfaces as the *source* of taboo duality, and places the machine at the height of the objective reality that constitutes respect for this taboo. Unmediated human perception re-establishes the animal or god that is external to taboo; the machine constitutes the ritual sacrifice (consumption) of that which is beyond respecting this taboo (of that which could not, even if it wanted to, respect this taboo).

The final line of this extract gives the reader a sense of the emotional and affective position of the characters which figure prominently in McCarthy's novels. Their impassivity is the result of their sensory organs abandoning the body and being sacrificed; their "elevated sorrow" is the result of having relinquished their being in favour of the non-being of the object. The inverted perspective is resolved in the final line as the inversion of the object and the subject:

This raises the whole question of the intelligence of Evil.

We are simplified by technical manipulation.

And this simplification goes off on a crazy course when we reach digital manipulation.

What becomes at this point of the ventriloquacy of Evil? It is the same with the radicalism of yore: when it deserts the individual, reconciled with himself and homogenized by the good offices of the digital, and when all critical thinking has disappeared, radicalism passes into things. The ventriloquacy of Evil passes into technology itself.

For duality can be neither eliminated nor liquidated – it is the rule of the game, the rule of a kind of inviolable pact that seals the reversibility of things.

If their own duplicity deserts human beings, then the roles are reversed: it is the machine that goes gaga, that falters and becomes perverse, diabolic, ventriloquous. The duplicity merrily goes over to the other side. (*Why?* 69-70)

Their sorrow, in other words, comes from having relegated themselves to the role of the dispassionate and disconnected observers of an unstoppable progression of ritual sacrifice; they become a community of stable tricksters no longer able to trick the machines they have elevated to the status of Gods. Their sorrow is the result of the secret knowledge contained in the continuity of this experience: it is the melancholy of the devotee whose rituals signify a utopian solution *and* its utter impossibility at once. If transparency is a poetic and aesthetic mode like symbolism, it would operate on the same mobius-strip logic: it would rise out of opposition to the metaphorical relation to the point of being easily simulated, and would thus pass back into its origins in the form of an *artistic expression* of reality (like realism). Like transgression, whose ritual expression eventually passes into the expression/celebration of its opposite, transparency inevitably returns to and becomes ideological obfuscation.

The particular icon at stake in *Men in Space* is the object of a criminal operation, an operation which seeks to return the artwork to its owners in order to accomplish its criminal objectives. It is the excessive proliferation of the symbol in the technical modes of dispersal and communication that establishes the icon as criminal, in terms of Baudrillard's notion of the "perfect crime". The icon is criminal in the sense that it seeks to deny the ambiguity or undecidability of what it purports to represent through simulation (which is the fate of symbolism according to Moréas):

On the horizon of simulation, not only has the world disappeared but the very question of its existence can no longer be posed. But this is perhaps a ruse of the world itself. The iconolaters of Byzantium were subtle folk, who claimed to represent God to his greater glory but who, simulating God in images, thereby dissimulated the problem of his existence. Behind each of these images, in fact, God had disappeared. He was not dead; he had disappeared. That is to say, the problem no longer even arose. It was resolved by simulation. This is what we do with the problem of the truth or reality of this world: we have resolved it by technical simulation, and by creating a profusion of images in which there is nothing to see. (*Perfect Crime* 5)

Like the symbolism of Moréas, the icons of the Byzantines in the extract above are meant to celebrate the immutable presence of their god. However, rather than revealing the universal and ideal nature of God, the iconolaters cause God to disappear into and behind these images. The metaphorical relation between symbol and idea (of God) is dissolved in the form of the icon; the icon portrays the *being* of God (as such denying God's possible *non-being*) rather than a relation of similarity obfuscating (containing) a whole

range of differences which might serve to destabilise the symbol as capable of confirming the *being* of God.

The head of a Bulgarian crime syndicate, the leader of the men whose vulgar conversation opens the novel, plans to hire the artist Ivan Maňásek to copy the icon, so that the copy can be returned to its owners and the crime can be hidden behind the appearance of the copy. The icon in question is “exceptionally valuable” (*Men in Space* 18); beyond what it represents in artistic terms, it represents the uncontrolled production of value, which is to say, it represents both the erotic allure of the pre-cultural point of boundless reproduction and the ideal boundlessness of the neo-liberal and late capitalist marketplace. The icon and its exceptional value constitute a commonplace transgression of the taboo on reproduction. A second example of the banality of this transgression, the banality of Bataille’s eroticism in a state of transparency, occurs when Nick has sex with Angelika on an “autopsy slab”:

Nick nods apprehensively. Angelika swings back the trunk’s lid. Inside the trunk is a pile of legs: maybe ten or fifteen of them. They’re single legs, not pairs, cut off below the waist. They’re slightly yellow. Angelika lifts one out and holds it up.

“Right leg,” she says. “A man’s. Not so old. Maybe forty. Want to hold it?”

“No.”

“Go on. Just while I take my jumper off.”

She rolls it into his arms. It’s very light. She peels her jumper away from her torso, takes the leg back and returns it to the trunk, leads him to another one and opens it [...]

“Yes?” The buttons are being undone now.

“I think your flatmate Ivan Maňásek is a psychopath.”

“Oh, I don’t know. He’s just a little . . .”

“Do you know what he did to me tonight?”

“When?”

“Under the duvet.”

“No.”

“He bit me! He bit me on the leg. Just here.”

She takes Nick’s hand and places it to her thigh. Her flesh is sending a large amount of heat through her tights into Nick’s fingers. He leaves them there. Angelika’s staring at his face intensely.

“He doesn’t seem to have pierced through the fabric,” Nick tells her. “If I were you I’d . . .”

But she's not listening, has already leant forward and kissed him. He kisses her back. She pulls him to his feet and leads him over to the table where her coat is lying.

"On the autopsy slab?"

"Why not?" (94)

The symbolic eroticism of sex and death, stripped of the rich metaphorical referentiality of *C*, retains the form of the symbol but the metaphorical relation is largely absent. The iconography of violence and death is present throughout the scene in the form of severed limbs, the setting of the autopsy lab, and the bite on Angelika's leg. However, like the bite on the leg, the poetics of the scene do not penetrate through the fabric of transparency. The limbs, the lab, the bite, the fabric, none of these are described metaphorically, they do not look, smell, sound or feel "like" anything else, they stand only for themselves. Though a place of death becomes a nexus of erotic desire, the language remains plain and dully repetitive. As when Serge has sex with Laura in the Egyptian crypt, there is no revelation or epiphany, merely the spatial, temporal and aesthetic coincidence of death and sex: the expression of an anthropological formalism composed of kinship vectors and lineages. This kind of eroticism has been made transparent, which is to say, it has shed its symbolic meaning, or the symbolic capacity to elaborate some universal idea through the metaphorical relation. It is an "aperspectival" vision of the coincidence of sex and death, a vision lacking perspective in the sense of a vision lacking a subjective viewer; it is the vision of this coincidence occurring without me. Like watching it on a computer screen, the reader alone with the text is left only with the self-evidence of the language. The aperspectival perspective of the novel itself has been by this point (94) established by shifting between the perspectives of characters which will eventually become lost in the swirl of plot surrounding the icon, as well as those central to it; characters like Roger (97), Heidi (72), Helena (65), Joost (61), Ivan (37), Nick (25), an unnamed police officer on surveillance duty (23) and Anton the gangster (3).

It is my contention that this persistent iconic relation is one element of the poetics of transparency, which is another way of saying the poetics of the world that writes itself. The poetics of transparency evoke the attempted elimination of the metaphorical relation, which in this case constitutes the attempted elimination of the non-being, or instability, of objects and their meaning. They are in a sense the poetics employed in a context distrustful of poetics, we might even say the automated poetics of enlightenment epistemology. In turn, this description is of the denial of Bataille's anthropological duality of transgression and taboo, a duality which, through its symbolic and ritual expression, establishes itself as a productive form of ambiguity. Transparency and its poetics are a denial of ambiguity behind the aesthetic clarity of machinic function; one way of thinking about the aesthetic clarity of machinic function

is through an investigation of the novels in terms of what post-workerists like Mauricio Lazzarato call “a-signification”.

A-signification and “Machinic Enslavement”

One of the most enigmatic characters to come out of McCarthy’s literary oeuvre is the police officer on surveillance duty in *Men in Space*. We are introduced to him immediately following Anton and Ilievsky’s discussion of their plans for the stolen icon. His sections of the novel are unique: they invariably begin and end with an ellipsis, indicating continuity in both directions, and in this case a beginning to the narration outside of the novel, just like Klára’s MA dissertation extract. There is a duality introduced in this section, a duality of material and linguistic reference contained in the concept of the formalism. It begins with a detailed description of the surveillance technology being used by the police officer:

...by means of a Ruble drop transmitter operating in the VHF part of the spectrum. This device is crystal-controlled, to prevent drift. Equipped with single-frequency-receiver circuitry and multiple-tone filter, it can be activated and deactivated remotely from the listening post, whose holding signal keeps the drop transmitter on air for no longer that it needs to be, thus avoiding battery run-down, or at least greatly deferring it [...] The drop transmitter’s frequency was set at 91.7 [ninety-one point seven] MHz, just below that of Radio Jedná (formerly Radio Stalin), thus ensuring that its output would be occluded by the commercial broadcaster’s output on all non-modified receivers. (*Men in Space* 23)

Within this technical nomenclature of surveillance technology is revealed a certain mode of duality made operational, one which bears the likeness of the symbolic. What we have is the description of the dual register of control (surveillance) and “commercial” pleasure; the former being “occluded” or carried, by the latter.

This effectively describes what Mauricio Lazzarato calls “a-signifying semiotics”:

The semiotic components of capital always operate in a dual register. The first is the register of “representation” and “signification” or “production of meaning”, both of which are organized by signifying semiotics (language) with the purpose of producing the “subject”, the “individual”, the “I”. The second is the machinic register organized by a-signifying semiotics (such as money, analog or digital machines that produce images, sounds and information, the equations, functions, diagrams of science, music, etc.), which “can bring into play signs which have an additional symbolic or signifying effect, but whose actual functioning is neither symbolic nor signifying”. This second register is not aimed at subject constitution but at capturing and activating pre-subjective and pre-individual elements (affects, emotions, perceptions) to make them function like components or cogs in the semiotic machine of capital. (“Semiotic Pluralism” and the New Government of Signs: Homage to Félix Guattari)

According to Lazzarato, the subject is generated by capital in two modes: the register of “signification” and that of the “machinic register”. The former produces both meaning and subjectivity, while the latter

produces a form of control whose end is the automated functionality of those aspects of the subject over which the subject has little or no control. This notion of a-signification is contained in the poetics of the police officer's narration. For instance, the individuality of those he is surveilling is denied through his use of the terms "Subject" and "Associate" (*Men in Space* 23), names which are pre-subjective, which do not refer to an "I" so much as to an 'it'. His surveillance machines in turn serve to control and enforce, not the actions of "Subject" or "Associate" (who are in effect products of the machines, the "sounds and information" described by Lazzarato), but rather his own function. They do so through the manipulative production of signals, noise, sounds and information, which in turn appeal to the "affects, emotions, perceptions" of the officer in order to compel the proper functioning of the officer in his surveillance role: "I trust I am not being immodest in stating that I am good at this: I can always get a signal. Indeed, it was made clear to me that it was for this reason that I was given this particular assignment. I must, however, register my anxiety that if the use of Ruble drop transmitters is phased out, as planned, the quality of future surveillance operations will decrease. I do not think I am alone in fearing this" (23). In an oeuvre largely lacking in significant expressions of affect or emotions, it is instructive to note that fear and anxiety come through here in terms of a possible reduction in effectiveness or function; they appear, in a sense, to be the affect and emotion of a machine worried about being made redundant or obsolete. This hews closely to Lazzarato's description of how a-signification produces functionality in the contemporary subject:

The cycle of fear, anxiety or panic penetrating the atmosphere and tonality in which our "surveillance societies" are steeped are triggered by sign machines; these machines appeal not to the consciousness, but to the nervous system, the affects, the emotions. The symbolic semiotics of the body, instead of being centred on language, are as such activity routed through the industrial, machinic, non-human production of images, sounds, words, intensities, movements, rhythms, etc. ("Semiotic Pluralism")

After noting how good he is at finding and receiving signals, the officer shares an anxiety about the potential reduction of that capacity that would result from the loss of this particular equipment. The one solid expression of personality by the police officer that comes out of this initial extract is clear: he is driven by his need to be an effective and functional component of this investigation.

The next installment of the officer's perspective arrives thirty pages later, when he is officially assigned the case of the missing icon in a meeting with an INTERPOL representative. During this meeting he and his associates are given a copy of an image of the icon. Through his description of this image we can see the difference between signification and a-signification:

It depicted a male figure floating above a landscape. Below him were mountains, below these houses and, to the right of these, a large blue area across which square objects were being shunted or shuffled into position by small men. The men were either repositioning these objects or else tending to them, as though they were fine-tuning listening devices [...] While I considered which new surveillance equipment to install in view of this directive, where to install it, and how many auxiliary people I would need to co-opt to work with me to do so, I continued examining the reproduction of the painting. Although, being old, it was certainly not intended to represent such things, what its action (if one can apply that term to such a static scene) most suggested to my mind was the transmission and reception of signals. The blocks to which the small men tended took on the character, even more strongly than they had on my first viewing of the image, of transmitters; the rough silver of the sky suggested a transmission medium, the bright gold around the floating figure's head a zone of reception; the text, perhaps, depicted the transmission's content – content which was, as so often in our field of work, encrypted. The mountains were dotted with angular objects which protruded from them: these, to my mind, suggested aerials or antennae. This made sense: hills, mountains, outcroppings of rock and other such bodies adversely affect a signal, causing multi-path interference. Aerials, such as depicted (so it seemed to me) by the angular objects, would help rectify this problem, aiding the passage of messages from the boxes set in the blue surface upwards to the floating figure, or perhaps vice versa, in the contrary direction. I am aware that my interpretation was highly subjective, and doubtless coloured by the surveillance considerations I was simultaneously entertaining, but this is how the painting presented itself to my mind, and I trust I am not misguided in deeming this fact worthy of inclusion in these notes. (54-56)

The officer's reading of the icon's significance rises out of, or is carried on the back of, his considerations of how best to perform his new duties. The nature of this reading is made explicit several times by the officer himself: "suggested to my mind [...] these, to my mind, suggested [...] (so it seemed to me) [...] I am aware that my interpretation was highly subjective, and doubtless coloured by the surveillance considerations I was simultaneously entertaining, but this is how the painting presented itself to my mind". Not only do we see the explicitly self-referential nature of signification at play here, but we also get a clear expression of its co-presence with the control exerted by a-signification in terms of his "surveillance considerations", or in other words, consideration of his function as a police officer. Like the object in de Man's theory, the being of this image is posited in terms of language. In turn, it conveys being and non-being simultaneously: being in terms of its capacity to reflect the officer in his function and non-being in terms of the "highly subjective" (that which problematizes and destabilizes this reading). Along with this dual register of meaning, we have the dual register of signification and a-signification: the combination of subjectivity with an emphasis on function. The "symbolic semiotics" of the figures in the icon convey the meaning of function, specifically the function of the officer himself, which is to say, the transmission and reception of signals, codes, and encrypted messages. Lazzarato calls the product of this second register "machinic enslavement":

Machinic enslavement is therefore not the same thing as social subjection. If the latter appeals to the molar, individuated dimension of the subjectivity, the former activates its molecular,

pre-individual, transindividual dimension. In the first case, the system speaks and generates speech; it indexes and folds the multiplicity of pre-signifying and symbolic semiotics over language, over linguistic chains by giving priority to its representative functions. In the second case, however, the system does not generate discourse: it does not speak but it functions, sets things in motion, by connecting directly to the “nervous system, the brain, the memory, etc.” and activate [sic] the affective, transindividual relations that are difficult to attribute to a subject, an individual, a me. These two semiotic registers work together to produce and control subjectivity in both its *molar* and its *molecular* dimensions. As we shall see, the same semiotic devices can be devices both for machinic enslavement and for social subjection. (“Semiotic Pluralism”)

So, though these two effects can be achieved by a single “semiotic device”, the icon does not constitute a device of this sort. Machinic enslavement differs from subjection in the sense that the former provokes certain and repetitive responses from the subject; they do not serve to form the subject so much as ‘motivate’ them (in a similar manner to Serge giving life to the battlefield by guiding the bombs that would explode it, that might set it into *motion*). It does so by virtue of what I am calling the iconic relation, that which avoids or defers the pitfalls of metaphor or subjectivity. This image serves to reproduce the officer’s self (subjection), and even his function (motivation), without serving to provoke or compel any action beyond an internal kind of perspective. In simple terms, the painting in the story reflects the reality of the officer, and in doing so demonstrates the paradoxical duality of stasis and dynamism in the iconic relation.

How does the machine-function enact a mode of control in the language of Lazzarato, Deleuze and Guattari? According to the former, it does so through “modulation”:

To make sense of the concept of modulation employed by Deleuze to explain the device of power in a control society and which he contrasts with the “moulding” of the disciplinary society, we have to look at the video machine. Television is a device that modulates the (message-bearing) carrier wave by acting simultaneously on its amplitude and its frequency. Rather than capturing the images, the camera captures the waves that constitute those images, composing and decomposing them by means of modulation. (“Semiotic Pluralism”)

Two examples of the seductive power of modulation can be found in Serge’s relation to the kinoscope and wireless in *C*. Both of these devices compel certain reactions in Serge and his family after they become fixtures in their daily life: “every night they get to watch Kinoscope projections. It becomes a ritual: as soon as supper’s over the bedsheet’s hauled up, chairs laid out and reel after reel fed into the mechanism [...] Each time Widsun racks up a new spool and starts running it, Serge feels a rush of anticipation run through the cogs and sprockets of his body” (*C* 57). The Kinoscope modulates light and sound waves for its audience, and in doing so seems to have established itself at the center of a ritual, a ritual whose repetition is implicitly related to the bodily affect it produces in Serge (a body composed of “cogs and

sprockets"). A similar relation is established in the first scene of Serge operating his wireless set, deploying a technical language like that used by the officer in *Men in Space*:

The static's like the sound of thinking. Not of any single person thinking, nor even a group thinking, collectively. It's bigger than that, wider – and more direct. It's like the sound of thought itself, its hum and rush. Each night, when Serge drops in on it, it recoils with a wail, then rolls back in crackling waves that carry him away, all rudderless, until his finger, nudging at the dial, can get some traction on it all, some sort of leeway. The first stretches are angry, plaintive, sad – and always mute. It's not until, hunched over the potentiometer among fraying cords and soldered wires, his controlled breathing an extension of the frequency of air he's riding on, he gets the first quiet clicks that words start forming: first he jots down the signals as straight graphite lines, long ones and short ones, then, below these, he begins to transcribe curling letters, dim and grainy in the arc light of his desktop . . . (C 79)

Though less explicit than in the previous example, we have yet again a demonstration of how the modulation of signals or waves produces a poetics of the body, of personal experience: they “carry him away, all rudderless, until his finger, nudging the dial, can get some traction on it”. The wireless produces for Serge a relation to coded communication, a pre-linguistic, pre-cultural state of communication through signals, codes and even his sense of smell, “it, too, carries signals, odour-messages from distant, unseen bowels” (83). Along with compelling certain performative responses (like the ritual nightly screenings, “nudging” the wireless dial, or writing out decoded messages) the operation of these machines offers a relation to a world that is definitively *without* Serge: it offers, in other words, the aesthetic presence of one's own absence. It is the role of absence which comes to define the process of a-signification in both Lazzarato's estimation and in the novels.

Satin Island provides a comparable scenario, but with important differences, in the airport lounge in Turin as U. sits before banks of television screens. Though both the nameless officer in *Men in Space* and Serge in *C* are affected by their relation to a-signifying machines, compelling in them certain bodily affects or reactions, U. maintains a notoriously affectless relation to what he witnesses on the airport screens (as well as the videos he watches at work). In *Satin Island* we have a different technological scenario from that in *C* or *Men in Space*, one involving cellular phones and laptops (*Satin Island* 9). In this context, the affective potential of a-signification seems to be dulled, or perhaps more accurately, made universal and banal. In this context, rather than explicitly engaging with the affective or the emotional, a-signification and its associated machinic enslavement seems to have lost their affective relation and regressed in the production of a Batailleian continuity (perhaps hidden behind the pleasurable functionality it compels):

My phone beeped and vibrated in my jacket. I took it out and read the message I'd received. It came from Peyman. Peyman was my boss. It said: We won [...] Two more, from other

colleagues, followed in quick succession, both conveying the same news. The effects of my chance exposure to this football game lingered after I'd read these; so it seemed to me that Bayern Munich's striker, roaring with delight towards the stands, was rejoicing not for his own team and fans but rather for us; and it even seemed that the victim with the Snoopy shirt on, as he ran screaming towards the camera, was celebrating the news too: from his ruined market with its standard twisted metal and its blood, for us. (*Satin Island* 6-7)

Despite receiving a message about his company's victory, a signal modulated by his phone, U. shows no emotional, bodily, or affective response. Instead, what we get is a convergence of this message and disparate images of events in the world. Rather than producing a certain predictable or controlled response in U., this example of a-signification produces the absence of a response. Instead of noting the presence of a-signification in the body (affect, emotion) of the character, we might identify it instead in the banalization of its purported effects of control and operation of the "semiotic machine of capital":

I looked up, around the terminal. People who weren't clicking and scrolling their way, like me, through phones and laptops were grazing on the luxury items stacked up all about us. The more valuable of these were kept behind polished glass sheets whose surfaces reflected the lounge's other surfaces, so that the marketplace bomb-aftermath replayed across the pattern of a shawl, oil flowed and reflowed on a watch's face. The overlap between these various elements, and the collage-effect it created, was constant – but, as the hours wore on, the balance of the mixture changed. The luxury objects stayed the same, of course – but little by little, football highlights and truck bombing faded, clips of them growing shorter and less frequent; while, conversely, the oil spill garnered more and more screen time. (9)

Once more, we find that the functional performance of the subject is present, while the affective or emotional reactions are absent. "Clicking and scrolling" are paradigmatic examples of the functional reaction to a-signifying stimulus, in that they constitute U.'s response to the flight delay information, the oil spill footage, and to Madison's text messages and skype call. Though seemingly the most banal of bourgeois human activity, among the most automatic of physical responses, they make up in this context a combined poetics of "machinic enslavement" and catastrophic (tragi-comic) failure in the form of regression. In turn, they maintain the theme of indistinct timelessness and spacelessness that has been summed up in this section as Bataille's "continuity". Clicking and scrolling are metaphorically compared to "grazing on the luxury items", as each are performed through the medium and modulations of a screen, transparent surfaces, or a machine. As in the previous example, the central theme here is the subjective merging into the continuity of modulated information about the world, commodities and consumer subjects ("the collage-effect it created"). Not only is there an aesthetic convergence, but the connection between shawl and terrorism, a watch face and oil, presents the reader with connections that seem less than metaphorical; unless we recall the shroud metaphor that opens the novel. With this imagery in mind, this scene becomes populated with metaphorical screens and actual screens, an endless flow of modulated information leading to a cyclical mode of production and consumption indicating a kind of

catastrophic mode of return or regression. The regression into a pre-subjective, or in Bataille's terms, pre-cultural, mode through the act of modulation is the essential mechanism of a-signification described by Lazzarato:

By modulating these intensities, these rhythms, these movements, the a-signifying machines shape the conditions from which the image, the word or the sound emerges, i.e. the conditions from which the action, the perception or the enunciation emerges. That is the source of their power: they work on all the elements within the process of subjectivation (both linguistic and symbolic), but their point of departure is this "vacuum", which actually and rightly precedes all signification and representation. ("Semiotic Pluralism")

Like the iconic relation, the ontological power of a-signification is bound up with its capacity to produce the world from nothing, out of an apparent "vacuum". It produces information, the world, out of an absence of both subject ("I") and metaphorical relation. Lazzarato calls this ostensibly spaceless and timeless point of origin, "A world of 'pure experience', before the crystallization of object and subject. A non-'human' world, since it goes beyond our ability to perceive these movements, these intensities, these rhythms. All is movement in the video, all is time – but these movements, this time is non-'human'" ("Semiotic Pluralism").

In the airport lounge the inhumanity of this surface-world has been poetically extended (like the control of a-signification, or the sensory organs of the subjects captured by the icon and the iconic relation) into the human world; the regressive poetics of this scene, and the ideology it represents, are expressed in the description of travellers as sheep or cattle, visually "grazing" on the glass-topped fields of consumer products. Their inhumanity (and the terrible potential its spread indicates) is then reinforced when U. describes the oil spilling into the ocean as though, "black cattle, through sheer mass and volume, had mutinied, stampeded and grown uncontrollable" (*Satin Island* 9-10). There is an implicit metaphorical association between consumers, cattle and a kind of black materiality representative of evil and the repressed erotic desire for violence and violation, "inching its way towards" "white-feathered sea birds" and "pristine, snowy shorelines" (*Satin Island* 6). In this short extract, the poetics of a-signification extend into the endless (dulled through repetition) experience of erotic continuity, a mode of cultural control, but at the same time allude to a cyclical mode of idealism and catastrophe hovering above all of this formalized activity.

Clicking and scrolling are the generalized responses to a variety of technical stimuli: images of the oil spill, information about flight delays, a text message, a skype call from U.'s lover Madison. Each of these responses represent the kind of control envisaged by Lazzarato in terms of a-signification, a control so complete as to shroud the emotional and affective (interior) experience or motivation of the characters

in the scene. Despite of, or perhaps precisely because of, the ubiquity of this mode of control, U.'s experience at the airport produces a poetics of catastrophe and failure at the same time as it evokes this seemingly inescapable mode. The oil spill, engendering clicking and scrolling like the rest, represents a kind of technical failure of control, or catastrophe. Madison calls on skype, U. responds with his clicking, but the program freezes, the call fails and is dropped (*Satin Island* 8-9). U. watches two young boys running in circles; one repeatedly falls, the other picks him up again (6-8). Even inside the mechanics of a-signification (the narration of the human by its technological excreta), there is failure: machines (oil rigs) fail, computer programs fail, balance fails, control fails, idealism fails. The particular brand of failure at stake in all the novels is mechanical failure, malfunction, the extension of technology and its benefit to its breaking point. The increasing aesthetic dominance of failure is indicated in the final lines of the extract above, as "screen-time" begins to be dominated by images of the oil spill, a metaphorical image referring simultaneously to mechanical failure, to the masses of mindless consumers in the lounge and to the uncontrollable quality of the "non-human", or pre-cultural modes of being, or of nature itself. The control enacted by a-signification, though coercive and violent, is as idealist as asking the question: "how do we develop practices of freedom and processes of individual and collective subjectivation using these same technologies?" (Lazzarato). Whereas Lazzarato maintains a Marxian sympathy with the utopianism of production technology, McCarthy establishes a poetics of cyclical failure and catastrophe that hews closer to the modern art theory of Moréas and Yeats, and the cultural theory of Baudrillard and Bataille.

***Remainder* and the Reversible Poetics of Transparency**

Under the aegis of this duality of idealism and failure, expression acquires the ambiguous potential of de Man's "modifications": the being of a thing becomes as likely to be expressed as its non-being. If duality is the "rule of the game" (*Why?* 69), it is directly connected to Bataille's anthropology in Baudrillard's later work. In this context, the art of disappearance constitutes the only response to the responsibility imposed on the modern human to "transform the world, and to do so by means of science, analytical knowledge and the implementation of technology" (*Why?* 10):

The basic rule, which, though it comes from the depths of our anthropology, still applies even in our present world, is the rule of gift and counter-gift.

If the natural world is given to us, then we must be able to respond to that. If we cannot, then we have to eliminate the natural world. It is an undertaking of just this kind that the human race has embarked upon, launching itself, particularly in modern times, into ever-increasing abstraction, going so far as to create a hegemonic structure that liberates us totally from the natural order. By this global performance, this technical scheming, this substitution of a controllable universe made by our own hand, we are probably trying to ward off the anxiety

produced by everything that has escaped us since the beginning, by what has been given to us without our having anything to give back.

We thought we had found a way out by wiping the natural world from the map. But, on the one hand, this does not settle the symbolic issues at all: the transformation of the world is a technical operation, not a symbolic one. And on the other hand, it is no response. We are just contenting ourselves with liquidating what we cannot respond to. (*Carnival* 84-85)

Baudrillard's notion of transparency is inextricable from Bataille's anthropological duality, in that it is a formal progression from the symbolic relation between taboo and transgression to the operational relation of the icon; we leave the ambiguous realm of the metaphor and symbol and enter into the ontologically certain realm of the true or false. If our attempts to "eliminate the natural world" constitute an attempt to "liberate us totally from the natural order", this order is one of violent ambiguity and reversibility, where taboo leads out of nature, but culture (ritual) leads right back to that now-taboo experience of unchecked violence and desire. However, what is being described here in terms of hegemonic transparency is precisely the technical elaboration of the impulse for control exemplified by taboo. Nature gives everything by virtue of providing no ideal (immaterial) boundaries on human reproduction; if nature's gift is a lack of limits to (an absence of *ideas* regarding) reproduction, a certain freedom from abstract constraint, how does one pay back the gift of this freedom?

We might try to answer this question by looking once again at the framing mechanism of *Remainder*. The accident and the settlement which offers the narrator an unfamiliar level of freedom and productive capacity (through the capital he acquires) bears the poetics of transparency that are being established here:

About the accident itself I can say very little. Almost nothing. It involved something falling from the sky. Technology. Part, bits. That's it, really: all I can divulge. Not much, I know.

It's not that I'm being shy. It's just that – well, for one, I don't even remember the event. It's a blank: a white slate, a black hole [...] And then there's the Requirement. The Clause. The terms of the Settlement drawn up between my lawyer and the parties, institutions, organizations – lets call them *bodies* – responsible for what happened to me prohibit me from discussing, in public or recordable format (I know this bit by heart), the nature and/or details of the incident, on pain of forfeiting all financial reparations made to me, plus any surplus these might have accrued (a good word that, "accrued") while in my custody – and forfeiting quite possibly, my lawyer told me in a solemn voice, a whole lot more besides. Closing the loop, so to speak. (*Remainder* 6)

The poetics of this extract, like the sex scene from *Men in Space* above, are the poetics of disappearing metaphor; however, neither the narrator nor the narration can escape the inauthenticity of metaphor. Even in describing the hard and fast legal guidelines restricting his communication, at least two metaphors find their way into this extract: the event is "a blank: a white slate, a black hole" and the notion of a

forfeiture of “more” than money is like, “Closing the loop, so to speak”. The former is an attempt to make present that which has no being for the narrator: the accident. The latter is an attempt to give form to death without naming death, instead allowing death (or disappearance) to slip through, or be carried by, the poetics of “closing the loop”. This arrangement gives a certain credence to Byatt’s notion that the novel itself is the death-fantasy of the narrator, in the sense that death is named here without being made present, that the name it is given leads not towards the intensity of its experience but actually away from that intensity in the form of a “peritraumatic”³⁸ illusion. Byatt, in his comparison of Ballard’s *Crash* and McCarthy’s *Remainder*, finds Baudrillard’s reading of the accident in *Crash* in terms of the “hyperreality” of the “narrative space” of the novel,

[...] to be wholly logical – if the vision is not post-traumatic but *peritraumatic*, and not objective but subjective, then morality, which acts as a mediator between individual desire and social order, becomes irrelevant. It is no longer a work concerned with the relationship between self and other, but instead becomes intra-subjective, morality in the peritraumatic consciousness (and particularly in that consciousness which is engaged with its own death) being objectless and therefore redundant. (“Being Dead?” 249)

Byatt argues that where *Crash* establishes the accident in terms of an eroticism of trauma, McCarthy’s establishes the accident in *Remainder* as, “a notably sexless realm. The narrative is one of endless reproduction, but it is asexual or autogamous, always seeking to reproduce from within, rather than through contact with the other” (253). In other words, *Remainder* constitutes a narrative space occupied by, reproductive and reflective of, only the being of the self.

This all amounts to the concealment of non-being and of death by the iconic nature of naming. These poetics are an expression of what Baudrillard calls the art of disappearance. He establishes the de Manian relation of mutual non-being as the origins of this mode of disappearance:

By representing things to ourselves, by naming them and conceptualising them, human beings call them into existence and at the same time hasten their doom, subtly detach them from their brute reality. For example, the class struggle exists from the moment Marx names it. But it no doubt exists in its greatest intensity only before being named. Afterwards, it merely declines. The moment a thing is named, the moment representation and concepts take hold of it, is the moment when it begins to lose its energy – with the risk that it will become a truth or impose itself as ideology. (*Why?* 11-12)

Like Byatt’s peritraumatic delusion (and Moréas’ Symbolism) naming a thing within the context of Baudrillard’s modernity extracts it from the ambiguity of being and non-being, and enters it into a process of “decline” which, if it becomes “truth” or “ideology” ends up contributing to an endless cycle of failure.

³⁸ The mental illusion which allows the subject to disconnect from the experience of its own death.

Naming the object within the context of “the Promethean project of mastering the universe, of acquiring exhaustive knowledge” (*Why?* 16) amounts to simultaneously fixing the self-evidence of the object to its sign (name) and entering the object into a play of being and non-being, or appearance and disappearance. The art of disappearance therefore constitutes the act of making non-being, the “brute reality” of the “thing”, disappear behind the iconic relation, in the case of *Remainder*, embodied in the form of rigorous legal language.

When the non-being of a thing *disappears* behind the representational force of the name, we have the inversion of de Man’s formula: the mind no longer recognizes the mirror of its own dualistic nature of being and non-being in the object, and instead relates to the modified object through the lens of “truth” or “ideology” (two possible end points of symbolist aesthetics). In other words, the mind sees itself as being as unified as the object and its name (which are almost always pre-subjective arrangements, in that a tree was a tree since before you were born), relegating the fundamental dualistic struggle of the human (between taboo and transgression) to disappearance or indefensible absurdity. Humanity withdraws from the responsibility of managing its erotic relation to death and violence. Han’s unambiguous and operational language is the consequence of the “hegemonic” form of transparency which “tends quite simply to liquidate its opponents, regarding them as worthless, eccentric and residual. A style not of oppression and alienation, but of excommunication of everything that doesn’t fall within this sphere of integral performance and exchange” (*Carnival and Cannibal* 38). The poetics of transparency excommunicates the universality of non-being and nothingness; it attempts to eliminate even the trace of these things that might be found in the metaphorical or symbolic relation. I have already mentioned how the final re-enactment of *Remainder*, the bank robbery, recreates an extract of *Simulacra and Simulation*, which describes a fake bank robbery as a demonstration of how the real consumes the false and re-invests its energy into an undeniable reality. The accident, through the conditions of the Settlement, leads the narrator of *Remainder* into “this sphere of integral performance and exchange”; he becomes an investor, a performer, and an investor in performance. He becomes a vector of capital and performance, obsessed with models, plans and strategies of re-creation and re-enactment, in order to return to the moment prior to the accident, a moment which constitutes an “authentic”, or we might say unbounded and natural, existence. According to Baudrillard,

We may take the view that the precession of models and images, the stratagem that erases the boundaries between the true and the false, is itself a form of offensive response to the natural world, the real world, and that all this is done to escape actuality and reality, to escape the unbearable pretension of the ‘natural’ world that preceded us and seeks to force us to recognize that precedence.

Everything would, in fact, come down to this: *we want to be the original*, and to be so at any cost. Even if it means destroying the genuine article. In this way, we are rounding off reality with a demolition project that is assuming insane proportions.

Today, unfortunately, the undertaking has succeeded so well and progress has made such strides that everything is potentially available to us, and we find ourselves in the same impasse as at the beginning, facing a reality as obvious and irresistible as if it had fallen from the sky! And we still do not know how to respond. Nor to whom we are answerable. We can no longer set anything 'against' this technological world (this hegemonic universe). (*Carnival* 87-89)

The need for re-enactment, models, schematics and plans expressed by the narrator is a response to the "unbearable pretension" of his own namelessness (his incapacity to narrate himself), which now comes to represent the non-being denied to the world of objects, which is to say the non-being of the "Promethean project" and its modifications. He is, in this sense, a simulation of Baudrillard's subject absent its other (and hence absent from himself); he is the subject with nothing but complete being reflected back to him. The narrator is seeking authenticity, or to be original again, "even if it means destroying the genuine article": even if it means acquiring that authenticity through repetitive reproduction and simulation of violence and death. That this is a "demolition project that is assuming insane proportions" is another way of describing the art of disappearance and its iconic denial of the nothing, of ontological and epistemological uncertainty. This kind of violence is exemplified by the narrator's thoughts about the sun on the final page of the novel, that it "would set forever – burn out, *pop*, extinguish – and the universe would run down like Fisher Price toy whose spring has unwound to its very end" (*Remainder* 284). This is the same kind of "demolition" of the Sun that Serge witnesses and ponders; its descent and enclosure within the black-matter residue of modern technology. As Serge assumes the archaic divinity of the sun, the narrator comes to assume the mantle of the sun-king: "I folded my shotgun and placed it inside a bag. I liked it now, wanted to keep it with me, carry it around like a king carries around his sceptre. I was feeling even more regal than normal" (*Remainder* 278). The violence in *Remainder* is not symbolic or sacrificial, but as Bataille describes, it is the evil of the symbolic or the sacrificial turned into the banality of the political and economic. The violence that results from the narrator's plans is no longer a product of an erotic desire, but rather the consequence of the automatic function of a system of political and economic circulation (capital) which is iconic of reality (the absence of nothing or non-being).

For Baudrillard, transparency is the result of capital pursuing the principle that "all things hasten towards their abstraction, thereby obeying a frantic desire to escape their materiality" (*Carnival* 42): transparency is the product of capital no longer respecting the very boundaries and taboos of its origins in, for example, labor time (Virtanen 227; Piironen 276). Hence, "Capital is the purest expression of the reality principle. It has *become reality* [...] In its advanced form, capital aims for ever-increasing abstraction

and hence seeks to offload that machine for slowing down exchanges that reality might still be said to be. It therefore sacrifices it and, in the process, sacrifices itself" (*Carnival* 42-43). In other words, capital is the iconic expression ("it has *become reality*") of an idea whose very being implies the absence of the nothing, the hidden and the secret. The icon sacrifices its object (its reflection) by "closing the loop" of its being/non-being relation; the object is rejected from the world of culture and enters not nature, but, in the parlance of Baudrillard and McCarthy, a void, a "no-space of complete oblivion".

By seeking to be unbound by social regimes or boundaries, capital and reality acquire the sacred aspects of spacelessness and timelessness, a total existence unbound by dimension, metaphor, and even otherness. Capital and reality (their limitlessness) are sacrificed on the altar of transparency, they become the sacred objects of the transparency cult handled and presented by the screen to the greater benefit, and thus diminished responsibility, of their human laity. As Baudrillard puts it:

Every personal dimension and all demiurgy is abolished in favour of an operational mechanics. Human beings are totally relieved of responsibility: today, even power is a source of shame and there is no one left genuinely to take it on. Humanity is no doubt the only species to have invented a specific mode of disappearance that has nothing to do with the law of nature. Perhaps even an *art* of disappearance.

But perhaps in the end we dreamed of this irresponsibility, of this total jettisoning of freedom and will – 'We dreamed it, IBM did it!' Nothing is more cunning or more inventive than human beings when it comes to exploring the tiniest nuances of servitude. This entire electronic, cybernetic revolution is perhaps merely a piece of animal cunning that humanity has found in order to escape itself, at the same time as escaping the monstrous responsibility to which it is now over-exposed in what has become a global context. The sexual process, the process of death, all singularities and fateful processes recede before the final solution: the technical, artificial equivalent of life and death. (*Carnival* 43-44)

The non-being of the accident equates to the non-being of the world prior to its being covered by an "operational mechanics". As the opening framework of *Remainder*, the accident serves to establish hegemonic transparency as the context within which the plot unfolds. The accident, gauged through the language used by Baudrillard above, equates to the poetic expression of a reality that is an "impasse" both "obvious and irresistible". The narrator cannot (either legally or potentially) name the "bodies" who might answer for this accident, nor does he immediately know how to respond to this position he finds himself in: he begins the novel as the symbol of nothingness, non-being, in a world conditioned by the iconic relation between name and thing, or language and reality. Though he begins the novel thinking that authenticity might be set against the boredom he feels in relation to this networked world, his friend Greg quickly disabuses him of that ideal notion (*Remainder* 24). He realizes immediately that Greg is correct, but the nature of his description of this inauthenticity is instructive in that it tells us something about how

the narrator understands this ideal authenticity: "I decided Greg was right. I'd always been inauthentic. Even before the accident, if I'd been walking down the street just like De Niro, smoking a cigarette like him, and even if it had lit first try, I'd still be thinking: *Here I am, walking down the street, smoking a cigarette, like someone in a film. See? Second-hand. The people in films aren't thinking that. They're just doing their thing, real, not thinking anything*" (24). The narrator's concept of inauthenticity is precisely related to the co-presence of thought and action. Thought, and the unplaceable presence it implies, is the lynchpin of inauthenticity, needing to be denied and discarded if anything like an authentic being is to be acquired. De Niro is real precisely because his actions are detached from his thoughts. Reality does not contain the instability of thought or the mind (which is to say: language); minds are, after all, "versatile and wily things. Real chancers" (5). In the context of this analysis, minds are made "versatile and wily" through their metaphorical relation to the world of objects, which is to say, the world of matter. As Attridge mentions, the concept of matter in *Remainder*,

[...] is everywhere, from the crumbly plaster when, near the beginning, the narrator pulls the phone wire from the wall ('It looked kind of disgusting, like something that's come out of something' [7], a phrase that will recur), to the 'shard' lodged in his knee (which will also return), to his re-learning of how to lift a carrot to his mouth. An art teacher's explanation that sculpture is a process of getting rid of 'surplus matter' (87) comes back to him, and a second re-enactment hinges on the disappearance and reappearance of matter: the sticky blue liquid which, when he starts his car, is discharged over him. Carrying out a re-enactment of a streetside murder, he's obsessed by the matter of which the road is made. (7-8)

What Attridge abstains from contemplating or mentioning in this reading of *Remainder* are the trances and comas that come to be closely associated with the narrator's encounters with matter. After opening the novel with an explanation of the accident and Settlement, the next topic of description engages with the coma he finds himself in after the accident:

I lay abject, supine, tractioned and trussed up, all sorts of tubes and wires pumping one thing into my body and sucking another out, electronic metronomes and bellows making this speed up and that slow down, their beeping and rasping playing me, running through my useless flesh and organs like sea water through a sponge [...] As the no-space of complete oblivion stretched and contracted itself into gritty shapes and scenes in my unconscious head – sports stadiums mainly, running tracks and cricket pitches – over which a commentator's voice was playing, inviting me to commentate along with him, the word entered the commentary: we'd discuss the Settlement, though neither of us knew what it entailed (*Remainder* 6).

What characterises this description of the coma that follows his initial close encounter with falling matter is the combination of machine-coordinated life and thought cut off from the external world of objects and machines (matter), caught in a self-referential loop indicated by the shape of running tracks (an image which recurs throughout) and the discussion of the Settlement between two voices that know nothing

about it (as they are both contained in the mind of the comatose narrator³⁹). In other words, self-containment and machine-coordinated activity combine in this initial comatose period. The next example of “the no-space of complete oblivion”, becoming, “gritty shapes and scenes in my unconscious head”, occurs when the narrator has his experience of *déjà vu* in the bathroom of his friend’s flat. This episode begins with the recollection of certain spatial details: the position of the crack in the wall, of the window, the size and age of the fixtures, the cats on the opposite roof, “neighbours beneath me and around me and on the floor above” (60). However, it quickly resolves into the recollection of certain *rhythms*, sonic and olfactory in particular:

The smell of liver cooking in a pan had been wafting to me from the floor below – the sound too, the spit and sizzle. I remembered all this very clearly. There’d been liver cooking on the floor below – the smell, the spit and sizzle – and then two floors below that there’d been piano music. Not recorded music playing on a CD or the radio, but real, live music, being played on a piano by the man who lived there, a musician. I remembered how it had sounded, its rhythms. Sometimes he’d paused, whenever he’d hit a wrong note or lost his place. He’d paused and started the passage again, running through it slowly, slowing right down as he approached the bit he’d got wrong. Then he’d played it several times correctly, running through it again, speeding it up again till he was able to play it back at speed without fluffing it up. I remembered all this clearly – crystal clear, as clear as in a vision.

I remembered it all, but I couldn’t remember *where* I’d been in this place, this flat, this bathroom. Or when [...] No use. I couldn’t place this memory at all. (60-61)

Despite the detail with which the narrator paints this recollection, it seems to be more consistent with the “no space” of his coma, the spacelessness and timelessness described in the first two chapters here, than with the experience of *déjà vu*⁴⁰: it contains, after all, no “where” or “when”. What it does contain, and what gives it force of reality despite its lack of spatial or temporal position, are repetitive and recognizable sonic and olfactory rhythms. The sonic rhythms of the piano player describe an arc between when the player would “hit a wrong note or lost his place” and when “he was able to play it back at speed without fluffing it up”; which is to say, it represents the rhythm of repetition that loops between failure and success. Finally, this experience alludes once more to the comatose state of “scenes in my unconscious head” when the narrator describes these sounds and smells as visual: “crystal clear, as in a vision”. He cannot “place” this memory because this is a memory of the “no-space” of his coma, a memory sustained (like his body) by the sounds, smells and rhythms that have somehow made their way into his

³⁹ Even if one of the voices is that of Greg, this voice is still effectively “modulated” by the narrator’s comatose, unconscious mind.

⁴⁰ “*Déjà vu* does not entail a defect of memory, nor its qualitative alteration. Rather, it means the untrammelled extension of memory’s jurisdiction, of its dominion. Rather than limit itself to preserving traces of times past, memory also applies itself to actuality, to the evanescent ‘now’” (Virno 7).

“unconscious head”: a memory of the authenticity he later admits he has never experienced. The imagined building itself becomes the material manifestation of the no-space of his coma, the place where he is only present to himself in his being, where he is authentic (lacking in the “wily” relation between minds and things, in favour of the authentic and automatic relation between the mind and itself, or the mind and no-space):

Most of all I remembered this: that inside this remembered building [...] all my movements had been fluent and unforced. Not awkward, acquired, second-hand, but natural [...] I’d merged with them, run through them and let them run through me until there’d been no space between us. They’d been *real*; I’d been real – *been* without first understanding how to try to be: cut out the detour. I remembered this with all the force of an epiphany, a revelation.

Right then I knew exactly what I wanted to do with my money. I wanted to reconstruct that space and enter it so that I could feel real again. I wanted to; I had to; I would. (62)

The narrator’s assessment of what makes this building “real” is in line with the notion of the transparent elaborated above: real is the absence of thought, a certain automaticity of things, elaborated here and in the initial description of his coma in terms of being automated by the sounds and rhythms of machines. The idea of “natural” movements described above constitutes a kind of idealisation of machinic movements: movements performed by the un-conscious, movements which create “no space” between them and the executors (no space for meaning or ambiguity to enter).

After completing work on his building, a process involving any number of plans, schematics, contractors and facilitators, the day of the first re-enactment arrives. Despite all this preparation and rehearsal (the very conditions of inauthenticity he wants to escape, but is more than willing to impose on others), the first re-enactment does not play through without issue. Its smooth operation snags on matter, smells and sounds:

“It’s not right,” I said.

“What’s not?” he asked.

“That smell,” I said. [...]

“What’s wrong with it?” repeated Naz.

“It’s got that sharp edge,” I told him. “Kind of like cordite.” [...]

I brushed past the kitchen unit’s waist-high edge, the same way I’d remembered brushing past it when I’d first remembered the whole building – turning half sideways and then back again. My movement wasn’t deft enough, though, and my shirt caught slightly on the corner as I passed – not violently, snagging, but still staying against the wood for half a second

too long, hugging it too thickly. This wasn't right – wasn't how I remembered it [...] I continued down the stairs. Sounds travelled to me – but these, too, were subject to anomalies of physics, to interference and distortion. The pianist's music ran, snagged and looped back on itself, first slowing down then speeding up. The static crackle of the liver broke across the orphaned signals cast adrift from radios and television sets. The Hoover moaned on, sucking matter up into its vacuum. I could hear the motorbike enthusiast clanging down in the courtyard, banging at a nut to loosen it. The clanging echoed off the facing building, the clangs reaching me as echoes almost coinciding with the clangs coming straight up from his banging – almost but not quite. (131-34)

The narrator's first attempt at re-enactment reveals the difficulty of actually achieving or experiencing Baudrillard's conception of transparency, inasmuch as it constitutes "an operational mechanics", or movement without thought as described by the narrator. The smell of cordite is a repeated occurrence in McCarthy's work (Namwali Serpell 257; Ness), and represents materiality in general or technology in particular. That it is described as having "a sharp edge" connects it to the "waist-high edge" which snags his shirt, before extending further into the notion of "anomalies of physics, to interference and distortion" which all contribute to the sense that this re-enactment has "almost but not quite" achieved its goal of re-creating an impossible authenticity. Materiality, that of sound, smell and the co-presence of his thoughts and actions, seems to be preventing the narrator from being able to access the feeling of authenticity he has identified with being in the no-space of the building, which is to say, the no-space of the coma. What seems to offer him the feeling of authenticity is precisely the opposite of matter or materiality: the presence of absence, in the form of unfathomable otherness, figured in the face and message of the "liver lady" (Staunton):

Still stooped, her face turned towards mine, she released her grip on the bag and said:

"Harder and harder to lift up."

I froze. *Harder and harder to lift up*, she'd said. I thought about this as I stood there facing her [...] I liked it. It was very good [...] It felt just right: all just as I'd imagined it. I stood still, looking back at her, and said:

"Yes. Every time."

The words just came to me. I spoke them, then I moved on, turning into the next flight of stairs. For a few seconds I felt weightless – or at least differently weighted: light but dense at the same time. My body seemed to glide fluently and effortlessly through the atmosphere around it – gracefully, slowly, like a dancer through water. It felt very good. (135)

The impromptu words of the liver lady, their automated but unplanned emergence, gives the narrator access to the kind of fluency of motion that he relates to authenticity (a kind of experience that he, as mind/thought, has been relegated from). The "liver lady" acts in this case like the screens in *Satin Island*, providing the narrator with an experience of continuity without him. Even his response is given the

sense of having arrived from somewhere else. He likes the feeling this produces so much he wants to immediately re-create it:

“Harder and harder to lift up.”

I answered her as before. Again I felt the sense of gliding, of light density. The moment I was in seemed to expand and become a pool – a still, clear pool that swallowed everything up in its calm contentedness. Again the feeling dwindled as I left the zone around her door. As soon as I’d reached the third step of the next flight I turned round, as before, and said:

“Again.”

We did it again – but this time it didn’t work. She’d steered the rubbish bag through its horizontal arc around her legs and, stooping, started to lower it to the ground when suddenly it slipped out of her hand and fell with a loud clunk. She bent over to pick it up but I stopped her.

“Don’t bother,” I said. “it’s broken the . . . you know: it won’t be right. Let’s take it from the top again. Someone should clean that patch up, too.”

Her bag had leaked from its bottom right corner, leaving a wet, sticky-looking patch on the floor. Someone came out and mopped this up.

“It looks too clean now,” I said when they’d done this. [...]

My voice petered out. I was quite upset. I wanted to slip back into it now, right now: the pool, the lightness and the gliding. (138-39)

What the narrator is getting access to is the iconic relation, “a still, clear pool that swallowed everything up in its calm contentedness”, utterly unlike the instability of the metaphorical relation. The smoothness of the passage from icon to authentic being is poetically expressed in the terms “gliding” and “light density”, recalling the feeling of roller-blading in U.’s dream over the “continuous tarmac coat” of Paris streets (*Satin Island* 61), or his abstracting of the tactile feel of the “semi-hardened” underwater oil as it “stretches and folds” (*Satin Island* 103). Repetition in this extract becomes the vector for the disruptive intrusion of matter; the fallen bag leaves a sticky trace, and though the narrator insists on cleaning it up, the patch of floor where it spilt is now “too clean”, it needs to be made dirty again. Repetition attains a kind of ideal balance when it produces this feeling of being consumed by “calm contentedness”, and in attaining this position, the unexpected performance of the world of matter repeats as well, this time not in the face of the old woman but when she accidentally drops the bag. This moment of repetition becomes one of iteration, in the form of an ironic reversal of the narrator’s relation to an unexpected event (speech and accident). The trace of movement, of use, of the passage of time and people, the trace of literary irony, is necessary to the functioning of the scene; without it, the narrator finds himself longing for the automated being provided by the “gliding”, “light density” of the iconic relation (light density being an

oxymoron that might easily be used to describe the apparent solidity of images on the screen; light being made dense enough to form line, colour, depth and matter); he wants to “slip back into it”, like one might “slip” back into a coma.

Conclusion: Baptism by Tyre Shop

The next re-enactment organized and produced by the narrator is the re-creation of an almost miraculous experience with wind-screen washer fluid at a tyre shop. Having stopped to get his flat tyre replaced, the narrator becomes fascinated with the procedures required to repair it:

“I can fix it,” said the boy.

He hoisted the tyre out of the water and carried it over to a kind of lathe [...] Black grime was rubbing off it onto his clothes, which were already smeared with grime all over. He sat down at the lathe and pressed a pedal with his foot, which made a series of clamps tighten round the tyre. Then his foot pressed another pedal and the tyre deflated with a bang. He started daubing glue on from a tin. His hand moved quickly as he did this, dipping and daubing, flashing the brush one way then another. The exaggerated manner he’d had when he sauntered over to the car was gone, eclipsed now by his earnest concentration, his artisanal skill [...] He pressed a pedal with his foot; the lathe revolved a quarter-turn between his hands, and he brushed an adjoining spot with glue. He pressed another pedal, and the wheel turned back for him to brush the spot on the other side of the puncture. When he’d brushed all he wanted, he dipped his hand into the tub again, scooped up some water and patted this on the tyre while the three of us stood still, reverent as a congregation at a christening, watching him at his font. Effortlessly the boy’s hand rose and flipped a lever at the lathe’s side. The lathe hissed as its clamps released my wheel and glided back. The same hand reached up to beside his shoulder to take hold of a blue tube. The tube was hanging just beyond his field of vision, but the hand didn’t need help: it knew just where it was. (157-58)

The tyre shop episode begins with the poetics of a kind of religious fascination. The boy who is performing the repairs is already “smeared with grime all over”; he is already wrapped in the traces of matter and the grime of transgression. He then engages in two primary movements, pressing a pedal and “daubing glue”; in performing these movements he has passed, in the narrator’s eyes, from an “exaggerated manner” to one of “earnest concentration” and “artisanal skill”. These movements are, in other words, *practised*. They are, in effect, the movements of an oft-repeated *ritual*, a ritual which has the narrator standing transfixed, “reverent as a congregation at a christening, watching him at his font”. The last few lines of this episode reveal the precise nature of this reverence, they reveal the sacred violence that the narrator is so attracted to. There are two points to draw from these last lines. The first is the notion of gliding; gliding here refers the movements of the lathe, and as such alludes to the possibility that the “lightness and the gliding” which the narrator wanted to “slip back into” (139) constitutes the being or mode of the machine, the being of an automated and spinning movement minus the aesthetics of thought. This notion is reinforced

by the second point: the reverence that the narrator displays for the movements the boy executes *without knowing*. The language used here describes a hand with its own knowledge; a limb that can move (but most importantly *function*) without the appearance of thought. It seems as if the narrator has located the type of being he is seeking both in the machine that glides and in the hand that operated without consciousness. The ritual he is observing is a ritual sacrifice of thought in the name of function; which is to say, it is an iteration of the ritual repetition of the art of disappearance. The mind in its intolerable duality of being and non-being is hidden behind the automaticity of repetition and function; the boy, his work completed, fully assumes the fascinating and exotic guise of the religious authority or icon: "He could have told me anything and I'd have said "Okay". I stood there looking at him for a while longer" (158). That this scene is ultimately about the idealism of this brand of disappearance is made explicit in what follows:

I remembered that my wind-screen washer reservoir was empty and I asked him for some fill-up. [...] the middling boy ran into the shop and came out with a litre of blue liquid which he and the youngest boy poured into the windscreen washer reservoir for me, operating in sync together now, the youngest one holding the lid off while the middling one poured, then passing the lid over for the middling one to screw on while he, the youngest one, carried the empty bottle over to a bin [...]

Before I drove off I pushed the windscreen spurter button to make sure it worked. Liquid should have squirted onto the glass, but nothing happened. [...] I got out [...] and checked the reservoir. It was empty.

"It's all gone!" I said [...]

Another bottle was brought out and poured into the reservoir. Once more I climbed into the car and pressed the spurter button. Once more nothing happened – and once more, when we looked inside the reservoir, we found it empty.

"Two litres!" I said. "Where has it all gone?"

They'd vaporized, evaporated. And do you know what? It felt wonderful. Don't ask me why: it just did. It was as though I'd just witnessed a miracle: matter – these two litres of liquid – becoming un-matter – not surplus matter, mess or clutter, but pure, bodiless blueness. Transubstantiated. I looked up at the sky: it was blue and endless. I looked back at the boy. His overalls and face were covered in smears. He'd taken on these smears so that the miracle could happen, like a Christian martyr being flagellated, crucified, scrawled over with stigmata. I felt elated – elated and inspired.

[...]

Then I got into the car and turned the ignition key in its slot. The engine caught – and as it did, a torrent of blue liquid burst out of the dashboard and cascaded down. It gushed from the radio, the heating panel, the hazard-lights switch and the speedometer and mileage counter. It gushed all over me: my shirt, my legs, my groin. (159-60)

The ritual repetitions of the boy that have led to this point have been in effect the ritual art of disappearance: they have produced the scene as practised, predictable, as erasing through repetition the instability of the subject through the artisanal exhibition of function demonstrated by the boy. The aesthetics of this scene imply the absence of his thought, leaving only objects co-operating with other objects in pre-programmed functionality; functionality that amounts to successful control through a-signification. We might even suggest that this is the true reason for the narrator's request to fill his wind-screen washer reservoir: to watch the other two boys "operating in sync together" like machine-parts. This synchronisation, like that of his first re-enactment, is key to the narrator's externalized will; it is through this automated performance that the no-space of his coma might somehow become present in the material world. And this is precisely what appears to have happened at first: the functional ritual repetition of the boys seems to have opened up a no-space, an "interim" (T. McCarthy, *Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* 124), into which the liquid has vanished. Like the violent sacrifices which offered the "congregation" an experience of continuity through death, the boy here is sacrificed; but because the interim denies the resolution of death, he does not die. Instead, by taking on the traces of matter, his unstable being/non-being is consumed by these traces, not just of matter, but of function. His instability and non-being hidden by these traces of matter and ritual function, the function of this sacrifice is therefore akin to the function of the re-enactors hired to populate the narrator's building. Like the latter, whose role is to allow the narrator to enter into, "a still, clear pool that swallowed everything up in its calm contentedness", the former's function is a ritual self-sacrifice that draws the blue liquid into the nothingness of the blue sky, performing the same "transubstantiation" the narrator felt in his building. The art of disappearance is precisely the hiding of subjective instability or non-being behind the iconic relation; and yet, when it seems that literal disappearance has been accomplished through the ritual repetitions of function, the narrator begins to deploy a religious metaphor that will return in various forms through to the end of the novel. In other words, apparently actual disappearance (of matter) calls forth precisely what the art of disappearance is meant to abolish: the instability of the metaphorical relation/perception. Through this miracle, seduced by ritual repetition, the narrator gains access to the very relation to the world that breeds the inauthenticity he has accepted, but still seeks to escape. For the narrator, the intrusion of matter into life (dualistic contact between mind and matter) is the source of inauthenticity, which is to say, it is the source of the metaphorical relation. He desires to escape this relation into pure functionality, but this desire breeds the very thing which might disrupt that field of narrated but mindless function.

The art of disappearance is the endless experience of ritual sacrifice; it is being in a state of permanent “congregation” before the ritual expression of continuity (before the screens showing the death of the other and the life of the self). The art of disappearance is living always in the world that continues after death, though the duality has shifted modes from physical to ontological (from the taboo on violence to the taboo on dualism). The art of disappearance is the automated performance of the world, the world as it narrates us, and the subject is the boy stained by the traces of this disappearance; sacrificed because they are the god (like Serge), they are divinely deficient in their capacity to respect the taboo against duality or thought. This is a self-sacrifice (the selfish element of the art of disappearance) that acquires the quality of pleasurable alienation described by Baudrillard in reference to Benjamin (*Carnival 7*); the object depicted by this art is like the film screen described by Benjamin⁴¹, denying your capacity to approach this object via its potential non-being (to think of it first in terms of its non-being). Written language, as demonstrated by the repeated instances of language comprehension problems throughout the novels (Serge and Simeon Carrefax in *C*, the surveillance officer in *Men in Space*, the Narrator and Naz in *Remainder*), offers a much more unstable approach. Hence, though the reader gains access to non-being through the medium, the narrator gains access symbolically, and paradoxically, through the return of the liquid and the explicit demonstration of the non-being (the absurdity or ridiculousness) of its possible non-being. Should we wish to avoid the use of the double negative, we might instead suggest that its return *refutes the possibility of its non-existence*. It ruins the fantasy of all churches: the ideal negation of physics, of muddied material existence, of disbelief, of criticism, of doubt, of moral and ethical certainty; the question of (the liquids’) possible non-existence is permanently resolved.

The narrator returns home, and while in the bathtub (surrounded by liquid, possibly tinged with blue residue), contemplates what he just lived through:

I lay in my bath looking at the crack and thinking about what had happened. It was something very sad – not in the normal sense but on a grander scale, the scale that really big events are measured in, like centuries of history or the death of stars: very, very sad. A miracle seemed to have taken place, a miracle of transubstantiation – in contravention of the very laws of physics, laws that make swings stop swinging and fridge doors catch and large, unsuspected objects fall out of the sky. (*Remainder* 161)

⁴¹ “Compare, if you will, the screen on which the film unrolls to the canvas that carries the painting. The latter invites the viewer to contemplate; he is able, in front of it, to give himself up to his chain of associations. Watching a film, he cannot do this. Scarcely has he set his eyes on it before it is already different. It cannot be pinned down” (*Mechanical Reproduction* 32).

This event was sad, but “on a grander scale”; not the subjective or affective sadness of the individual but rather an intellectual sadness: the narrator does not feel sad, but rather *knows* it. Like baptisms or circumcisions, this ritual he witnessed connects the individual to “centuries of history”, and not just any history, but that of the modern expanding West; like the death of god and nature (the falling sun in C), what he has witnessed positions him firmly in the place of these formerly sacred symbols. His understanding of the miracle is one of a double negation: of both the laws that make possible all ‘stops’, ‘catches’ and ‘falls’, and the materiality of the liquid itself. What he witnesses in the form of a miraculous negation is the domination of the material by the ideal: it is in effect almost the a-signification of the art of disappearance. The possibility of his own disappearance (authenticity) is contained in the potential of the interim moment that saw the blue liquid vanish. However, he explains what follows: “This miracle, this triumph over matter, seemed to have occurred, then turned out not to have done at all – to have failed utterly, spectacularly, its watery debris crashing down to earth, turning the scene of a triumphant launch into the scene of a disaster, a catastrophe. Yes, it was very sad” (161-62). This seems to confirm the imperative of the art of disappearance as the universal illustrated by the object in its relation to the absent subject. We might think of the narrator’s being soaked by this “blue liquid” as his baptism-by-matter into the “set of devotees to a religion not yet founded” (*Remainder* 259) he imagines later in the story. It effectively initiates the next re-enactment (that of the baptism at the tyre shop) and establishes a total continuity through the mode of repeating cycles. Each repetition of the ritual re-enactment constitutes progressing towards a mindless and automatic performance of movements; repetition is the technique of the art of disappearance, with each iteration the specificity and instability of the subject recedes further and further from view. The first few (mostly) successful performances provide the narrator, with “a sensation that was halfway between the gliding one I’d felt when my liver lady had spoken to me on the staircase during the first re-enactment in my building and the tingling that had crept up my side on other occasions” (165). However, the description of this feeling disappears after the first re-enactment: it is replaced first by his assuming a “pretty analytical” (166) posture towards the scene, noting that the liquid “wasn’t gushing out quite right” and “other minor hitches” (165). During this portion of the repetition, the narrator decides to have the car drive in the pattern of a figure eight: “Over the following hours and days the car deposited across the floor an eight – a thick black line of run-together turrets and plateaux out of whose edges individuated lines and corners slightly rose, records of the wildest routes. Just to the right of this a large, sticky patch made by the repeated gushing of hundreds of litres of blue liquid stained the floor” (167). After making sketches and rubbings of these residue-tracks and putting them up on his walls like artworks, he finds that:

If I stared at them for long enough they took on shapes: birds, buildings or the interlocked sections of space stations – and my whole mood would slide from analytical to dreamy. The same slide happened at the re-enactment scene itself. One minute I'd be really concentrating on an aspect of the sequence and the next I'd let the movements mesmerize me, like a bird charmed by a snake: the Fiesta slowly rolling through its well-worn eight, the tyre floating on the boy's knee to the workshop, his hand pushing the hand of the other boy away, the gliding clamps, the gushing blue – monotonous, hypnotic, endlessly repeating.

In these moments the episode's sounds took on the aspect of a lullaby. (167-68)

The monotonous hypnotism of these repetitions begins to blur the lines between the “analytical” and the “dreamy” (167), or conscious thought and the unconsciousness associated with consuming the stream of images produced by a film, the digital mode, a-signification or the “interim-time” described by McCarthy (*Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* 124). This is expressed in his eventual slipping into trances and comas (and out of them again). He comes to desire not the art (simulation) of disappearance, but the real thing, and of course, when he next demands that his staff make it so that the blue liquid, “disappears from the reservoir, then doesn't reappear again [...] Disappear upwards. Become sky” (169), they first remind him that this is impossible, before suggesting ways that they might simulate it. Before these potential stage effects lead to his inevitable disappointment, he stumbles past the trace of a kind of disappearance, a death; it is at this point that the tyre shop re-enactment is forgotten in favour of re-enacting this murder scene. It is after he involves himself *as* the dead man in these re-enactments, after many repetitions, when he slows it down to half speed, that he enters his first coma-like episode since that which opened the novel: “I spent the next three days drifting into and out of trances. They were like waking comas: I wouldn't move for long stretches of time, or register any stimuli around me – sound, light, anything – and yet I'd be fully conscious: my eyes would be wide open and I'd seem to be engrossed in something. I'd remain in this state for several hours on end” (203). Once again, despite the narration indicating his own perspective, it equally indicates a lack of access to the interiority of these comas; in other words, he can describe them from the outside, but gives no real sense of what was happening in his head while was immobile but conscious. He is, in a sense, assuming the role of the spectator without any discernible spectacle. By using his capital to set into motion a series of productions and re-enactments, the narrator engages in a process of attempting to escape the materiality of his existence by passing into trance or coma, an expression of the subjective non-being aspired to by the art of disappearance.

As a mode of control that works through reference to “pre-individual” or pre-cultural time and space, which seduces affect and emotion, a-signification as a relation to the object or machine seems paradigmatic of McCarthy's narratives. Yet what appears consistently as the power and ubiquity of a-signification is a particular brand of failure: malfunction. Malfunction becomes the paradoxical end-goal

of the ritual practices of the secular religion to which each protagonist, in his own way, adheres. Taking the tyre shop scene as an example: each repetition of the automated and mindless movements (functional movements) of the boys and the machines are like a religious performance, or a ritual. Yet, what fascinates the narrator, what is established as the true objective of this ritual repetition is not the perfection of the scene, but the seduction of the taboo by these repetitions. The scene is defined in terms of the absence of thought, and then the absence of knowledge (the laws of physics), before the latter comes rushing back into the scene. It is this loop that is formed between ideal absence and material return that constitutes the meaning of the ritual at work in this capitalist religion. This religion idealises the absence of matter, of evil, of thought, of negativity, and yet, through the ubiquity of a-signification (the narrative implication of our absence by the world), a reversal occurs. This brand of absence is not divine, but banal and self-evident. In its place, it is the presence of that which is repressed and eliminated (thought, matter, otherness, non-being) that becomes the true erotic end of the ritual: the ritual is successful only as a mode of controlled, acceptable transgression. If duality and undecidability (figured in terms of evil, otherness, thought and non-being) are taboo, then the religion to which the narrator implicitly belongs truly revolves around indirectly calling for the return of transgression and duality, the return of the unexpected and the undecidable. This is how ritual repetition is a controlled transgression: it indirectly, and perhaps even unwittingly, calls into play the return of what it seeks to eliminate, demonstrating the continuity, or violence, of duality. This system of belief revolves around controlled transgression accomplished by machines. The human becomes divine in this context because the human cannot conform to the taboo against duality; like the narrator in *Remainder*, the human cannot escape the need to think, even when submerged in the automated signals and responses of mass communication networks. The sacred and prophetic texts of this religion are precisely the accident, the malfunction, the catastrophe, the return of indeterminate violence and violation out of the control established through hegemonic function. We might say that this religion worships the apocalypse “in homeopathic doses”:

There remains, also, the nostalgia cultivated by all heresies over the course of history – the dream, running parallel to the course of the real world, of the absolute event which would open on to a thousand years of happiness. The heightened expectation of the single event that would, at a stroke, unmask the enormous conspiracy in which we are immersed. This expectation is still at the heart of the collective imagination. The Apocalypse is present, in homoeopathic doses, in each of us. (*Carnival* 89)

This description of an “expectation [...] at the heart of the collective imagination” speaks to both poles of a dialectic of extremes. In ontologically negative terms, this “absolute event” is death, it is the *final* experience of ritual repetition, the one that *breaks* the loop. In ideologically positive terms, this event is

the final filling-in, the last step in the process of total resolution or reality production; the ascent of the human to the role of god, the final step in the domination of nature and its uncontrollable violence. This is the religion that both worships the cycle of idealism and catastrophe/failure and at the same time secretly desires the loop to be broken, one way or the other (ending in utopia or death).

Symbolism acknowledges the cyclical structure of its own idealism (the ontological metaphoric relation) and it cannot be eliminated by this turn to ontological positivity; though the problem it presents, the instability of meaning and reference that correlates to the individual genius of the poet, can appear to be resolved and eliminated by continuous forms of control like a-signification, the iconic relation or the art of disappearance. Transparency or a-signification on the other hand, are modes of control and expression which pursue death, in the form of a complete utopian presence or the complete non-being of death; in other words, they are the poetics of straight lines, rather than loops. Critchley notes that lines as vectors dominate the narrative of *Men in Space* (*Men in Space* 282); and yet a looping sort of return seems to dominate as well, in the spatial form of the orbit of the cosmonaut (42), in the form of the revolution and Ivan Maňásek's erotic desire to return to that moment, and in the movements of celestial bodies discussed by Anton and Helena (68). Alas, the excess contained in Bataille's duality, the erotic desire for transgression that emerges explicitly out of taboo and control, cannot truly be resolved by "machinic enslavement", or by the vectors of transparency (a-signification, transparent language) carrying subjects either to utopia or to catastrophe and death; as Baudrillard suggests, "the crime is never perfect". The excess continues in the form of its reversal, this time in a kind of religious-erotic relation to the malfunction (as that which will deliver us from our ritual repetitions; the religion has become worse than that which it was meant to address). When the narrator of *Remainder* gets access to malfunction in the form of the disappeared liquid (the malfunction of reality, of physics), he gets access to the duality of his erotic pursuits: he is drawn in by, and compelled to reproduce, the entirety of the cycle, the path from idealism to catastrophe (return), from disappearance to appearance, and back again. That he finds this cycle to be divine, banal and "sad" all at once informs the analysis of the next chapter, which will investigate the symbolic (material) presence of melancholy in the novels.

Chapter 6: The Duality of Melancholy

Of all the diverse characteristics of the melancholic, “dissatisfaction with the ego on moral grounds is the most outstanding feature” (Freud 248). Freud argues that we must believe the melancholic when they say that they are lacking in interest in the world and in the capacity to love, suggesting that the victim “has come pretty near to understanding himself” (246). This constitutes an initial obstacle in identifying McCarthy’s characters with melancholy, in that they rarely demonstrate the self-recrimination or self-disgust described by Freud. Instead, the novels provide metaphorical comparisons between the subject and the machine, or the insect, incorporated into and positivized by the framework of the “Project” or “Great Report” in *Satin Island*, or Serge’s war-time ecstasy. Traditionally, reducing the human to the mindless automaticity of the machine or insect would constitute an affront to our “humanity”, a quality here associated with freedom of judgement and choice, will or agency. McCarthy’s texts combine the poetics of achievement with the poetics of regression; self-dissatisfaction emerges in the language of poetic and personal ambivalence, a figurative allusion to the continuous co-presence of the dirt of human experience in- or alongside the poetic expression of a heightened perspective, the manifestation of progress. This same dual instinct is exhibited by the melancholic. According to Freud, social shame is not commonly expressed by melancholics, but rather, they express their self-disgust with an “insistent communicativeness” and find “satisfaction in self-exposure” (247). This is certainly the case with Serge of *C*, the officer in *Men in Space* and U. of *Satin Island*; each are entranced and abstracted by technical communication, while the latter clearly seeks fame and self-exposure of the kind Freud mentions. After the tepid reception received by his talk on “The Anthropology of the Contemporary”, U. fantasizes about the talk he should have given. The failure of his talk took the form of “silence, then, when my audience realized that I’d finished, a smattering of polite clapping. No one approached me to discuss it afterwards. Later that evening, in the “wet” or Turkish sauna, I recognized one of the other delegates. He recognized me too, but broke off eye-contact immediately before slipping away into the steam” (*Satin Island* 94). The total indifference U. receives as the talk ends, the avoidance by his fellow presenter and academic, constitutes for U. the absence of a community, its failure, in his eyes, to recognize that “To air the doubt about a concept before airing the concept itself was [...] quite intellectually adventurous” (92-93). Unlike the melancholic, however, U. does not make his ego into the object that has failed to live up to itself, but rather, he fantasizes about giving a paper at a conference that amplifies his ego to almost dictatorial proportions. He denounces his detractors in the audience (in the form of the man from the opening scene

in Turin, who notes that the oil spill is a tragedy), arguing that the “consistency” of oil when spilled into water makes the latter “more poetic” (105), that spilled oil “improved” the animals it covered, that they “become instant martyrs – and in so becoming, are infused with all the pathos and nobility of tragic heroes” (106)⁴². Finally, in his response to his critical fellow-traveller, U. gets to the crux of the rhetorical and somewhat despotic picture he is painting:

When oil splatters a coast-line, Earth wells back up and reveals itself; nature’s hidden nature gushes forth. The man who brings this gushing-forth about – the drunk ship’s captain, oversightful engineer or negligent safety officer, or behind these, the oil magnate, or even behind him, the collective man whose body, faceless and compound as oil itself, is the corporation – *he* should be considered a true environmentalist: nature’s more honest intermediary, its loyaler servant. The cheers, at this point, grew quite deafening; the argument was won; and my foe would be evicted from the building, whimpering as blows rained down on him (108)

U.’s relation to his professional community, a community ideally meant to work in the interests of knowledge and humanity, has been rejected by U: or rather, its pre-emptive absence makes its presence felt through the indifference of his academic audience. His fantasy speech to them after this break constitutes not an attempt at reconciliation or recovery of the relation, but an almost ideological commitment to oil (the shroud) as a medium of both truth and death. His commitment to academia is *redoubled* in his fantasy through its projection of an ideal community that has never (like the narrator of *Remainder*’s authenticity) truly existed. In this theatrical public speech U. demonstrates the melancholic’s desire to be heard, yet it is not self-deprecation that is transmitted but its opposite: U. positions himself as the transmitter of the truth-aspect of Freud’s melancholy, which is to say, he claims to know the truth of a certain relation to the world. This is not a self-deprecating truth, nor is it a critical one, and as such U. avoids the self-hate of melancholy by avoiding himself entirely, squarely placing the world, or “nature” in the fallen position that the melancholic ego would normally occupy. Nature, not U., is “senseless. And nature is dirty” (109). U., in this fantasy, is far from the ego emptied of self-worth: he is self-identified the mouth piece of a world-processing religion, one which profanes the sanctity of the world in which an oil spill is a “tragedy”, by canonizing the failures of incompetence and corruption as a form of drawing out the truth of the world, the true nature of nature (hardly the spiritualist, poetic notion of the Symbolist). If the melancholic knows the uncomfortable truth of themselves, U. seems to know the uncomfortable truth of the world, but that world is one he has crafted for himself to suit his pursuit of professional credit and publicity. It is a projection of his interests and his obsessions into every crevice of reality, spreading like

⁴² In a creative reiteration of the tar-covered Serge in *C*, or the grime-covered child working at the tyre shop in *Remainder*.

oil. The object of his interest is himself, in the sense that in knowing the world through oil he knows the world through the lens of his own capacity for failure, through the in-built inconsistencies of the anthropological formalism (or what was described earlier as the logic of deconstruction). For U., the work of anthropology itself is always the processing of a failure of an ideal object-relation, the failure of formalistic interpretation (lines of kinship, vectors of trade, patterns of habitation) and language to convey consistent meaning or to lend itself to modern universal truths. He is always in the process of losing this relation, rejecting it, and at the same time always in the process of establishing new iterations of it.

Like the melancholic, the characters' attempts at communication are largely one-sided, they all (through the narration) largely focus on receiving signals and decoding them rather than to sending or producing them. Theirs is a static and passive perspective in this sense. Freud suggests that this moral dissatisfaction, which in the novels is neutralized by the positivity of its symptoms (morally dissatisfying images), is a consequence of the critical agency of the ego splitting from it. What Freud calls the conscience is now aimed at the ego itself. Hence, says Freud, when the melancholic self-recriminates he or she is actually recriminating others: "All this is possible only because the reactions expressed in their behaviour still proceed from a mental constellation of revolt, which has then, by a certain process, passed over into the crushed state of melancholia" (248). It is as if the lost object, that which was loved or attached, takes the place of the ego: the ego becomes "as though it were an object, the forsaken object", and as such he argues that "object-loss was transformed into ego-loss" (Freud 249). The characters in McCarthy's novels somehow mitigate that loss of ego with the persistence, if not inescapability, of object-relations in the mass-communicational context of postmodernity.

Freud's melancholy is underwritten by a mechanics of narcissism, and the ego-loss described above comes about when a kind of narcissistic "object-choice" (Freud 250) falls apart, when narcissistic self-service fails to serve the self. This kind of object-choice is defined as the ego wanting to "incorporate this object into itself, and, in accordance with the oral or cannibalistic phase of libidinal development in which it is, it wants to do so by devouring it" (Freud 249-50). Freud describes this object-relation as a "strong fixation" that, at the same time, "must have had little power of resistance" (249). In other words, the object that is lost and converted into the ego, is one with a necessarily fragile grip on the subject. This is, in a certain sense, precisely what we experience in the novel form: an object demonstrating both a strong fixation and a fragile resistance to critique (language) converted into ego, or a character. In McCarthy's novels, this lost object-relation that at once bears a strong fixation by the subject and at the same time a fragile constitution, is precisely the metaphorical (linguistic) relation to objects that is meant

to establish the particularities of the authentic self. In a sense, Freud is describing the melancholy of the consumer, endlessly acquiring narcissistic relations to (devouring) objects, only to be disappointed by the fragility of their meaning and to undertake efforts to replace them with new objects. This consumer position is both the before and after of the melancholic condition: both satisfied, and about to be unsatisfied, with narcissistic object-relations. The consumer of information is confronted by a doubly difficult condition: they are forced to confront the fragility of both the commodity and language at once, the fragility of the former transcended by feeding off of the fragility of the latter.

Freud uses the example of a loved one who has disappointed us as the object of melancholy, arguing that “The loss of a love-object is an excellent opportunity for the ambivalence in love-relationships to make itself effective and come into the open” (250-251). The loss of this object comes in the form of some kind of failure to live up to expectations: “all those situations of being slighted, neglected or disappointed” (Freud 251). In Freud’s context, this ambivalence leads to a narcissistic hate levelled at the melancholic him-/herself, where the lost object “takes refuge in narcissistic identification, then the hate comes into operation on this substitutive object, abusing it, debasing it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic satisfaction from its suffering” (251). This self-abuse is not explicit in McCarthy’s novels however, and what we get in its place is a neutralized melancholic relation to the world, a relation that defies this description of melancholy by asserting a continuity of narcissistic or mimetic object relations and “choices” that persist through disappointment, through the failure of these intensely fixated but equally fragile “object-cathexis” (Freud 250), in a state of intellectual passivity. What McCarthy establishes is a space in which melancholy is capable of being positivized; a space in which the melancholic self-criticism and self-hate related by Freud is displaced by a kind of fetishistic indifference or detached poetics of fascination. I would suggest that this is indicative of a subject position that is, like the saint in the icon of *Men in Space*, floating between the extremes of melancholy and mania in the time of the interval, and hence performative of both.

One quality that distinguishes melancholy from mourning is “the conflict due to ambivalence” (Freud 256). The object of this ambivalence is precisely the “love-relation” (Freud 256) itself: “The ambivalence is either constitutional, i.e. is an element of every love-relation formed by this particular ego, or else it proceeds precisely from this experience that involved the threat of losing the object” (Freud 256). Hence, if the object in question is language (or our relation to it), this ambivalence is either fundamental or the consequence of discreet moments or experiences of this relation’s fragility. It is this ambivalence which unites Freud’s conception of melancholy and mania. Freud states that, “both disorders

are wrestling with the same 'complex', but that probably in melancholia the ego has succumbed to the complex whereas in mania it has mastered it or pushed it aside" (254). The structure of this link demonstrates similarity to the problem of being and non-being in de Man's critique of epistemology. Kant and Condillac, like the manic, have simply pushed the problem of linguistic or semantic instability aside. Whereas de Man, similar to the melancholic, but more apropos to McCarthy's characters, has allowed these problems to fixate and fascinate him. Like McCarthy's characters, he is sitting between melancholy and mania, where mania is a state in which,

[...] the ego must have got over the loss of the object (or its mourning over the loss, or perhaps the object itself), and thereupon the whole quota of anticathexis which the painful suffering of melancholia had drawn to itself from the ego and 'bound' will have become available [p.253]. Moreover, the manic subject plainly demonstrates his liberation from the object which was the cause of his suffering, by seeking like a ravenously hungry man for new object-cathexes. (Freud 255)

What we get with McCarthy's protagonists is the neutralizing effect (or affect) of mania and melancholy's simultaneity; if in Freud's diagnosis mania tends to follow from melancholy, the novels demonstrate this cycle sped up, where it becomes nearly impossible to distinguish between manic and melancholy, cause and effect, beginning and ending, or a love-relation and the relation evident in detached fascination. In a sense, the symbolic chains investigated in the previous two chapters can be understood in terms of the simultaneity of an inaccessible but persistent absence, and a hyper-accessible network of symbolic presence (whether we are speaking of the social networks of 19th century art circles or the digital social networks today). It is the very excess and inescapability of the symbolic relation in a digital context (or even an early 20th century one) which places a spotlight on both the strength and the fragility of what Freud calls love-cathexes, but what we are thinking of here in terms of the relation to language. Like Serge, we are born into a world of signals we are initially blind to; many of us have come to avoid the (moral, ethical, semantic) instability of the written word in favour of the bold predictability of the machine and the flattened truth of the image. But we might understand this shift as a shifting into neutral, into a simultaneity of melancholy and mania. Our desire for the machine is merely the socially acceptable form of our desire to redeem the lost object, to redeem the failure of language, by making it (and hence ourselves) whole, functional and predictable. And yet, as we see with Serge, this intense love-cathexis with the information machine cannot redeem the failure of language (or the language of failure) once and for all. It must be kept up, fostered and organized like a religious calendar; no matter how many prayers, ceremonies or maintenance checks, the devils and gremlins of language persist and remain immanent in even our most habitual and well-thought-of ideas and practices. The connection provided

by the information machine constitutes the media of both mania and melancholy, in each instant revealing the simultaneous ease and incorporeality of connection. In this context, it is precisely the ease of connection that dominates the duality of mania and melancholy: the excessive simplicity (code) of connection produces a sense of nauseous speed and detached (almost meditative) stillness at once, in the manner of U. back-peddalling his bicycle down the hill.

In *Satin Island*, U.'s perspective and relation to the world is dominated by his role as anthropologist, his duty to write the "Great Report", and his involvement in the "Project". In *Remainder*, the narrator undertakes a slowly unfolding project of repetitive re-enactments guided by his relation to the notion of "authenticity". Serge of *C* moves through the world on the backs of machines and signals, seeking death in the form of merging with technology (both symbolising finality): "Of all the pilots and observers, Serge alone remains unhaunted by the prospect of a fiery airborne end. He's not unaware of it, just unbothered. The idea that his flesh could melt and fuse with the machine parts pleased him" (*C* 206). He envisions the ideal end as the dissolution of flesh into a union with the formalism of the machine. In *Men in Space*, the perspective that dominates the novel and the characters in it is that of the historical shift, the movement between eras signified by the collapse of the USSR, the orbiting cosmonaut and the icon painting. Each of these novels are dominated in some sense by the notion of the end, where the end refers to both the contemporary era and the life of the subject.

The "end" is precisely the ideal outcome sought after by Peyman through his assigning U. the task of writing the Great Report: "The Document, he said; the Book. The First and Last Word on our age [...] Not just a book: *the* fucking *Book*. You write the Book on them. Sum their tribe up. Speak its secret name [...] What I want you to do, he said, is *name* what's taking place right now [...] like the princess does with Rumpelstiltskin in the fairytale? Yes, he said: *exactly*" (*Satin Island* 56-58). Though I have previously engaged with this excerpt in chapter 3, there is a double meaning hidden behind the explicit metaphors used in these lines. In the text these three metaphors, book, name and word, all refer to the end of the Great Report and its means, at once. This end, according to Peyman, is "exactly" like what the "princess does with Rumpelstiltskin in the fairytale". Peyman's series of metaphorical undertakings are split between the metaphor for the ideal end (book, word, name) and a metaphor for a very final and physical end (the end of Rumpelstiltskin). In the Brothers Grimm fairy tale, the brief story ends when the miller's daughter *cum* queen names the "manikin"⁴³ Rumpelstiltskin, when he returns to seek reciprocity for his services. The queen's new daughter is his price for having spun straw into gold and made her queen (as

⁴³ Defined as, "A model of the human body designed for demonstrating anatomical structure [...]" (OED Online).

well as saving her life), because for him, an unnatural, miniature simulation of a human (like a scientific ideal made flesh), “something that is living is dearer to me than all the treasures in the world” (Grimm 237). There is no real clue as to what he might do with the child, other than declaring that he will “have” (239) her in the song that reveals his name to the queen. Whereas the end of literary and linguistic metaphors suggests the potential production of total knowledge, the fairy tale ends violently: “The devil has told you that! The devil has told you that!” cried the little man, and in his anger he plunged his right foot so deep into the earth that his whole leg went in; and then in rage he pulled at his left leg so hard with both hands that he tore himself in two” (239). The ‘fairy-tale ending’ of Peyman’s Project and Great Report is naming the era, like the manikin, and causing it to tear itself apart. Paradoxically, we have the juxtaposition of an *ideal* ending, and a *fairy tale* ending. Though the two terms might produce similar connotations in the reader, in the novel they equate to two options: continuity or violent scission. In this instance, like the ‘hidden idea’ sought after by the Symbolists, the word, book or name is difficult to idealise in late capitalist society: each seems ubiquitous and at the mercy of profit and positivity. Most importantly, it is difficult to conceive of a word, book or name that might cause the era to tear itself apart. It is a material ideal, one whose end has become too easy to achieve through the reach of internet commentary and television news punditry. If the duality of the material and ideal persists here it is in reversed form, the ideal of knowledge made material and the materiality of the end (death/violence) made into fantasy. The pull that U. will eventually feel drawing him towards the negative is precisely the seductive finality of a material end, the *realisation* of the fantasy of the book, word or name. Baudrillard articulates this linguistic ideology of the end confronting the ethos of reality production in poetic terms:

Against this general movement, there remains the completely improbable and, no doubt, unverifiable hypothesis of a poetic reversibility of events, more or less the only evidence for which is the existence of the same possibility in language [...] Poetic language also lives with pre-destination, with the imminence of its own ending and of reversibility between the ending and the beginning. It is predestined in this sense – it is an unconditional event, without meaning and consequence, which draws its whole being from the dizzying whirl of final resolution. It is certainly not the form of our present history and yet there is an affinity between the immanence of poetic development and the immanence of the chaotic development which is ours today, the unfolding of events which are themselves also without meaning and consequence and in which – with effects substituting themselves for causes – there are no longer any causes, *but only effects*. The world is there, *effectively*. (*The Illusion of the End* 121)

Like the song that spells the end of the manikin in “Rumpelstiltskin”, the innate duality of the poetic, that it “lives with [...] its own ending”, makes its ending not only its destiny but the very thing that gives it meaning. However, like the essence of the ‘fairy tale ending’, Baudrillard considers this outcome

“completely improbable” when contrasted against the continuity and automaticity of the world that writes itself.

Several pages later and we find U. dreaming about floating weightless over Paris streets of endless black tarmac, a flow of black materiality (black matter, black bile, melancholy) obscuring the historical “acts of insurrection, of defiance, or their markers and memorials”, and “heading nowhere in particular, just gliding, on and on” in a dream-like and endless objective⁴⁴ iteration of the *manifestation sans plainte* (*Satin Island* 61-62). Even before U. begins to recognize the Project and the Great Report as the automated totalization of the world, the production process of its double, the dream that is the precession of the Great Report infects *his* dreams with the iconography of timelessness and spacelessness: of the abdication of spatial and temporal boundaries. Though in his dream a disembodied and potentially pre-individual voice, “perhaps my own” (62), notes that “No one was complaining [...] *That’s just the way it is*” (62), later we see serious doubts arise about the morality of this process, immediately following the failure of U.’s theory concerning the death of the skydiver and his prediction of a “deep depression coming on” (122). This depression frames the doubt U. comes to regarding his own potential, his own agency, value, meaning and purpose within the context of the world that writes itself. Baudrillard describes this in terms of melancholy: “We are, then, unable to dream of a past or future state of things. Things are in the state which is literally definitive – neither finished, nor infinite, nor definite, but de-finite that is, deprived of its end. Now, the feeling which goes with a definitive state, even a paradisiac one – is melancholic.” (*The Illusion of the End* 120).

Though it is a difficult and varied condition to approach, melancholy has a long history in the artistic representation of the Western world. As Winfried Schleiner puts it, “Melancholy is anything but a novel subject in the history of ideas” (9). According to Schleiner, in the Renaissance,

It covered many conditions from madness to genius; it encompassed not only what we now call depressive phases but also manic ones, and indeed there was a condition called “laughing melancholy” or *melancholia hilaria*; furthermore, all thinking about what we call character typology and even about its applications in career planning was done in terms of humoral physiology; hence the word melancholy was used in the broad and sometimes ambiguous range between the natural or physical humor and the mental (but often somehow physically conditioned) state of a person. (10)

Melancholy in this period relates to a simultaneously physical and mental condition, a duality of states and effects that might produce experiences ranging from “madness to genius”. As a descriptor of

⁴⁴ Meaning lacking in will, exhibiting the characteristics of an effect without an associated cause.

experience or condition, it ambiguously refers to all aspects of the human. Later, in 1621, Robert Burton would publish his *Anatomy of Melancholy*. According to Sinson, the *Anatomy of Melancholy* was written in an unscientific register, one that, “can provide valuable insights” into the “unreasonable” parts of the human mind (9). Melancholy, as a concept approaching the horizon of science and philosophical objectivity, is at this stage symbolic of the ambiguous relation between the physical and the mental, or the difficulty of delineating which is the cause and which the effect. With the passage into modernity the melancholy subject takes on, in accordance with the ideological burden of producing reality, the task of parsing causes from effects. We can say that the melancholy subject ceases to be an ambiguous tangle of symptoms revealing the “unreasonable” in the human and instead reiterates the subject or mind at the heart of de Man’s metaphoric relation.

Kant, born a century after Burton’s *Anatomy* was published, describes the modern melancholic condition as exhibiting primarily mental effects:

The man of melancholy’s disposition is little concerned with the judgement of others, with their opinion of what is good or true; he relies purely on his own insight. [. . .] He regards changes of fashion with indifference and their glitter with contempt [. . .] He has a lofty sense of the dignity of human nature, he esteems himself and regards man as a creature deserving of respect. He suffers no abject subservience and breathes the noble air of freedom. To him all chains are abhorrent, from the gilded fetters at court to the heavy irons of the galley slave. He is a stern judge of himself as well as of others and is not infrequently disgusted with himself as well as with the world. (Kant, qtd in Lucas xii)

Kant’s “man of melancholy” is entirely self-contained and self-narrating: he rejects the thoughts of others, he rejects the value of aesthetics, he is a humanist, he is free of both cultured performance and manual labour, he judges all and often judges negatively. This subject is precisely the passage through which reality flows⁴⁵. And yet, there are no negative affects or emotions described here, aside from a subjective self-disgust that seems more intellectual than emotional. This melancholy subject is in an elevated form of isolation privileging the total command of the verbal relation to the world that defines the individual: the metaphorical relation between subject and object that demonstrates the stability of the iconic relation. Though idleness is not explicit in this position, it is implied by the dominance of terms describing the position of the “man” as relating to (like) contemplation or consideration, hinging on terms like “disposition”, “insight”, “regards” and “sense” (Lucas xii). Not only is this description dominated by acts of intellect and observation, but it establishes the primary quality of the melancholic as a certain kind of freedom from outside influence, contrasting that with the metaphor of chains, fetters and irons. In this

⁴⁵ Referring to de Man’s “*lieu de passage*”.

description, we have the melancholic who operates along the lines of duality, whose subjective relation to the world is determined and made certain (made iconic) by the simultaneous sanctification of the inside and judgemental objectification of anything originating beyond the horizon of the subject. His “lofty sense [...] of human nature” is confronted by the disgust which his ever-present judgement produces in himself, his culture and the world; his notion of humanity deserving respect co-exists with his lack of respect for the judgement of others. He represents the ideal subject that has gone beyond the problem of semantic instability by confronting the duality of being and non-being in the form of the relation between inside and outside. In many respects McCarthy’s narrators and protagonists (as well as the surveillance officer in *Men in Space*) reflect this description: they are rarely concerned with the thoughts of others, they largely express and act on their own insights, there is almost no concern for fashion or conspicuous consumerism (in and of themselves). And yet, unlike with Kant’s melancholy subject, these repeated mental practices do not relate in any way to a professed belief in human dignity, self-esteem, respect, or the “noble air of freedom”. There is no assertion of a clear philosophy or ethics from the characters that might problematize their reliance on the inside in the way that Kant’s melancholic demonstrates. The latter, as such, represents the melancholy of the apotheosis of subjective knowledge, while the former represents a melancholy perspective derived from the postmodern dissolving of the borders between inside and outside. This is the melancholy of the crypt, or of Proust’s protagonist in *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*: of sacrificing the charm of the exterior for an endless interiority.

Max Pensky describes melancholy, through the work of Julia Kristeva, as representing,

[...] an inward history. It attaches itself to the characteristic forms of literary expression of an epoch [...] Its mode of erotic representation and manipulation, its grammar, its essential problematic of illness and insight, all combine into a constellation of cognitive, libidinal and semantic regularities that, in its unhurried historical creep, ‘produces,’ creates, forms. In this way Kristeva observes an inner connection between melancholia and writing. Modernist literature is melancholy; conversely, melancholy writing bears within it something disturbingly, undeniably modern. (2)

This “inward history” is precisely the history of self-consciousness, of the verbal relation between self and other, or in “inward” terms, the verbal relation between one’s being and non-being. Following this logic, Pfau argues that,

Born of an excess of knowledge that ultimately renders it incommensurable with any form of representation, melancholy has long puzzled those inquiring into its constitution. Whereas Enlightenment thought posits a lack of reflexivity as the distinguishing characteristic of all affect, melancholy appears to be so insistent and overdetermined a feeling that it must be viewed not as the opposite of self-consciousness but as its veritable apotheosis. With its attendant quality of exhaustion rather than possibility, of a lucid ending rather than sentient

beginnings, melancholy confounds the eighteenth-century paradigm of conspicuous, theatrical, and unselfconscious passion inasmuch as it appears to have worked through and despaired over all methods of knowing and representing itself. (309)

For Pfau, melancholy represents the Möbius strip of understanding through language or material representation (endless interiority). It is a consequence, an affective and physical one, of having, in Baudrillard's terms, called on all of one's resources: "Calling on all your resources is completely wrongheaded. To do so is to achieve immortality, but the immortality of totalization, addition and repetition of yourself" (*The Illusion of the End* 102). Pfau's melancholy is the apotheosis, the immortal continuity, of self-consciousness. This is the modern melancholy of introspection, or we might say, the introspection at the heart of the metaphoric relation between subject and object. Pfau outlines Hegel's subject as constituted in a similar fashion to de Man's or Condillac's:

Even more critical than Marx, whose writings ultimately seek to contain alienation as a historically and materially determined aberration that may (and ought to) be corrected, Hegel conceives of alienation as the very foundation, the negative origin, of the modern, cultured individual [...] For Hegel, alienation is not a contingent fate suffered at certain times by only some individuals but, on the contrary, involves the self's delving deep into its own otherness, its denatured, deracinated constitution. (311)

As such, this modern brand of melancholy derives from knowledge of the non-being at the heart of both things and the self.

From this idea of melancholy as modern form of "abyssal discontent" relating to the duality of being and non-being, comes what Pinsky calls "a very Nietzschean challenge" (3):

"The postmodern is closer to the human comedy than to the abyssal discontent"; the world of hell, of the theology of evil as deprivation of meaning, has transformed itself from a literature of emergency, a *difficult* literature, into something more familiar, more accessible, and more comfortable. The crisis of meaning that drove modern literature into the secrets of its own inner illness now appears as the occasion for a good time; the converse of meaning is no longer "abyssal" meaninglessness but the pleasure of indeterminacy; the comic dance of representations within the exhilarating space that dead meaning has left behind. (2)

With the passage into postmodernity (the opening of modernity to itself) comes the reversal of the terms of melancholy: rather than lamenting the instability of knowledge of self and other, or the absence of meaning in object-relations, the postmodern subject performs the "comic dance of representations" with a mind to achieving exhilaration and pleasure. Taking his cues from Kristeva's juxtaposition of modern and postmodern melancholy, Pinsky notes that, "For Kristeva, this transposition of a language of melancholia into its buffoonish alter ego allows us to see that, in the history of melancholia, this *comédie humaine* is just as essential – just as "transhistorical" – as the abyssal discontent" (3). Hence knowledge in the contemporary context exhibits the quality of a duality, of being capable of producing incongruous effects:

both a melancholy intellectual stillness and the meaningless play of “its buffoonish alter ego”. This contemporary perspective of melancholy, as such, is of the simultaneously critical and pleasurable, as exhibited by Serge’s intellectual shift and sexual arousal at his sister’s funeral.

“For such a privileged perspective,” that which sees the entirety of the cycle of melancholy and comedy, “melancholia is indeed here forever, since it corresponds to the very ground of our emergence as speaking and acting persons. But a melancholy world is only a world awaiting its own parody.” (Pensky 4). As such, melancholy is at the heart of the metaphorical relation that establishes the being of the subject, it is at the heart of language itself, with its propensity to de-nude itself, it exposes itself to/as a “continuity” or continuum of meanings that threaten to further dissolve with each extension of the semantic chain of tropes. In other words,

[...] melancholy always speaks and writes itself. The horizon beyond the interiority of melancholy is withdrawn as insistently as writing approaches it. The Thing, the unnameably, irretrievably withheld, whether the messianic day or the mother, absolute truth or eternal peace, establishes the impossibility and necessity of melancholy writing by its absolute absence.” (Pensky 5)

Melancholy in the novels follows this principle: it is never fully present, only conditionally so. It is itself the unreachable erotic goal of completion, in the sense that it is one of the objects that must be de-nuded in the grand process of exposure that, like so many comedic scenes, combines nudity and comedy (makes nudity itself, and the dark places it exposes to the light, comedic or laughable). At the same time, it is as self-evident as our subjective experience and being. The “irretrievably withheld” corresponds to a major force in each of the novels: the mother, the scene of trauma, death and ending in *C*; space and a fixed position within it in *Men in Space* (the cosmonaut); the fairy tale ending of fatal poetic resistance in *Satin Island*; the “absolute truth” of authenticity in *Remainder*. Each novel fluctuates between dark derision and melancholy indifference.

Pensky compares this perspective with that of Walter Benjamin, writing in the early stages of the 20th century. Benjamin’s contribution is articulated in terms of a critical attack on leftist intellectuals, like Kästner, who transformed the representation of the melancholy of a society and subject embedded within structures of social injustice, “into objects of aesthetic appreciation” (Pensky 8). In other words, the leftist intellectuals of the Weimar period stand accused of being melancholy, and that subjective position just so happened to be eminently convertible into a productive and profitable process of aesthetic pleasure. This is perhaps the origin of Baudrillard’s claim that society has turned its greatest alienation (melancholy) into an “aesthetic delight” (*Carnival* 7). Pensky thinks that attacking left intellectuals in this way

establishes a different brand of the critical — as it relates to melancholy — from that which emphasises writing as a potential solution for melancholy. In other words, it is not an analgesic, so much as an economic and subject-oriented amphetamine (it artificially accelerates the melancholic bourgeois through an injection of prestige, profit and “aesthetic delight”): “Rather than insisting on the political mobilization of the writer, the poems merely describe the desperation and the sadness of a bourgeoisie that, while “upset” by social injustice, has no interest in acting against it” (Pensky 8-10). This is Benjamin’s problem with melancholy writing in the 20th century: it is a product of the middle class acquiring the contemplative perspective of a “spiritual and economic elite – of thinkers, writers, contemplators – by a middle class that was successful in fashioning even a sentiment of hopelessness into a force of political reaction, precisely by fostering the rise of writers whose hopelessness was dedicated to, and therefore identified with, the critique of that same class.” (Pensky 11). Benjamin seems to be suggesting that the hopelessness of melancholy acquires the dual qualities of criticism and passivity, or in other words, of movement and stasis at once.

In a mode that reveals certain connections to the novels of McCarthy, “Benjamin, in the last years of the Weimar Republic, understood a critique of melancholia as a demand for decisiveness and thus a victory over, rather than a redemption of, the object of critique. Critique is a strategic act in a politics of intervention, directed toward the heart of the present, against a politics of melancholia” (Pensky 12). Like Marx, who sees alienation as a historically particular, and solvable, problem, Benjamin rejects the fundamentality of the condition, seeking “victory” over melancholy through the application of a “decisiveness” that denies the terrible staticity and terrible freedom of the cycle of melancholy and derision. Benjamin even converts the comedic potential of melancholy to his verbal advantage (an act exemplifying the active posture of the comedic as opposed to the laconic posture of the melancholic) when critiquing his contemporaries and their melancholy dispositions: “As Rolf Teidemann observes, the close of “Linke Melancholie,” in which Benjamin compares Kästner’s writing to flatulence, observing that “constipation and melancholy have always gone together [...]” (Pensky 12). This is relevant by comparison to the scene of Serge’s flatulence while using the wireless, and his constipation that results from the concentration of black bile in his intestines at his sister’s funeral. The former alludes to the notion that sending signals between transmitters and receivers (global subjects of the network society) is no more critical and no less passive and complicit than Kästner’s writing; the latter alludes to the notion of melancholy as a state of political or historical inactivity, or refused passage (which is the state of the interim or interval). That Serge likes the smell of his own flatulence situates him alongside Kästner, or at least would, if Serge displayed any of the political interest that Kästner did. Instead, Serge is already,

before Benjamin writes any of the texts analysed by Pensky, in the zone of aesthetic and erotic enjoyment of expressive and communicational passivity. The only aspect that remains of critique is its comedic enjoyment of derision.

Pensky suggests that Benjamin's work is characteristic of "two otherwise thoroughly heterogeneous features". These can be summarised as first, a tendency to operate within the bounds of "a never fully developed metaphysical doctrine or code", and second, "fragments of completely personal experience" (14). I would suggest that these are also the features of Symbolism, understood in terms of the dualistic combination of the subjective production of universal and inaccessible ideas. Personal experience (subjective expression) and an absent unifying force (the universal ideas conveyed and contained by material symbol) define both the dialectical engine of Benjamin's writing and that of Symbolism as a mode of artistic production: "Adorno, who with Scholem was best able to observe this trait both in Benjamin's speech and in his writing, argues forcefully that this juxtaposition of extremely personal experience with gestures towards the ineffable absolute constitutes a dialectical tension that provides Benjamin's thought with its remarkable clarity and power" (Pensky 14). Arguably there is a similar relation at play in McCarthy's work: there is a combination of an almost isolationist (encrypted, shrouded) sense of personal experience combined with the symbolic poetics of the relation between that isolated personal experience and that which exceeds or evades its grasp: the "ineffable absolute", death, satisfaction, and ending. However, the symbolist poetics of the novel do not relate the reader to McCarthy's or Serge's personal perspective, rather they represent the perspective of the object or world that writes itself. The poetics of elimination and erasure seem most profound in historical moments of economic and political instability, like that of Weimar Germany and the 21st century 'war on terror'. This is how melancholy and absurdity (comedy laced with derision) sustain a cyclical dualism in the present moment or age: through the denuding of both extremes (political, cultural and historical transparency), globalised networked culture has itself, like melancholy and in the fashion of Benjamin's critical proscriptions, eliminated "the cultural milieu in which the act of writing can maintain its remoteness from its status as a productive force" (Pensky 11). In Benjamin's response to bourgeois melancholy, Pensky draws out the reversibility of that condition, demonstrating its dual potential and its ultimate investment into the ideologically positive being of the postmodern bourgeois subject. Both Benjamin's assertion that melancholy can be effectively defeated, and that it corresponds to the continuity of bourgeois dominance, serve to illustrate that the tension described by Pensky is only perceived from the position of the leftist critic who wants delineation as opposed to unification.

McCarthy's writing is lacking precisely in the tension of this dialectic, in many ways reiterating the lack of tension in the Symbolist manifesto: tension, in this sense, is undermined by a cyclical structure in constant movement from one extreme to the next and back again. Tension is dissolved into the isolated aesthetic experience of the object seeking the universal in the subject. McCarthy's writing demonstrates the endlessly productive relation between the subjective and the universal or "the nothing", without the dialectical progression longed for by Benjamin's critical approach. There is no great tension in the novels, only contemplation and indifference, spiked with highly contextualized and intense but bodiless bouts of intellectual "sadness" (*Remainder*), or "anger" (*Satin Island*). Hence, as Pensky suggests, "without this tension – between the personal and the absolute, the concrete and the transcendent, the messianic and the mythic – Benjamin's own writing would itself collapse into unmediated collections of the concrete or unmediated wishes for the end of history" (15). McCarthy's novels are precisely beyond the bounds of this "collapse"; they combine "unmediated collections of the concrete" and "wishes for the end of history" into a cultural cycle of ritual repetition, with the automaticity of isolated bouts of contemplation and erotic fascination that respond to the persistence of the uncontrollable elements of both subjectivity and language. Beyond the collapse of this tension lies the fertile fields of duality, or in postmodern terms, the collapse of the distinction between the true and the false.

Benjaminian critique, the kind that seeks victory over melancholy through decisiveness, is illustrated in our contemporary setting through the episode of revolutionary fervour in *Satin Island*: U. is suddenly gripped, after suffering from and experiencing the indifferent passivity of the academy at a conference, by the desire to position himself against the automated unfolding of things of which he plays a part. He seeks to be the malfunction of this automated system. However, Madison quickly disabuses him of this idealism: the system is designed to create its own faults (as Serge determines in C), its own brand of catastrophic malfunction, and within this melancholic passivity, a radical and fatal passivity, the bourgeois subject is neither contented nor frustrated, merely pleasingly absent. Instead of establishing the melancholic position through the leftist academic, who textually identifies and cries over injustice as if doing so were an act of defiance, the system itself is articulated as suicidal, as bringing about its own destruction, containing its own decisive critique like a retro-virus waiting to express itself. McCarthy's novels are representative of this privileged perspective, the perspective whose vision encompasses both the melancholic stillness and the libidinal potential contained in the contemporary cycle of knowledge and absurdity, or being and non-being.

The Idealism of the Anthropological Perspective

What the last two chapters have hoped to accomplish is laying out the symbolic groundwork of an anthropological poetics, the poetics of the nature/culture dynamic described by Bataille:

Man belongs in any case to both of these worlds and between them willy-nilly his life is torn. The world of work and reason is the basis of human life but work does not absorb us completely and if reason gives the orders our obedience is never unlimited. Man has built up the rational world by his own efforts, but there remains within him an undercurrent of violence. Nature herself is violent, and however reasonable we may grow we may be mastered anew by a violence no longer that of nature but that of a rational being who tries to obey but who succumbs to stirrings within himself which he cannot bring to heel. (*Eroticism* 40)

While we might associate the scenes of WWI carnage in *C* with Bataille's description of the modern rational human succumbing to "an undercurrent of violence", we might equally connect it to U.'s description of the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss in *Satin Island*:

He was my hero. He would roam around the world – twice: first slowly, physically, by boat and train and donkey; then all over again on fast-track as, writing his findings up, he zapped from continent to continent, culture to culture, travelling through worm-holes of association till he'd remade the entire globe into a collage of recurring colours, smells and patterns. Patterns especially: the painted patterning on tribesmen's bodies [...] their transgenerational rhythms of exogamy and endogamy – he saw all these as co-related, parts of larger systems lying behind not just a single tribe but also the larger one of all humanity. If we had some kind of grid that we could lay across it all, he reasoned, we could establish a grand pattern of equivalences. (29)

In this passage, the role of the anthropologist is described in terms of its idealist relation to the descriptive and captivating power of the formalism: the anthropologist is a hero who travels the world and then reshapes it through writing into previously invisible recurring *patterns*. The outcome of this adventure is a single system, or "grand pattern of equivalences". U. then articulates it differently, through his own apparent enthusiasm: "This stuff bewitched me. Master-meaning! Concealed revealment! I spent my twenties wanting to be Lévi-Strauss – which is ironic, since he spent most of his life wanting to be somebody or something else: a philosopher, say, or novelist, or poet" (29-30). The idealism of the anthropologist infects U., a passion for a "grand pattern of equivalences" becomes the bewitching concepts of "Master-meaning" and "Concealed revealment". However, the figure of the anthropologist carries with it the undercurrent of violence of a rational being, as described by Bataille: a passive, indirect, fateful kind of violence. This is the violence produced by the idealism summarized in the figure of the anthropologist and in a utopian vision U. has of the operation of the Koob-Sassen Project:

I saw towers rising in the desert – splendid, ornate constructions, part modern skyscraper, part sultan's palace lifted from *Arabian Nights* [...] Below them, hordes of people – thousands, tens of thousands – laboured, moving around like ants, their circuits forming patterns on the sand;

patterns that, in their amalgam, coalesced into one larger, more coherent pattern, just as the meandering, bowing, divagating stretches of a river delta do when seen from high enough above. What were they doing, all these ant-like labourers? Why, they were bringing materials [...] or delivering instructions they themselves, perhaps, did not quite understand, nor even, fully, did the person to whom they were relaying them, so complex was the logic governing the Project as a whole – instructions, though, whose serial execution, even if full comprehension was beyond the scope of any single point in the command-chain, had the effect of moving the whole intricate scheme towards its glorious realization, at which point all would become clear, to everyone, and ants would see as gods. (63-64)

The Project, the actual meaning or function of which remains as inscrutable as the nature of U.'s contribution to it, stands in symbolically for the totalizing idealism of the formalism described in the novel through Lévi-Strauss' patterns and linkages, and here through Baudrillard's postmodern imperative of resolution. This extract describes the historical subjectivity offered by the idealism of the anthropological position. U. represents Kant's melancholic, only with the idealism of the anthropological method (the formalisms of its models) replacing the philosophy of humanism. Hence, the first expression of violence by the anthropological subject is against the being of the subject itself, reduced to the existence of "a single point in the command chain" whose actions are meaningful only in that they constitute one part of the "serial execution" of a grand project of ontological unification. As an anthropologist, U. is figuratively *already at the end* of this idealist quest: he is envisioning the labourers making their way to the idealist, vertically defined, perspective of the anthropologist. In melancholic terms, U. seems always-already detached from the very concept of an *end* while at the same time manically connecting to a variety of *means*. They appear *for him*, in the same way that the terror-victim with the Snoopy shirt "ran screaming towards the camera [...] for us" (7). It is a clear re-imagining and re-thinking of Lévi-Strauss' anthropological idealism, fit into the frame of the "Project", and U. is still the anthropologist who is definitively *outside* of what he observes: he already sees "as gods", detachedly through the screen. The screen or the shroud is as such the definitive artifact of this melancholic anthropological perspective; the perspective of the immortal, on the other hand, is its comedic, derisory artifact. His vision of the Project here replays the speed of anthropological vision, of travel and writing at once; he is observing the social patterns of the Project-natives in their "world of work and reason" (Bataille, *Eroticism* 40), and what is revealed by this god-like perspective is their concealed, and idealist, desire to see like gods.

This perspective appears symbolically in each novel: the orbital position of the cosmonaut and the surveillance officer in *Men in Space*, Serge flying in *C*, and the narrator of *Remainder* in his role as detached coordinator, as well as in the flight that ends the novel. The Project, in a sense, is "finding its shape" in each novel; what separates them is the nature of the character's relation to it. U. represents the bourgeois idealist who can see just enough of (and hence knows just enough about) the goal of the Project

to participate in it. From this perspective, all those mindless and grounded workers on the Project seem like ants: it elevates the self while it diminishes others. This represents the reversibility of melancholy in the age of information: the melancholic navel-gaze is systemically reproduced in the liberated “self” or individual. This is an example of melancholic self-obsession whose misery has been anesthetized through the scope of personal vision provided by the screen. Like Proust’s protagonist isolated in his room yet connected to the world through books, U. is the isolated melancholic, but one whose isolation is precisely defined by its connectedness with the broader world. U. may have lost his relation to ‘the end’ for having already passed by it, but the melancholy that normally would be the result of the loss of this ideal relation translates instead into a neutral but manic connection to all kinds of images and concepts that refer to death and ending, but in no way bring U. into an intimate relation with these things. This connectedness produces an aesthetic that defies (neutralizes) the traditional symptoms of melancholy while at the same time retaining its conditions of isolation and loss of ideal relations (relations to ideals like resistance and “end”). This is melancholy neutralized by the access offered to what was lost; access offered by the screen.

In *Men in Space* a minor character named Hájek, while contemplating the ceiling of a bar painted like the night sky, tells his companions: “A Soviet cosmonaut is stranded in his spaceship” (42). When they follow his gaze and look to the ceiling, he explains: “No not here!” [...] “I mean really. This guy went up as a Soviet, on a routine space mission, and then while he was up there the Soviet Union disintegrated. Now, no one wants to bring him down” (42). This image is, like the saint of the icon, representative of a contemporary subject caught in a postmodern void, and is likely based on the account of Sergei Krikalev, a cosmonaut who spent 313 days in an orbiting space station, during which time the Soviet Union collapsed. Krikalev was nicknamed, “the ‘space victim’ and ‘the man who is sick of flying’ by the media while he waited to be returned to Earth, Krikalev now is being called Russia’s ‘Time Traveler’ and compared to science fiction characters who suddenly find themselves catapulted into a new century” (Randolph). This living metaphor of breaking through “walls between eras” (*Satin Island 3*) is historically particular to the wall that ostensibly separates *and* connects the modern and postmodern eras. This story is used by Jean Baudrillard as well, in *The Illusion of the End*, where it serves to illustrate our spatial relation to history and the event, to the *ending*, in postmodern conditions:

It circles around us, and will continue to do so tirelessly. We are encircled by our own end and incapable of getting it to land, of bringing it back to earth. This is like the parable of the Russian cosmonaut forgotten in space, with no one to welcome him, no one to bring him back – the sole particle of Soviet territory ironically overflying a deterritorialized Russia. Whereas on earth everything has changed, he becomes practically immortal and continues to circle like the gods, like the stars, like nuclear waste. Like so many events, of which he is the perfect illustration,

which continue to circle in the empty space of news [*information*], without anyone being able or willing to bring them back into historical space. (119)

In the novel, as in the theory above, the shroud through which this symbol is projected is that of the news media. Events are deterritorialized through their becoming orbital, and this state or condition is equally that of the contemporary subject and the cosmonaut (as literary figure; in reality he returned safely). Ivan Maňásek's incorporeal and erotic spirit of the revolution reiterates the dematerialized nature and experience of the event through Bataille's anthropological theory, alluding to the notion that the shroud is a permanent fixture in human vision, independent of particular poetic manifestations. The shroud allows for the state of god-like existence that Serge achieves in his role as observer: detached from events but constituted in them, intellectually active but no less objectively determined than an exploding artillery shell.

In his first flight, Serge observes the earth beneath him: "As the landscape falls away, it flattens, voids itself of depth. Hills lose their height; roads lose their camber, bounce, the texture of their paving, and turn into marks across a map. The greens and browns of field and wood seem artificial and provisional, as though they'd just now fallen from the sky" (C 155). Like the cosmonaut, Serge represents a living metaphor of the orbital condition of the postmodern subject and their endless project of cartographic idealism. The perspective produced by the airplane is a reiteration of that of U. and the orbiting cosmonaut: being beyond the event for being at the (metaphoric) *center* of the event, living through the shift between eras. The merging of map and territory is a well-established trope of postmodernity, often referring through Baudrillard or Slavoj Žižek to the fable *On Exactitude in Science* by Jorge Luis Borges, in which the advanced cartographic science of a fantasy empire necessitates the creation of a map on a one-to-one scale with said empire. And yet, Baudrillard notes that, "In fact, even inverted, Borges's fable is unusable. Only the allegory of the Empire, perhaps, remains. Because it is with this same imperialism that present-day simulators attempt to make the real, all of the real, coincide with their models of simulation" (*Simulacra* 2). The model of simulation at play in relation to the cosmonaut is that of the news event, where in C it is that of the signal, the mechanical vector of the wider world that hypnotises Serge at his attic wireless station. Both U. and Serge are imperial subjects, somehow contributing to the cartographic production of reality; however, they each occupy both the anthropological and insect perspectives. Their melancholy disconnection from the ideal of *ending* means that these characters cannot find the horizon of their own perspectives: Serge, high on heroin and cocaine, seems to be seeking death in battle through his very enjoyment of the carnage and chaos, though of course, even after being shot down and captured, he is denied the end he was subconsciously seeking. U., in a similar respect, is endlessly fascinated and

drawn in by symbols of death: blackness, oil, war, cancer, etc., and yet when finally within eyeshot of his own personal symbol of the ultimate end of death, Staten Island, he turns back to the detached (deathless) continuity of his corporate existence. Serge in his airplane, like U. in his speculative vision, is both the observer of the ants executing their orders below him, enacting the indecipherable will of the Project and command structure, and one of those ants himself. The possibility of being both is described by Baudrillard in terms of a loss or disappearance:

But it is no longer a question of either maps or territories. Something has disappeared: the sovereign difference, between one and the other, that constituted the charm of abstraction. Because it is the difference that constitutes the poetry of the map and the charm of the territory, the magic of the concept and the charm of the real. This imaginary of representation, which simultaneously culminates in and is engulfed by the cartographer's mad project of the ideal coextensivity of map and territory, disappears in the simulation whose operation is nuclear and genetic, no longer at all specular or discursive [...] The real is produced from miniaturized cells, matrices, and memory banks, modes of control [...] It no longer needs to be rational, because it no longer measures itself against either an ideal or negative instance. It is no longer anything but operational. (*Simulacra 2*)

Another way of understanding this disappearance is in terms of the metaphorical relation, the immutable difference produced by the metaphorical comparison (the body of ignored differences asserted by metaphorical similarity). The charm that is produced is the charm that is made operational by this ideology: the charming notion that verbal unification constitutes actual connection, that we can write our desired reality into being, becomes a self-evident part of the production process. The orbital position, the position of Serge in his machine above the battlefield, makes the world appear as a globe or map; the difference between territory and map dissolves when seen from above. This is the god-position, alluded to when Serge's comrades yell out to him after his first training flight that his face is black, and his instructor mentions, "Tar in the explosive mixture" (C 156) in a precession of the poetics of Serge observing the sun as a "tar-coated orb". But it is not just from actual heights that this position is symbolized in the text. One day, while re-assembling the plane's machine-guns,

The other cadets try to force the trigger sears and firing pins together, swearing when they won't fit, but not Serge: he finds the process pleasing, an extension of the logic he's developed from the Farman's front seat. In the click and swivel of machinery being slotted together, moved around and realigned, its clockwork choreography, he relives, in miniature, the mechanical command of landscape and its boundaries that flight affords him, the mastery of hedgerows, fields and lanes, their shapes and volumes . . . (159-60)

Serge retains the capacity to access this perspective even on the ground (like U., who dreams of heights while grounded), in the form of the operational alignment of machine parts. The narrator of *Remainder* assumes, and desires, a similar position on the ground, when re-enacting the scene at the tyre shop: "I'd had a raised viewing platform built, a little like an opera box, because I'd enjoyed watching the action in

my building from above and wanted to have a similar option here" (*Remainder* 164). This alludes to the possibility that this perspective is as much ideological as spatial. Not only does the machine grant the "mechanical command of landscape and boundaries", but it also causes the metaphorical difference between map and world to fade into the background. The two constitute equal parts of this perspective, as expressed when Serge's plane paces a friendly artillery shell on the way to destroy its target:

Serge knows that planes get hit by their own shells, but this one seems so placid, so companionable – and besides, if they're travelling at the same speed then both it and they are just still bodies in space, harmless blocks of matter. In the instant before their paths diverge, it seems to Serge that the shell and the plane are interchangeable – and that the shell and *he* are interchangeable, just like the radians and secants on his clock-code chart [...] Within the reaches of this space become geometry, the shell's a pencil drawing a perfect arc across a sheet of graph paper; he's the clamp that holds the pencil to the compass, moving as one with the lead; he is the lead, smearing across the paper's surface to become geometry himself . . . (C 179)

The poetics of cartography continues here through the qualities of the formalism (arcs, graphs, compass points, geometry), and Serge (as post-melancholic subject) becomes the metaphoric ground of an operation that is both realising and de-realising. While the map gives a kind of access to the landscape as "geometry", it serves at the same time to destroy it by causing it to disappear behind both that geometry and Serge "become geometry himself": the formalism of the map is always ready to absorb Serge as subject, confirming his absent particularity or subjectivity. The system of equivalence sought after by the anthropologist is accessed in this moment of matched speeds, in terms of the exchangeability of subject and object within this formalised space. While Serge's mind might serve to ground ("clamp") this mathematical reality (as in de Man's critique of ontology, where the mind is the metaphorical ground of reality), it is also his mind that is inscribed onto the surface of that reality, as point on a map: his mind, like that of the Kantian melancholic, seems to ground itself. In other words, this cartographic project produces in its (conscious and unconscious) agents this double-perspective of territory and cartographer, object and anthropologist, or ant and god: the Project causes difference to be articulated and refused at once, or, difference is refused precisely through the automated ease of its revelation and articulation. This is a literary expression of buffering, or of the Möbius-strip structure of melancholy: Serge's melancholy exhibits itself through his attempts to disappear behind the automated function of the machine. He exhibits the duality of melancholy: a paradoxical indifference to things combined with an intensely intellectual interiority that is tied negatively to writing, but positively to technology. Like the majority of McCarthy's characters in the majority of each novel, Serge exhibits very little in terms of melancholic affect or emotion. Hence, it seems appropriate to suggest that McCarthy's protagonists are what I would call *post-melancholic*: they exhibit the trace of certain melancholic conditions (a lost relation to an ideal),

but the negative affect associated with such a loss has been tempered by a new-found and seemingly irrevocable technological relation to that which had been previously inaccessible. In other words, unlike Pinsky's modernist writer caught in a melancholy whose horizon continues to escape the grasp of the writing generated to name it and confront it, Serge is caught in the melancholy stillness of modernity while at the same time demonstrating the capacity to enjoy certain aspects of this condition: namely, the thrill and perspective offered him by machines like the wireless and the aeroplane.

Serge, unlike the cosmonaut, loves flying. Though he could end up like some of his comrades, "carbonisé" (C 182) or like his enemies, "when they roast, they look like dead flies, round and blackened" (200), his position within the space of war is reiterated in the god-like position of the narrator at the end of *Remainder*. In the plane after the simulated bank robbery, the narrator assumes the position of the 'no one' in Hájek's story: the nameless agency that could, but refuses to, return the orbital cosmonaut to earth. After setting the airplane into a figure eight pattern above London, he needs to hijack the crew at gun-point to maintain this position:

"Jesus! If you shoot that, we'll all die."

"Don't worry," I told him. "Don't worry at all. I won't let us die. I just want to keep the sequence in place."

The radio crackled more. The pilot spoke into it in a hushed, urgent voice, telling the tower what was happening. The tower crackled back to him; he half-turned to me again and asked:

"Where do you want to go?"

"Go?" I said. "Nowhere. Just keep doing this."

"Doing what?" he asked.

"Turning back, then turning out. Then turning back again. The way we're doing it right now."
[...]

I looked out of the window again. I felt really happy. (*Remainder* 284)

The nameless narrator is the "no one" who *prefers* the orbital position, who wants to keep it in place. He is symbolic of the mad cartographer at the heart of this modern project. His priority is keeping "the sequence in place", which is to say, the cycle of idealism and failure and the duality of melancholy and play. There is, as such, something occasionally pleasing about this heightened perspective that soothes the subject caught in its essentially passive grasp. This heightened perspective is enjoyed in these examples by Serge, U. and the narrator, while in *Men in Space* the cosmonaut is as much a metaphor within the plot of the novel as it is for the reader. However, in *Satin Island*, these ideological visions of grand projects begin to transform, mutate into scenes utterly lacking in the will and agency of the subject.

Melancholy and Radical Duality

A kind of melancholy stillness related to the anthropological perspective is articulated next by U. in the familiar terms of buffering. U. notes that in the first stages of the Company's work on the Project,

[...] we started experiencing problems with our bandwidth. There was too much information, I guess, shuttling through the servers, down the cables, through the air. My computer, like those of all my colleagues, was afflicted by frequent bouts of buffering [...] The buffering didn't bother me, though; I'd spend long stretches staring at the little spinning circle on my screen, losing myself in it. Behind it, I pictured hordes of bits and bytes and megabytes, all beaver away to get the requisite data to me; behind them, I pictured a giant *über*-server, housed somewhere in Finland or Nevada or Uzbekistan: stacks of memory banks, satellite dishes sprouting all around them, pumping out information non-stop, more of it than any single person would need in their lifetime, pumping it all my way in an endless, unconditional and grace-conferring act of generosity. *Datum est*: it is given. It was this gift, I told myself, this bottomless and inexhaustible torrent of giving, that made the circle spin: the data itself, its pure, unfiltered content as it rushed into my system, which, in turn, whirred into streamlined action as it started to reorganize it into legible form. The thought was almost sublimely reassuring. (*Satin Island* 67-68)

The visions that U. has of the Project offer several instructive connections to the other novels relating to the dual potential of the contemporary. The Project begins by tripping over both the limitations and the excess of the dominant form of contemporary technology: digital information. The Project is about, so far as U.'s visions let on, the automated and inscrutable shuffling back and forth of matter and information within a form that is metaphorically similar to both Baudrillard's imperial endeavours and the hidden processing functions of a "black box" (both aesthetic and functional). And yet, from the outset, the very excess of information overcomes the material limits of the technology used to channel it, causing a blockage like Serge's black bile, forcing U. and his colleagues to sit, stare and wait. The buffering circle is a symbol of this time of delay (the interim), of forestalled revelation and final appearance (ending). It serves to transfix U.'s attention, to hypnotize him like the material traces and repetition of the re-enactments hypnotize the narrator of *Remainder* (168). Like the narrator of *Remainder*, but less directly, U. is drawn into a form of narration that becomes, post-hypnosis, like that of a coma or a dream. From this point on in the extract we are seeing through the lens of the unbounded vision acquired by Serge at Sophie's funeral (C 104-105), the aesthetic and expressive potential of the coma-visions of *Remainder* that result from the narrator's re-enactments, or the fleeting visions and paradoxical presence of the revolutionary and erotic spirit pursued by Ivan Maňásek. The ants and workers of the previous vision become bits and bytes; the sands of the desert become the *über*-server and the perspective of gods becomes the torrents of information that are both the gift being given and the obstacle to U.'s receiving that gift. U. occupies the space of the saint in the reading of the icon by the officer in *Men in Space*: the

memory banks in his vision are re-iterations of the “blocks” in the painting, which take on “the character [...] of transmitters” (*Men in Space* 55), the satellite dishes are re-iterations of “aerials and antennae” that “protruded” (*Men in Space* 56) from the mountainside. This alludes to the objective poetic structure of the world that writes itself that is shared by the novels: the forever elusive and ideal end of things sought through the mediation of the Project, the Great Report, or contemporary technology generally speaking. This poetics culminates here in the image of a stream that is endless (like that which is seen flowing into and out of Crypt Park in *C*), and endlessly positive (always giving more). Information takes on the guise of the engine of the buffering circle, both what keeps it spinning and what holds it in place, in the same sense that knowledge and writing are the engines of certain forms of melancholy (Pfau; Pensky). U. thinks of it as a gift, but in an expressly non-anthropological sense (without thought of reciprocation), as if within the confines of this vision his being anthropologist no longer bears on his vision of things; he is, like Serge at Sophie’s funeral, seeing beyond the bounds of his being for having been permanently detached from the absent object he is pursuing (in U.’s case, the Great Report), even when he is forced simply to wait for the buffering to end. This is the stillness of the modern melancholic combined with the (ostensibly) postmodern pleasure of playing with representations and ideas. This ideal perspective is in essence the perspective of the subject that has stepped out of the scene to better observe it and get at its truth or reality: the perspective floating on an excess of knowledge or information, or abandoned to float aimlessly, like roller-bladers, on “the vast sea of transmission roaring all around” (*C* 80). In the hypnotic melancholy and religious contemplation of the buffering circle, U. envisages the source of all information, of buffering, of the material of the Project, as an “über-server”; only a few pages further on and this figurative model comes to assume the guise of the Project itself, which is to say, the means and ends of his task have figuratively merged:

Talking of visions: as time went on, my mental picture of the Project, my baroque casting, or elaboration, of it, changed. Out went the towers and palaces – or rather, better to say they flattened, their balconies and arches, corbels, cornices and spires and all such wedding-cakery steamrolled down into a uniform consistency. What these second-generation reveries gave me in their place, compressed and smooth, was a black box. It might have still been standing in the desert; or perhaps up on a plateau, a raised plain – above a city maybe [...] but nonetheless connected to a city, or a set of cities, over which it exerted influence [...] More accurate, perhaps, to describe it as resting on a *plane*, rather than plain: one geometric shape that sat atop another. As to its size: this too, was far from clear. It was hard, in these visions, to maintain a sense of scale. Sometimes it seemed enormous, like an emperor’s mausoleum; at others it appeared no larger than a trunk, or coffin; at others still, the size of a child’s toy- or music-box. The only constant or unchanging aspect of it was that it was black: black and inscrutable, opaque. (*Satin Island* 75-76)

From his romantic visions of worker-ants and grand projects, the choreography of the formalism of productive social relations that is the object of the anthropological gaze, emerges a vision of the Project in the form of an inert black container. The black box, however, retains the traces of empire noted by Baudrillard, in its networked connection to, and influence over, an array of cities. Rather than envisioning the Project through the veil of its anthropological idealism, U.'s continued reveries cause him to confront an alternative possibility, one that would define his position as melancholic, caused by the black matter or black bile symbolized here in the form of a "black box [...] black and inscrutable, opaque", like melancholy itself. This is the beginning of a shift in the poetics and perspective of U., from the heights of anthropological and bourgeois idealism, to a perspective we might more readily associate with the "ants", with the ignorant but committed labourers at the heart of a grand project.

In the "Death of Writing", McCarthy essentially outlines the problem faced by contemporary writers in terms of the excessive, even insurmountable, capacity for the digital to produce expressions of reality. If U. represents the perspective of the novel reader, the writer, the anthropologist and the bourgeois ideologue, then the surveillance officer from *Men in Space* represents the perspective of the ants, or of one of the "bits and bytes and megabytes, all beavering away to get the requisite data to me" (*Satin Island* 68). The officer is in service to U., who stands as the figure of the bourgeois Western subject, in the sense that he is precisely an agent of collecting and distributing signals relaying information, in an attempt to reconstruct events and in doing so bring an end to them (and thus re-form the lost relation to ending).

The Melancholy Comedy of the Insect

In the previous chapter (p.251-81) we looked at the officer in terms of his expression of a-signification, in terms of the functionality of his role. During his surveillance operation he begins to express signs of a critical perspective similar to that symbolized by U. in his visions of the black box and the Project:

. . . able to infer, from overhearing Subject's end of a phone call received at 12:45 [twelve forty-five] a.m., that the artwork in question was almost certainly in his custody. I was, further, able to infer from his side of the dialogue that Associate Markov would be visiting his residence the following day in order to transfer the artwork to the studio of an artist, although why this should be done was not clear to me. On taking stock of the situation, I concluded that the best course of action was to enter Subject's property that night, arrest him and recover the painting. Although I had 2 [two] colleagues with me, I nonetheless decided to radio Headquarters in order to request armed and uniformed back-up. To my great surprise, my request was denied – and I was instructed, moreover, that on no account was I to effect an arrest or attempt in any way to take possession of the object. I was informed that this instruction had come "from the

top", although I must admit that it is no longer entirely clear to me who or what "the top" is any more. (*Men in Space* 94)

First, we should note that the officer continues to express a subjective viewpoint in his surveillance function, beyond and equivalent to his reading of the icon: it is through a series of inferences that his agency arises in his desire to arrest the "Subject" and bring the case to an end. Instead, his subjective interpretation of the situation and what it calls for from the perspective of his role or function, is denied by the overarching authority coordinating this law-enforcement procedure, or "the top". Not only does "the top", an entity and authority that the officer cannot locate in either a person or a thing, prevent him from executing this arrest, but it essentially declares that he must, "on no account" bring this investigation to a conclusion by arresting anyone or taking "possession of the object". In addition to this, his loose relation to authority continues to loosen, when he is informed that there are other teams assigned to surveilling "Subject's property" that he was not made aware of (95). A creeping doubt begins to set in: "I did not know this and wonder why I had not been told. Was this lack of coordination between sections of our reconfigured department accidental, or did it serve a purpose?" (95). His confusion is elaborated further when he meets with his lieutenant and "another man whose name and exact status I was not able to ascertain", but who appears to the officer in the guise of the authority of some unknown, "body to which I was answerable: part of Interpol, perhaps [...] a new body within the CCP created by the merging of several other bodies, divisions, departments, [...] for the purpose of this particular investigation, or perhaps also of other ones connected to this investigation, or at least connected to investigations to which this one is connected" (95). Like the ant in U.'s idealist vision, the officer is unsure of the value or meaning of the duty he fulfills: he is confused by the refusal to bring the investigation to a conclusion at this juncture, confused as to who or what is at "the top" of this investigation, and confused about how to proceed. However, like the worker ant who merely functions, the officer knows that, "it is not for me to ask such things, simply to answer when called: that is enough for me; I am satisfied with that" (*Men in Space* 95). From there, this both known and unknown authority (Lieutenant Forman and the unknown representative of another body, or collection of bodies) order the officer to continue his surveillance of the artist, Ivan Maňásek: "The phone tap bore immediate fruit [...] I then reported back to Lieutenant Forman that, without any doubt, Ivan Maňásek was engaged in copying the stolen painting. Lieutenant Forman informed me that he knew this already, and that I should carry on listening to and reporting on the activities of all involved in the process. This I have done, and will continue to do until instructed otherwise" (96-97). Once again, the officer seems to have solved (put an end to) the case of the missing icon. And yet, he finds out that his superiors already had this information; as when U. considers the

possibility that the Great Report, “had *already been written*” by some “auto-alphaing and auto omegaing script” (*Satin Island* 123). Unlike U., this realisation does not seem to cause consternation, anxiety or reactionary negativity in that the officer is, like the ant caught in the interminable interval, always merely awaiting instructions (signals). Where U.’s perspective on the Project begins to sour after he thinks about the self-writing of the Great Report, and he fantasizes about helping to destroy it from the inside, the officer becomes only more ingratiated to the absent authority he serves. Where U. begins in the elevated position of the God viewing ants, the officer proceeds from confusion to religious trust in the absent authority, placing himself firmly in the position of the ant, or the figures moving the boxes in the icon. Instead of producing a sense of derision or resistance in the subject, the precession of this knowledge in the form of the absent or lost authority serves to produce a sense humility and awe in the officer:

Although it is not my place to state this, I now understand my superiors’ reason for preventing me from making arrests or recovering the artwork, and find them commendable. They know where the painting is, and what is being done with it, and by whom. They have a holding signal on the whole conspiracy. This gives them enormous power. This power, to me, is almost tangible: sitting in my car beside the carp tank on Lidická, I feel it rushing through the air around me – and feel that I, too, am held by it, or rather within it: neither its origin nor its destination but one of its relays, its repeaters. I am satisfied with this: satisfied with my place within the overall field of transmission. As long as they know where the painting is, and who is doing what to it, the field will remain strong. I continued listening and, with the exception of short periods during which I allow myself to be relieved, still continue, waiting until such time as . . . (*Men in Space* 97)

The officer has begun a process of detachment from his duty that does not preclude the continuity of his commitment to the idealism of his project; which is to say, a detachment that does not equate to critical desire or willful disbelief. In this declaration of commitment to and faith in the absent authority, in this moment of almost religious connection between the employee and the mythical CEO they praise but never know (like Peyman in *Satin Island*), the officer produces the kinds of connections he desires, he folds into the symbolic structure shared between the novels and into the recesses of the investigation into a crime that amounts to the symbolic breaking of the wall between the modern and postmodern era: the copying of an icon (iconic relation). The officer, like U., is both observing and embedded in what he observes: the passage between eras. The officer however, is comforted by this, by the immense and unknowable power of the investigation. It is this rigorous and spirited attention to his duty, absent the image of what its conclusion might look like, or from whom or what the duty issues, that makes this character both a derisory figure and a melancholic one at once. The officer heralds the “holding signal” as a kind of final step for the investigation that paradoxically but pleasingly necessitates a repetitive continuity of the investigation, a phrase shaped precisely like the aerial holding “pattern” (*Remainder* 284)

that makes the narrator of *Remainder* feel “really happy” (284). Like Serge (Lanone 4), the officer is content to consciously perform his role as “one of its relays” (*Men in Space* 97); like the nameless and often faceless re-enactors in *Remainder*, he is content to be one of the investigation’s “repeaters” (*Men in Space* 97). Not only is he satisfied with this, but his efforts seem to be enhanced by his consciousness of this relation: his will is aligned with the interests of the “field” being exerted by the investigation, and he has been paradoxically animated by the power that he is “held” by. His surveillance is now almost unbroken, “with the exception of short periods”, and it is this commitment of all his resources and desires into this investigation that serves to ground the dark anti-humanist comedy and melancholy of the character.

As a result of his decisive commitment to the investigation and his role within it (now surveilling Ivan Maňásek), he becomes “something of an expert on the subject of zography” (*Men in Space* 114). From the description of what he has overheard, one would imagine zography to be the study or creation of icons. However, a direct definition is elusive. The Oxford English Dictionary provides only one instance of this term in use, in an English translation of Euclid’s *The Elements of Geometrie* by noted English alchemist John Dee in the late 16th century: “Zographie, is an Arte Mathematicall, which...demonstrateth, how, the Intersection of all visuall Pyramides, made by any playne assigned, (the Centre, distance, and lightes, beyng determined) may be, by lynes, and due propre colours, represented” (OED Online). Dee’s idiosyncratic understanding of zography is described by Urszula Szulakowska in terms of a system of illustration dependent upon the “single-point” perspective:

Dee was implying that the application of the single-point perspective system, whether to the human-figure, or to architectural space, served to align the human-being with the macrocosm [...] Contextualized within Dee’s Euclidian optical and alchemical system, the semiotic function of single-point, spatial geometry is essentially [...] a metonymic relationship with the physical world. As a sign in its own right, the Pythagorean-based system of drawing was reified by Dee to become a signifying mode which operated within real physical space, not only that of the painting. (76)

Hence, there is the implication in this term of more than just a painting technique that might relate to the production of icons. Dee’s ‘zography’ equates to a mode of connection between the cosmic ‘whole’ and the individual that is not relegated to the realms of art, but rather equates to an alchemical practice of unification in “real physical space”. We might therefore understand what follows in the officer’s narration as his confronting the indistinct aesthetic alchemical processes that linked the political ‘whole’ to the single-point perspectives it necessarily attempts to contain.

The officer learns that the icon “probably stems from a set of murals in Bačkovo, a Bulgarian monastery founded in roughly 1100 [...] and that the monastery’s muralists were trained in Byzantium then sent back to Bačkovo to paint in the official style” (*Men in Space* 114). He learns that severe punishments were meted out to those icon-painters who deviated from the official coda or style, and agrees with Maňásek’s comparison between the behaviour of the Byzantine Empire and the USSR: “In prohibiting modes of expression not sanctioned by Moscow and in supervising and arresting dissidents such as Maňásek for deploying such modes, was our state not performing a similar role to that of the regional enforcers of Byzantium’s canons?” (114). The comparison becomes instructive as Klára continues to explain Byzantium’s strategy of control. She tells Ivan and the officer that the Emperor Comnenus decided to install “Georgians and Armenians” as priests in Bulgaria in order to give the Bulgarians an “impression of independence” and in order to turn the Bačkovo monastery into “an official institution: Bačkovo would thus serve as (as it were) both loudspeaker and listening device” (115). In this relation, the monastery becomes like Dee’s drawing technique: seductive of the whole (the empire) from the point of particularity. In other words, by employing zographs (who are tacitly also censors) the Byzantine empire draws its ‘whole’ into its own ‘single-point’ perspective. However, with the vast space between them and Byzantium, the Bulgarian zographs began “taking more liberties” than allowed, “flouting the canons with heretical paintings” until, “the regime of propaganda and surveillance [...] slowly broke down” (115). The very collection of the whole and the single-point perspective together enacts its own dissolution. This causes the officer to ponder: “Was this not the fate, after *Perestroika*, of the empire of which our nation formed a part?” (115). The metaphoric wall between eras is illustrated here in terms of the establishment and dissolution of political authority by and over representation. The officer affirms the validity of his observation when he summarizes his duties analogically to that of Imperial Bačkovo: “Maňásek and Jelínková talk; I listen and repeat; and my superiors listen in through me” (115).

Immediately after he learns that the icon is potentially a rare example of a heretical saint, “not even Christian in origin”, and that it is possibly “extremely valuable”, he is forced, “to hand over [his] earphones to one of [his] men by a ringing which had developed in [his] ears due to their extended exposure to a source whose signal-to-noise ratio was, as previously indicated, less than ideal” (116-117). Noise, if we recall from chapter four, is compared to an insistent aesthetic presence by McCarthy (*Tintin and the Secret of Literature* 82). The officer finds workmen on the street adding further noise to this unfavourable ratio and attempts to use his authority to get them to stop. As they refuse, the officer is “struck by a phenomenon of which [he] had been theoretically aware but the full reality of which [he] had never had to face until this moment: people are not afraid of us anymore. We have, in effect, suffered the

same fate as Byzantium" (117). When the authority attempts to "monitor and absorb the energy that might have undermined" (*Men in Space* 115) it, it establishes the conditions of its own dissolution or failure. This is represented here in terms of the USSR, Byzantium and the investigation. The more decisive the officer's faith in the investigation, the more difficult the execution of his responsibility becomes. The more committed the officer is to listening and reporting, receiving and relaying information to the end of maintaining the "field", the less singularly useful to this end he becomes. Once the officer recognizes the "holding field", his perception of and connection to what it contains begins to fray. The irony of this is what fuels the derisive comedy that proceeds from it.

These hearing problems are getting worse as Markov arrives to collect the icon and its copy from Ivan: "The quality of the audio I was receiving from the flat had been deteriorating for some time: radio and other signals had started breaking in more frequently, and this, coupled with the ever-increasing volume of the ringing in my ears, was putting a great strain on the operation" (137). As Markov leaves the flat with the paintings, the officer follows in his car, and tries to contact his colleagues and superiors, "but was unable to establish contact with them" (137). This theme of disconnection persists when he arrives outside of Markov's flat. Once again, he tries to raise his colleagues on the radio, and once again he fails. After unsuccessfully searching the cars on the street for the surveillance vehicle his colleagues were using, he decides to find a phone box:

This took some time: the first one I came across had been irreparably vandalized; the second connected me in such a way that [...] the desk could not hear me speaking to them; the third had been entirely decked in shaving foam. Even when I did manage to get through, the damage to my hearing was such that I was still unable to make out what Lieutenant Forman was saying to me [...] I eventually understood that he was telling me to go home and rest for a few hours and, accordingly, returned to my car and drove down towards Prague One. (138)

On his way home he encounters throngs of New Years and Independence revelers and abandons his car. As if observing these events as a material amplification of the "passage between eras" symbolized by the crime,

I found the noise overwhelming. The ringing in my ears was compounded by shrieks, whistles and the almost constant explosion of fireworks around me. The sounds all ran together; I was unable to distinguish one from another. The sensation was extremely disorienting [...] I remember shouting at people to let me by, but none of them seemed to hear me. I myself could not make out my own voice above the noise, nor even be sure that my vocal chords were amplifying it at all (139).

Within the repetitions of the holding field, everything is becoming noise, as what the holding field contains is precisely the noisy incoherent passage between eras. This is the noise of the explosion that is "taking place already" described by Madison in *Satin Island* (129), the noise of "every exciting or painful

event in history" (C 248) bouncing around like wireless signals, "and hardly losing any energy in doing so" (C 246). Where Simeon Carrefax believes that events like the "Battle of Hastings [...] could still be *happening*, right now, around us" (C 248) in the form of signals or waves, the officer is caught in the middle of an epoch-transitioning event, and in a position of communicative isolation that makes him question his very capacity to communicate. After following orders and going home to rest, he returns to the station where he discovers that Anton Markov is being arrested and the painting recovered: "Completely unaware that such an event had been planned, let alone that it was occurring at this very moment, I ran from the building" (*Men in Space* 149). In his comic haste, the officer has forgotten his badge, and is prevented from crossing the police cordon and joining his successful colleagues. Despite this, he notices Lieutenant Forman and others who might identify him, and as he attempts to approach them: "the officer with whom I had been remonstrating, entirely without warning, struck me on the side of my head with his baton, causing me to fall down to the ground, where my head was once again struck, this time by the pavement as it hit it" (150). With the mindless decisiveness and deafening disorientation of the mechanically encrusted, the officer pratfalls over the rigor of his responsibility and role, and over the possibility of being there to witness its resolution.

Upon returning to the station after a stay in the hospital, this section of the officer's account opens with an instructive but partial statement: ". . . an acute sense of being cut off" (190). Confirming that the rigour with which the officer is committed to the investigation is equal to the void that appears between him and everything involved in the investigation, he then tries to "find someone willing to talk to me about the current state of the case" (190): "Even when people did grant me interviews – people with whom I was not familiar, or at least with whom I was not aware of being familiar – my overall state of confusion was such that I was unable to piece together the scraps of information that they offered me" (190). At this point we are unclear as to how much the officer remembers after being hit on the head, or even how much time has passed. He seems not to trust his memory, somewhat like the narrator of *Remainder* after his accident. The themes of hearing loss and confusion begin to reach a crescendo in this section:

As it was made clear to me that my presence was not required at Headquarters, I left and wandered, in a kind of daze, back to Korunní, where I had last had contact with events [...] I waited there, I do not know for how long [...] I experienced considerable distress due to the changes in both pressure and acoustics brought about by the ascent. My ears were assailed by the sounds of banging and drilling [...] Occasionally, voices emerged from the banging and drilling, and spoke words which seemed to be those contained within the advertising posters lining the station's walls, as though someone, or several people, were reading these out aloud. I cannot say for certain whether this was indeed happening, or whether the sounds were mutations of the residual noise I was by now experiencing constantly. (190-91)

The officer seems to have been cut off from Headquarters (does not know/cannot remember if he knows anyone) and at the same time from the investigation. However, without any orders, or knowledge of the current state of the investigation, he is undirected and wanders “in a daze”. He finds himself where he “last had contact with events”, outside Markov’s house, when he sees Markov exit and decides to follow him into the Metro. In the Metro, the officer is confronted with a wall of sounds that cause him distress. Like the subject metaphorically trapped in a holding field of signal-relay, in a coffin or crypt according to C’s poetics, everything is signal and everything is noise. However, while previously it seemed excessive attention to the investigation had damaged his ability to hear, in this instance, he proclaims that though one would imagine that all the damage caused to his hearing:

[...] would have diminished my powers of hearing. On the contrary, they seem to have augmented them. It is though I could hear *everything*, and all at once: traffic, human voices, sounds of crowds in bars and squares, in football stadiums and auditoria of concert halls, the crackle of radios and television sets. I seem to hear the noises given out by neon signs, fluorescent lights, power lines and power substations, atmospheric noise produced by lightning discharged during thunderstorms, galactic noise caused by disturbances originating outside the ionosphere. But it’s all noise: I’ve lost the signal. All I pick up now is interference. (191)

This presents the reader with a problem: is this real, or is this some kind of dream? We might, copying Byatt’s reading of *Remainder* but deviating from it slightly, want to explore the possibility that the intention of the text is to present the character as metaphorically dead. We do not see the body, or the coroner’s report, or the funeral, but we see the impossible made possible: hearing damage producing improved hearing. In turn, this impossibility feeds into the notion that rigorous commitment to “holding fields” or holding patterns that rely on and relate to communication technology and capital, is precisely what reduces that which is contained by these modes of control to the instability of language and noise. It is possible that the officer died of a blow to the head, inasmuch as it is possible that the narrator of *Remainder* is dead from the opening page of the novel, but it is also possible that the officer simply ‘might as well’ be dead: that his existence is like that of the object, narrated by the object, through the inescapable fields of language, signal and interference. Peter Boxall articulates this position in terms of “posthumous narration”, a narrative technique that entails the use of narrators for whom, “the experience of entering into the twenty-first century has felt like the entry into posthumousness, into a life that outlives itself, that persists beyond its own death” (“Fictional Time” 701). He attributes the use of this technique to contemporary authors like J.M. Coetzee, Paul Auster, Margaret Atwood, Marilynne Robinson and Philip Roth, and alludes to McCarthy’s connection to these when he cites the description of time in *Remainder* as “differently weighted” (“Fictional Time” 701-702). Boxall expands this description by suggesting that, “In all of these writers, posthumousness and historical disorientation are expressed in

the emergence of a late style—a pared-down sparseness of expression, a tautness at the level of the sentence” (“Fictional Time” 702). Though there is certainly a theme of disorientation in McCarthy’s novels, relating to the officer in particular, I find it hard to agree that McCarthy’s style relates to tautness or sparseness of expression. His persistent use of ellipses and scrambled words or letters, I believe, constitute counter-examples. McCarthy’s posthumous narration, demonstrates that the confusion and disorientation of the subject caught in the transition between centuries or eras is accompanied not by a paring down of narrative voice, but by the overproduction of that voice in the form of waves, signals, word and symbols. The officer has been long cut off from the end of his investigation. First, his superiors deny him the chance to end the investigation, then the establishment of the holding field denies him even a coherent vision of this end and finally, the (apparent) recovery of the painting produces yet another false ending that the officer cannot connect to. Despite this persistent lack of relation to an ending, the officer does not ever truly become melancholic in the affective or emotional sense of the term. This is to say that the officer is trapped in a melancholic condition without necessarily experiencing melancholy itself. One way of thinking about this post-melancholic state is to think about the metaphor of living death, of living *beyond the end* of one’s own life, or, of living beyond the loss of one’s own relation to the end.

The officer comes precisely to represent the subject caught in the over-abundance of voice, sound, and information. This section is confusing (and indicative of the poetics of after-death), in turn, because this position as universal receiver is itself a kind of ironic nod to the officer’s desires during the investigation: to play his part as nodal point between the subjects of the investigation and his superiors. Now that he can hear everything, ostensibly all kinds of audible traces of criminality, it is only at this point that he becomes “not required”. He has, as he admits himself, become like an object: “This interference business troubles me. On a professional level, I know all about it. I understand internal interference [...] I understand external interference [...] I know how multi-path interference can be caused [...] But these were things that happened to the equipment; now they’re happening to me” (*Men in Space* 192-93). The officer is, without necessarily understanding what he has expressed, expressing the possibility that he has become the equipment, not just of the investigation, but for a generalized accumulation and transmission of information. He loses interest in Markov and “Subject”, and cannot help finding his attention drifting, like U. with videos or screens, to “spots”, as if guided by “an alien hand” (193). The officer seems completely isolated from the investigation and his colleagues, and yet is guided still by some external and imprecise imperative, “thus making himself, by the deployment of a will without object, the surest agent of that continuity of the nothing” (*Perfect Crime* 14). The officer, in the post-melancholic state of a universe of noise, abandoned by the authority of the investigation and the holding field, is now gripped

by an inescapable connection to the instability of language and the vague symbolic imperative to convey and express that his object-ness represents. Having surpassed the very concept of “the end”, the officer is a melancholic whose lost relation, or lack of relation, to an ending *is ideal*. This is to say that the lost relation that is at the heart of this melancholy (post-melancholy) is precisely making one’s way through the *simulation* of an absent relation to the end: everything comes to an end, it is just a matter of whether we, or our devices, are there to witness it or not. It is, in effect, an *ideologically enforced* melancholy that is productive of a state of manic continuity and circulation (of products and information) largely absent the negative affect of traditional melancholy (because the loss of relation at its core is an impossible, which is to say fictitious or simulated, loss).

Guided by a will not his own, contained by and connected to an endless cacophony of noise, he begins to perceive objects as pre-mediated by his surveillance equipment, as if *he* were this equipment that can only see in terms of signals and waves (*shrouds* in the poetics of *Satin Island*): “Clearly, the cello was not the *origin* of these sounds, yet there seemed to be a connection between them and it – indeed, between them and all the objects in my vision. The sounds undulated in dislocated waves. Objects undulated too: cheese, satumas, cello (*Men in Space* 193)”. These objects which become waves in this extract are significant objects in themselves (they constitute the “spots” he watches instead of the subject of his surveillance); they are in a sense already become waves on the currents of modern literature. The orange (the satsuma), for instance, is referred to by McCarthy as a metaphor for when literary language attempts to contain the entirety of the object: something oozes free of its grasp (*Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* 71). There is reason to suspect that the officer’s final few sections are precisely this excess: excess consciousness squeezed free of the experience of death, liberated from its usefulness. Like the officer, who loses track of his intentions of following “Subject” and Anton in order to be compelled into noticing the details of certain “spots”, Anton himself experiences his death in an utterly detached but detail-oriented manner, completely ignoring the imminence of his demise at the hands of his employer (253-54). Ignoring, or being detached from death in this way is both the means and the end of their condition: a duality of melancholy isolation and pleasurable connection (pleasure derived from the darkly comedic notion of the simulated absence of ending or death, the dark prospect of perpetual human motion). The continuity of this detachment that is both material and ideal is evoked in the aporia that ends both character’s sections of the novel, and the novel itself. The next time we hear from the officer, he has once again assumed a different position. He now resides in a shipyard, but can hear nothing in the shipyard empty of people: “There’s no one left to synchronize, to dub” (276). The poetics of this closing section place the officer in a world of machines abandoned by their operators: “Here, movement is

extremely rare. Very occasionally, I see a man, or men, walk over and point welding torches at the hulls [...] Most of the time the hulls are without visitors. Cranes stand above the dock – stiff, as though with rigor mortis. Chains hang limp from these. As far as I can see, they serve no purpose” (276). Stillness and death abound in this scene, but they reflect the paradoxical stillness of freedom from purpose exemplified by the officer’s own isolated condition. Chains, like those that bound him to particular duties of the investigation, “serve no purpose”, just as he does in terms of the investigation. In other words, social relations of power, the responsibility of power, no longer dominate as they did when the Czech people “feared” officers like him. He is experiencing the isolation of the individual caught in the transition between eras, and this isolation can, through a simulated melancholic detachment from death or ending, be like death itself (especially when life is compelled to be active, assertive, political and radical). Finally, his section and the novel closes with a metaphor of this subject made to feel disconnected and absent by the very machinery of the idealism in which it is imbricated (and hence not disconnected or alienated from): the joker. The officer finds two playing cards with equal but opposite jokers depicted on them (mirror images). These jokers come to metaphorically relate to the idealism of eliminating evil through function and precision, which is to say, through the slow reduction and eventual elimination of the dualistic. The officer positions himself (and U.) as the jokers, when he thinks that, “the jokers, by contrast, numbering 2 [two], had been deliberately discarded with a view to facilitating the smooth passage of a game in which jokers are redundant, as they are in a majority of card games” (278). In the game of technological reality production (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Fox News), we are, paradoxically, both the jokers that are redundant (our detached melancholy position) and the audience watching the slow comedic unfolding of that redundancy in ourselves and others (our detached and playful comedic position). The officer wants to know whether these were discarded on purpose, but, like not being able to discern the end of an era when you are contained by it, there is no one else (no one on the outside) to ask, and even if he could find someone he, “would be unable to hear their reply” (278). In his containment in a field of largely abandoned machines, the officer is utterly detached (spatially, verbally, emotionally) but still cannot escape that “alien hand” that directed him, even while living like a homeless individual apart from everyone and everything related to the investigation, while always keeping in mind that “Soon I will stop. Soon...” (278).

The contemporary condition of this violent undercurrent is represented or symbolized in the poetics of the idealist outsider on the inside of things and minds, one who infects the other with methodical sameness and with disruption and death, and who eventually comes to understand they never will come close to the “truth”, the reality, or the original object they have sought out to analyse. This is an

anthropological poetics that reverberates with a particular (and reversible, for being a verbal fiction) brand of melancholy; a kind of knowledgeable indifference that is the only engine of progression to the end. The sadness that comes at the end of material failure, the realisation that what you have bought into is not quite what you wanted it to be (the pre-programmed obsolescence of consumerism in capitalist society), the cycle of idealism and failure, is the sadness (and comedy) of the anthropologist who knows his/her object is forever out of reach. However, like the post-melancholic, the anthropologist does not, as a result of this uncomfortable truth, resort to incessant self-deprecation. Rather, this negative knowledge becomes bound up in the rituals of the method, it disappears behind the formalisms of field work. This is the perspective acquired by the narrator of *Remainder* that injects him into a repetitive and religious mode of being. Though dedicated to details and function, this religion passively deifies all symbols (nodes of aesthetic connection for the subject), causing them to proliferate and deproblematize this secular religion of capital and technology. However, as in the case of *Remainder*, this simultaneously pleasing and melancholic position necessitates a certain ethics that capitalises upon the duality of proximity and detachment produced by late capitalism. Yet, like the dual register of encryption or a-signification, the fixity of this position and the sadness it produces can speak for both the before and after of the quest for the object: the object is forever out of reach because it begins this way, making way for the endless process of the development of material culture and language to (metaphorically) fill in that empty space. This is the melancholy of a lost relation that has been *sought out*; a melancholy without the persistent negative affect, a surpassed melancholy that persists as a trace within the mania that follows it. The object is forever out of reach because we have passed a point of no return in our quest for the complete denuding of the object, even undiscovered objects have their horizontal and vertical place in the overall grid waiting for them. In either case, an endless process, a farce or fall, proceeds to a certain (in that it repeats itself symbolically) but essentially unpredictable end (in that if it is the *true* end, there will be no human left to ontologically confirm it, either in person or through the screens and airwaves). That space itself is the space of the postmodern where, like the narrator of *Remainder* slipping into comas after being hypnotized by repetitions, Serge in his ponderings and metaphorical re-imaginings of himself and the world, the aimless orbiting of the characters in *Men in Space* ambling towards their deaths, or the space of the screen in *Satin Island*, events and things perform a metaphorical ontological immediacy (the character's thought, or mediation in the case of Serge) at the same time as aesthetically cleansing the scene of the metaphorical relation: the digital surveillance profile image is not *like* reality, it *is* reality (both true and false: missing the authority that might settle the instability of the relation, and hence sharing in the melancholy of the subject). The cycles repeating are religious and hypnotizing, though the 'highest'

speed that the cycle achieves is the buffering circle; the circle is the symbol of post-melancholy, the symbol of the endless cycle, of the tar-soaked sun, the ellipse, dripping with a melancholy on the cover of *Satin Island*, the anthropological melancholy of contemporary history.

Conclusion: The Melancholy of Historical Stillness

While the heightened perspective offers U. an ideal vision, that same perspective, when turned to thinking about its *own* potential to organize or guide the Project, now envisions the Project as an all-consuming container hovering over that which it controls. The stillness and opacity of the black block of matter evokes a dual posture, as it contains all the movement, commands and signals that once animated the scenes of insect-labour. The idea of contemporary history alludes to the contemporaneity of the event and its transcription into material signification or writing, without coming close to the effects of near real time transcription offered by mass communication networks converting these events into waves and signals, images and sounds. If everything is in a perpetual state of unfolding, like the oil spill in *Satin Island* or Agamemnon's fall (referring to the character in McCarthy's play), the speed of transmission and appearance of the event in fact creates an increasingly real *slowness* of the event, the mass of details and relations created by the wealth of information making the true ending of its effects practically impossible to locate. Events disappear from the narrative of reality (or the novel) when they become continuous, when their ending becomes impossible, as when U. declares directly to the reader of *Satin Island*, "(events! If you want those, you'd best stop reading now)" (13). This slowness is in many ways related to the creative potential of the bourgeois subject, always *capable* of spending time speculating and luxuriating in thought. However, it could equally represent the slowness of a definitively 'other' form of thought. In *Satin Island*, U. ponders the possibility that the Great Report he has been assigned to produce is in fact in a constant process of writing itself:

Write Everything Down, said Malinowski. But the thing is, now, it *is* all written down. There's hardly an instant of our lives that isn't documented. Walk down any stretch of street and you're being filmed by three cameras at once – and even if you aren't, the phone you carry in your pocket pinpoints and logs your location at each given moment. Each website that you visit, every click-through, every keystroke is archived: even if you've hit *delete*, *wipe*, *empty trash*, it's still lodged somewhere, in some fold or enclave, some occluded avenue of circuitry [...] Pondering these facts, a new spectre, an even more grotesque realization, presented itself to me: the truly terrifying thought wasn't that the Great Report might be unwritable, but – quite the opposite – that it had *already been written*. Not by a person, nor even some nefarious cabal, but simply by a neutral and indifferent binary system that had given rise to itself, moved by itself and would perpetuate itself: some auto-alphaing and auto-omegaing script – that that's what it *was*. And that we, far from being its authors, or its operators, or even its slaves (for slaves are agents who can harbour hopes, however faint, that one day a Moses or a Spartacus will set them free) were no more than actions and commands within its key-chains [...] But who

could read it? From what angle, vantage-point or platform, accessed through what exit-jetty leading to what study (since all studies and all jetties were already written into it), could it be viewed, surveyed, interpreted? None, of course: none and no one. Only another piece of software could do that. (123-24)

The act of writing the contemporary era in this extract is conditioned by the ubiquity and inescapability of digital surveillance technology: an automated and objective form of writing the record of the global society, the contemporary era. Even if, within this technological context, the subject performs part of its a-signified function in the form of the delete-actions described in italics above, the records that are deleted are “still lodged somewhere” in some “occluded avenue of circuitry”: like the oil that is waiting beneath the earth to once again return to the surface and dominate “more and more screen time” (*Satin Island* 9). In other words, despite the exuberant and permanent material appearance on our screens of the erase or delete function, this task is beyond the scope or capacity of the individual in a world perpetually and automatically recording itself. That the Report might be unwritable is one thing; McCarthy associates the writerly refusal of completion with certain modern authors (Conrad, Blanchot, Mallarmé, Shakespeare) he clearly admires (*Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* 99-124). Hence, what is even more terrifying for U. is the complimentary (and Baudrillardian) notion that the Great Report has “already been written”, that it is a self-contained, automated and indifferent author of itself, like the state of post-melancholy. This context is one from which U., his social value, his purpose and the meaning of his work has been drained utterly. What is U., an observer, recorder and analyst of human society and culture (like a novelist), inside the confines of this self-writing program? He is, according to the text, neither author, operator nor slave. The social relation produced by this programming is not one of labour (author/operator) or domination (slave), but rather the *functional* relation between a program and its command execution; an automated relation that has deleted thought, relegating it to the inevitability of the malfunction and hence to a process of ideal extermination. In this context the subjectivity of the subject, its potential for a disruptive agency and will, which is to say thought, hope and critique, are reduced to the formalism of information and absolved of their historical and disruptive agency. Reiterating the crypt-symbol of C, this extract articulates the subjectivity of contemporary history as the experience of being a command in the process of being executed by (contained and distributed by) an indifferent and inescapable programming. The irony of the world that relieves the subject of its responsibility of recording and analyzing the world is that the final product (the end of this automated self-writing) would, by definition, be inaccessible to anything but “another piece of software” (because the final product is either too vast and complex, or, because this complexity might only be resolved with the disappearance of the thinking, language-reliant, subject).

This is a description of subjectivity buried in and expressed (recorded) by a vast technological crypt, or as Baudrillard puts it: “The worldwide listing of all data is the same phantasy as that of the spelling of the names of God – a chimaera in which we bury ourselves as though inside a metal sarcophagus, in a state of weightlessness, dreaming of living out all possible situations by the grace of the Digital. Phantasy of synthesis of all the elements, by which we seek to force the gates of the real world” (*Perfect Crime* 35). The subject acquires the immateriality and weightlessness of a chain of code inside a machine, a momentary flash of electronic signals sent from one machinic node to another (a “fulguration” that disintegrates and exposes at once), and hence in a constant state of connection. However, this melancholy being does not deny the capacity for fantasy or dreams, and it becomes instructive, in *Satin Island* in particular, to note what occupies the dreams and fantasies of such a subject. Immediately following this “terrifying” thought, U. experiences “a sea-change” (124) in his attitude towards both the Great Report and the Project:

I started seeing the Project as nefarious. Sinister. Dangerous. In fact, downright evil. Worming its way into each corner of the citizenry’s lives, re-setting (“re-configuring”) the systems lying behind and bearing on virtually their every action and experience, and doing this without their even knowing it . . . I started picturing it, picturing its very letters (the *K* a body-outline, the *S*s folds of a cloak, the hyphen a dagger hidden between these), slinking up staircases in the night while people slept, a silent assassin. That’s how I started seeing it. (124)

The evil of the Project is articulated in terms of progression or change that is definitively beyond both the control and the awareness of the subject (who, from this negative perspective, is now at least identifying with the ant-labourer in their detachment from knowledge or agency): the effects of the Project move like a *dream* through the inaccessible recesses of their conscious mind. The evil of the Project is itself arrived at through the form of evil: language, speculative meaning, an otherness that exceeds what U. knows about the Project, an idea that seems detached from the consensual reality in which it formed. Which is to say, U.’s visions of the Project are perhaps the consequence of its already-automated completion: he can only go *beyond* what is already completed into the realm of metaphor and meaning, those human elements which, by definition, exceed objective reality and as such have been reduced to transparency. The ants and U. are in this sense metaphorical effects of this automated processing; he begins to perceive a certain evil behind these automated processes, which he can only articulate metaphorically in terms of murder and death, in terms of an assassin’s goal. We might associate this metaphorical death with the appearance of the subject as merely an ignorant line of code. This begs the question: what or who does this assassin seek to kill? U. alludes to the answer as he continues to ponder this evil:

I couldn't, at first, put my finger on a *particular* aspect or effect of it, nor on a specific instigator or beneficiary, that was itself inherently and unambiguously bad. But after a while I started telling myself that it was precisely this that made it evil: its very vagueness rendered it nefarious and sinister and dangerous. In not having a face, or even body, the Project garnered for itself enormous and far-reaching capabilities, while at the same time reducing its accountability – and vulnerability – to almost zero. What was to criticize, or to attack? There was no building, no Project headquarters or Central Coordination Bureau. What person, then? [...] The Project was supra-governmental, supra-national, supra-everything – and infra- too: *that's* what made it so effective, and so deadly. I continued to ponder these things even as I laboured on, week-in, week-out, to help usher the Project into being, to help its first phase go live; and as I did, the more I pondered, ruminated, what you will, the more thoughts of this nature festered. (124-25)

The evil being described by U. is precisely a dematerialized evil, an evil that cannot be reduced to a body, face, building or headquarters (like the absent authority of the investigation); it is, in other words, evil because it is beyond material expression. This assassin, as such, seeks to kill in the way it has transformed the subject into ant, and ant into code: it kills through dematerialization or disappearance. This is an evil form, "And it is, at bottom, the form itself that is intelligent, insightful: with evil it is not a question of an object to be understood; we are dealing with a form that understands us" (Baudrillard, *Intelligence of Evil* 160), which is to say, it understands the desire for immortality contained in a post-melancholic state. What is the target of the violence of a form that "understands us"? In the passage above it seems to kill any chance to oppose it, by eliminating its relation to both accountability and vulnerability, by becoming like an "orbital", "deterritorialized" event, not lacking in material manifestation, but rather with a scope so vast as to be incomprehensible. U. is connecting the Project to the intelligence of evil, which according to the extract above is precisely an intelligence which understands dematerialization as the means of achieving this desire for immortality (or in other words, understands the human desire for immateriality and the art of disappearance). The Great Report, which may have made his role redundant, and the Project, which may be "unambiguously bad", equate to directives that "allow [...] for the creation of an imaginary space in which the subject, no longer corporeal but purely semiotic, can continue to exist. [...] McCarthy's characters are, at least potentially, dead, but as long as they continue to imaginatively construct a space in which to exist, a simulacrum of the real world, they are able to maintain at least the illusion of indefinite longevity" (Byatt 258). Under the auspices of undertakings that depend upon the capacity to convert reality into information, upon the power of naming, the subject in its traditional guise as center of reality, agency and social life is (metaphorically) dead, which is to say, practically inert. However, McCarthy's characters demonstrate that the melancholy created by the loss of the relation to *ends* (to accomplishment, death, success) is not so straightforward as that of Freud's desolate subjects. McCarthy's characters demonstrate that while the lack of a relation

to death may be isolating and affectively neutralizing, it equates as well to an absent relation to will, agency, and responsibility. Baudrillard once stated that it was not he who was nihilist, but rather the system with its organs of endless commodification and circulation. McCarthy's characters are precisely the subjects of that nihilist system: bearers of a perspective absent meaning or end, they are compelled to generate meaning in the most banal and repetitive of scenarios. While that need to produce meaning for themselves may be an enjoyable process (given the practically limitless mode of connection provided by the digital), it comes out of the melancholy loss of the relation to ultimate meaning, to endings, or to death.

The self-writing world absolves U. of his duty to think and record at once, without releasing him from the religious duty of performance and repetition: "I laboured on, week-in, week-out, to help usher the Project into being, to help its first phase go live". This totalizing and self-recording program *encrypts* the desire for disruption (the negativity native to thought), absorbs and consumes it as reality absorbs and re-expresses the fake bank robbery in its own terms, eradicating its falseness with the immediacy and force of reality's response. U.'s subjective being, his humanity, recorded and then re-transmitted into the "folds" of digital formalisms and networks, emerges in this extract as a "festering" remainder of doubt regarding the meaning and potential of this brand of subjective presence. The evil of the Project is, as such, the dream of eliminating evil through *our* burial inside "a metal sarcophagus" meant to accomplish "that extermination which would be produced by an absolute determination of the world and its elements" (Baudrillard, *Perfect Crime* 36): it is the disappearance of the difference between inside and outside. However, as is indicated by the lingering trace of doubt in the thoughts of U., this "absolute determination of the world" is,

[...] literally impossible. Very High Definition, with its ambition of producing images, sounds, information, bodies in microvision, in stereoscopy, as you have never seen them before, as you will never see them, is unrealizable. As is the phantasy of Artificial Intelligence: the brain's becoming a world, the world's becoming a brain, so as to function without bodies, unfailing, autonomized, inhuman [...] There is, in fact, no room for both natural and artificial intelligence. There is no room for both the world and its double" (*Perfect Crime* 36)

While being *literally* impossible, this outcome is ideologically or metaphorically possible, through the imagining and projection of its ideal *effects*: the same absence of thought from action that is sought after by the narrator of *Remainder*.

This relation between the subject-as-command-execution and the self-writing world is the ideal relation that is constantly rising and falling in the novels, the pattern of an irrevocable human tide made metaphorically into the tragedy of gushing oil, the frustrating delay designated by the "buffering" circle,

the new tar-coated sun-god or the orbiting cosmonaut. McCarthy articulates this state of affairs that confronts and makes the writer redundant in terms of “data saturation”, metaphorically speaking the blanketing of the earth in a layer of digital information (oil, tar, tarmac, etc.), and extends this confrontation between writer and world backwards to a classic melancholic position:

Western literature may have more or less begun, in Aeschylus’s *Oresteia*, with a lengthy account of a signal crossing space, and of the beacon network through whose nodes the signal’s message (that of Troy’s downfall) is relayed – but now, two and a half millennia later, that network, that regime of signals, is so omnipresent and insistent, so undeniably inserted or installed at every stratum of existence, that the notion that we might need some person, some skilled craftsman, to compose any messages, let alone incisive or “epiphanic” ones, seems hopelessly quaint. (“The Death of Writing”)

It is out of the perpetual emergence and failure of this ideal relation that a certain poetics of melancholy reveals itself in the novels. If melancholy is associated with metaphorical malfunction embedded in language and epistemology, it must necessarily be a melancholy not specific to a particular set of historical conditions. It is the melancholy described by Toohey through the face and body of Orestes, classical Greek matricide, as he is found painted onto an ancient vase: “Look at his heavy, half-closed eyes and at the dissatisfied, tired, even unhappy expression on his face. Notice the slight drooping forward of his head. Look, too, at the pensive and indecisive way that his right index finger seems to scratch at his chin, and notice how his body is slumped in lassitude (and is supported, almost, by his left hand)” (15). It is important to note that, as the context produced by the Great Report serves as the background for U.’s imminent depression, the context of Orestes’ melancholy posture is a purification ritual (for erasing the sin of matricide) and that the gods in the scene share this “dissatisfied, tired, even unhappy expression” of Orestes’. This is, however,

a melancholia or depression of a seemingly unusual type. Nowadays we tend to associate this state with a general slowing down of bodily and mental processes, with what is usually termed psychomotor retardation [...] That understanding can hardly be what is called for here. Orestes’ face and much of his posture exhibit a patina of motor retardation. But there are clear signs of mental activity – of agitation [...] It is best described as an agitated form of melancholy, as an agitated depression. It is a state in which motor retardation, at least in the case of Orestes and the Furies, seems to betray considerable inner agitation and turmoil [...] In the Eumenides Painter’s rendition, the mania – or flight of thought, or anxiety – represents the internal state. Externally, the victim, Orestes, appears to suffer from extreme motor retardation. (Toohey 18)

Like the poetics of the buffering circle, which imply delay and movement at once, or the poetics of totalization that seem to infect U.’s later understanding of the Project and the Great Report, this is a dualistic melancholy, a stillness and staticity of the body that opposes but fails to eliminate the trace, the “inner agitation and turmoil” (Toohey 18), of thought. Thought is precisely that trace of ending, of death, that persists beyond its banishment into the post-melancholy mania of connection, meaning and

automated movement. The duality that emerges from the flat image of Orestes found on the Eumenides Painter's vase, with its contradiction between exterior appearance and internal "agitation", finds its only corollary in McCarthy's *poetics*, as U. has almost no bodily existence in the novel to contrast with any expression of thought or inner turmoil, aside from its passive presence as an internal mechanism of the Project.

Instead, what we find in *Satin Island* is that U. cannot himself represent this co-presence of interior and exterior, because we can only access him through the narration, through his thoughts or interiority projected through a variety of objects and formalisms. His thoughts are both passive and active at once, but they do not represent a difference between interior and exterior. Where we can see this juxtaposition of passive and active is in the figure of the "black box", the buffering circle, oil or the caoutchouc that "consisted of no more than tubers and protuberances knotted and gnarled together every which way [...] Now, looking through the window at the bulbous clouds that, once again, were slightly smudged, I thought of this caoutchouc; then of Petr's cancer; then, once more, of spilled oil" (*Satin Island* 101). Toohey is challenging the understanding that ancient melancholy was at its heart a kind of violence, and that only modernity, with its material and economic conditions, has turned melancholy towards the depressive state: "This is to misrepresent. As the Eumenides Painter's Orestes demonstrate, depressive melancholia existed from early in antiquity. It emerges as a literary entity late within classical antiquity" (26). Toohey establishes a distinction between the Orestes of the picture and that of the Euripidean narrative; in other words, a distinction between the passive, depressive melancholy of the image, and the violent angry melancholy of the written word (27). U. on the other hand, caught in the postmodern collage of historical images and the endless unfolding of the (ever-distant) end, demonstrates both these characteristics: first depressive (*Satin Island* 122), then angry and violent:

I started to reassess my own part in it all [...] suffice to say that my own role was tiny – tiny and lowly. I was, quite literally, underground: secreted down among Koob-Sassen's, as among the Company's, foundations, its underpinnings [...] This afforded me no power to shape the Project in a formal or official way – but to *unshape* it, sabotage it even . . . That, I started whispering to myself, was another matter. Given licence to burrow, could I not sniff out central axes and supports, and undermine them? [...] could I not lift a spanner from my tool-bag and, when no one else was looking, drop this in the engine rooms, jamming Project-cogs and Project-levers? [...] Something as simple as providing faulty data, an intervention so mouse-like at point-of-entry, might engender, three or so steps down the chain, a sewer-monster of gargantuan proportions that, Godzilla-like, would rise up and smash everything [...] These fantasies grew on me. In my mind, I saw administrative buildings, bunkers, palaces come crashing down, heard glass splintering, stone tumbling, saw flames licking the skies: the Reichstag, Hindenburg, the falls of Troy and Rome, all rolled into one. (125-126)

When U. speaks of his part in it all, he is speaking about the nature of his being in this context: he is buried beneath the superstructure of belief and material culture (he is “seeing things shroudedly”), beneath the immensity of the Promethean project itself, with no hope of directing it or changing its method of operation. This is the hopeless state of staticity that is both ideologically thrilling, occasionally pleasing, and melancholic. While acknowledging his incapacity to add to this endeavour, to “shape” (control) it, he begins to ponder, to dream, about his potential as a saboteur, about his role as possible malfunction within the system of the Project. This is a fantasy of the return of subjectivity, of a being that is in some way distinct from (not equivalent to) the being of objects (in that it can at any time choose its own violence and death), a dynamic being as opposed to a static one: the being of the worker-ant rather than that of the elevated perspective of the idealist-anthropologist. Like Orestes, U.’s impassive and melancholic nature is seemingly betrayed by these episodes of mental violence and anger; where Toohey associates this behaviour with the idea that classical Greek narrative melancholy emphasizes the violence inherent in this condition, both the impassivity and violence of U. is displayed through his narrative fascination. Hence, rather than demonstrating a passive and static exterior that contrasts with an “agitated” interiority, U. demonstrates the duality of pure interiority, like that of Kant’s melancholic. He lacks exteriority, insofar as the text lacks any physical description of U., and insofar as everything in the novel is parsed into moments of intellectual fascination and dream-like visions: a lost relation to death is in this sense a lost relation to one’s own body, something demonstrated explicitly by Serge during his (dehumanising and suicidal) time in the Air Corps. It is U.’s interior that manifests that duality of agitation and melancholy stillness, through his contemplative and intellectual passage from passive melancholy to violent melancholy and back again (all the time through formalisms of research, revolt, and attempted resolution). Where melancholy appears as a combination of placid exterior and “agitated” interior is precisely in U.’s vision of it as a “black box”.

In his contemplation of his own ant-like role in the grand scheme of the Project and the Great Report, U. begins to be depressed by the fact that the value or meaning of his thought, as when he thinks he has solved the mystery of the dead skydiver (119-120), has been reduced to an automatic function of an externality. Where this is what the narrator of *Remainder* seems to desire, U. has now come to distrust this Project that is definitively beyond him, precisely because it is paradoxically already inside him. His desire to see it collapse culminates in the moment he shares those violent yearnings with Madison. She argues him out of it, noting that,

It isn’t revolutionaries and terrorists who make nuclear power plants melt and blow their tops, or electricity grids crash [...] they all do that on their own [...] You all want to be the hero in the

film who runs away in slo-mo from the villain's factory that he's just mined, throwing himself to the ground as it explodes. But the explosion's taking place already – it's always been taking place. You just didn't notice . . . (129).

As the Project and the Report seem to write themselves, they also, according to this logic, contain and condition their own undoing. The individual, the one who assumes the post-melancholic perspective of excess knowledge and information, is both present in and absent from this arrangement. U.'s anger at his own inconsequence and his internalized response to this description intimates that this logic is already built into his own notion of the anthropological perspective, and that it may lie at the heart of this dualistic melancholy:

I didn't know what to reply [...] I lay awake for a long time though, thinking about what she'd said. Lévi-Strauss claims that, for the isolated tribe with whom an anthropologist makes first contact – the tribe who, after being studied, will be decimated by diseases to which they've no resistance, then (if they've survived) converted to Christianity and, eventually, conscripted into semi-bonded labour by mining and logging companies – for them, civilization represents no less than a cataclysm. This cataclysm, he says, is the true face of our culture – the one that's turned away, from *us* at least. The order and harmony of the West, the laboratory in which structures of untold complexity are being cooked up, demand the emission of masses of noxious by-products. What the anthropologist encounters when he ventures beyond civilization's perimeter-fence is no more than its effluvia, its toxic fallout. The first thing we see as we travel round the world is our own filth, thrown into mankind's face. (129-130)

McCarthy himself states that what fascinates him about Lévi-Strauss's work is, "not so much its colourful accounts of Nambikwara ceremonies or Caduveo body art as its constant, melancholic undermining of itself (whence the *tristes* of his signature tome's title)" ("The Death of Writing"). This is descriptive of the melancholy of excess information, of the object of scrutiny dying, disappearing, for its having been studied and categorized and immersed in the endless stream of information. This is the melancholy of things having ended before they began, of desires having been sated, or goals achieved, by their very acknowledgement as goals or desires. This is the melancholy of the subject-object relation from which the object (its *end*: its ultimate iteration) is destined to retreat and disappear (for having never been there in the first place): the object becomes the stream of information, the toxic effluvia of the Project, the very excess that creates the need for buffering, and hence the stillness into which thought (simulated ends) might re-emerge. And yet, exemplifying the centrality of the loop structure to the novels, thought is never really absent from this melancholic condition: it is his thoughts in their relation to anthropological formalisms that give U. pleasure, that "please" him (a condition made notable by the absence of any mention of pleasure when U. and Madison have sex). It is through his formalized thoughts that U. idealises the Project and his position within it, and it is through his thinking that the formalisms of the Project are beyond his ken that he comes to view the Project as evil and entertains the possibility of helping to destroy

it. Unlike the Kantian position, U. does take Madison's opinion into account, folding it into his own version of the same thought. Acts of malfunction or catastrophe are pre-figured in the methods of anthropological study, in the same way that it is in the origins of being itself that we might identify the irrevocability of non-being. Having no longer any "perimeter fence" of civilization to cross over, the effluvia is no longer found on the outside, but is rather recycled endlessly within the "black box" of contemporary Western society, within a melancholy interiority that cannot seem to escape itself with the exuberant tools it uses to refashion its exterior, to escape other harsh or negative elements of reality (writing, novel, film, television, video). From the depths of depression and anger U., having been dissuaded from enacting fantasies of revolt and revolution, fantasizes about the early days of anthropology, where the discipline and the anthropologist were powerful enough to bring cataclysm directly into play. Madison's assertion precludes this fantasy of agency, while at the same time reconfiguring it by abandoning the specificity of the anthropological (excess, transgression, agency) and assuming the entirety of the world as the "explosion" that takes it down. The relation between U. and catastrophic malfunction becomes passive, like that of the anthropologist to the tribe: they are both passive unintentional vectors of catastrophe. Hence, in a sense, Madison is describing to U. the responsibility proper to his role and being, while rejecting the particularity of that being and thus the melancholy self-as-object of inward gaze: by doing your work, you bring about cataclysm, you do not need to *want* to blow anything up for it to explode. Not only does this prescription correspond to the idea that literary language has the potential to ignore the *intent* of the writer in its production of meaning, but it also makes the passivity of the subject into a mode of resistance. This is in essence the passive violence of language, the passive violence of trauma: a deceptive and fatal continuity that seeks to end them by ignoring them (a pleasing and paradoxically passive strategy). In other words, the relief of responsibility is not an act of removal, or deletion, so much as an act of extreme embedding, where the very existence of the subjects as they are "supposed" to exist (fulfilling their role, doing their duty) constitutes a sometimes pleasing, sometimes emotionally and physically detached continuity of responsibility.

The melancholy of the passage between eras constitutes a passivity that holds in reserve the potential to provoke the ire or the pleasure of those that it contains. It is the melancholy of a passive position in an active space: like the position of the anthropologist (in the field or the study) or the surveillance officer. This is the melancholy of the human position in the space between the subject and the object, the melancholy of the endless and repetitive passage between the two, where the metaphorical relation has become erotically charged (with its aspect of death and non-being) and taboo. The passage between eras is precisely the passage between two points that are both like and unlike each

other: two copies of the same iconic relation, metaphorically linked but temporally and (typically) spatially distinct. The melancholy of the contemporary is an unstable combination of isolation and connection, waiting for the iconic relation to stabilize. The passage between eras, as such, is a living space of convulsive signs and symbols, a dream space that has deprived the writer (and the individual) of their capacity to participate meaningfully in the “Great Report” that will describe the world to its end. It deprives them of their life ‘as writer’, or in McCarthy’s words:

These thoughts are difficult, elusive, hard to parse. Yet I suspect they are vital if we want to think of what it means to write today – to write, that is, in the shadow of omnipresent and omniscient data that makes a mockery of any notion that the writer might have something to inform us, and of a technologically underwritten capitalism that both writes and reads itself. We could quite easily dismiss these thoughts as French bollocks, brush them aside and pen great tales of authenticity and individual affirmation, even as the sands in which we’d need to bury our heads in order to do so are being blown away. Alternatively, we could explore, with trepidation and with melancholy joy, this ultra-paradoxical and zombie-like condition, this non-life-restoring resurrection that, if De Certeau is correct, is writing’s true and only lot, its afterlife. What would this afterlife look like? What forms might these melancholy-joyful explorations take? It is impossible to prescribe these – nor would I want to. I just hope they happen: let a thousand zombies bloom. (“The Death of Writing”)

What this melancholic “zombie-like” position causes the reader to question through its poetics (and the poetics of the veil in particular) is precisely the nature of this idealism: the idealism of an end to this project. Is it something we have lost in the passage between eras? Or does the passage between eras reveal to us the continuity of (political, semantic, economic, environmental) instability in the dream-mode of the interim? In the novels, ideals surrounding authenticity (*Remainder*), agency and anthropology (*Satin Island*), escape from human materiality (*C*), and devotion to the “holding pattern” (*Men in Space*), all crumble under the weight of the protagonists’ intellectual convictions: late-capitalist melancholy interiority erodes the very base of that interiority, leaving no self to loathe. Hence, if in Benjamin’s terms, melancholy writing is an act of bourgeois complicity, at the very least it reveals (like the narrator in the final scene of *Remainder*, like the saint in the icon) the ideal position of the bourgeois subject: hovering between sky and earth, not crashing into the latter or disappearing into the former, not needing any ground to stand on, and persisting precisely because of the perceived absence of that ground (the self as object of melancholic hate). McCarthy’s narratives show the rise and fall of these subjects, and as such have the potential to reproduce several melancholy perspectives. We see the perspective from the sky (which is simulated, or approximated in, the perspective of the middle) through U., through the narrator of *Remainder*, and through Serge. The perspective from the ground (of the ant, simulated in turn by the middle perspective) is represented by these three characters as well, but primarily in this chapter by the surveillance officer. The merging of perspectives in these novels is never a matter of empathy but of

communicational ecstasy: all perspectives are unified in the welcoming formalisms of the digital networks. U., for instance, learns the perspective of the ant from the outset, watching terrorist bombings and football matches on screens. When he begins to fantasize against the Project, he does so through the romantic images of modern mass communications' first terrorist celebrities: like the melancholy from which he suffers, his visions of resistance are already subsumed by the self-writing project he has come to resent and suspect, they treat death as if it did not share equal screen-time with the Baader-Meinhof gang. The pleasure and (self-aggrandizing) potential of contemporary mass media combine with the null presence (or formalized absence) of the subject caught within a "holding field". The point is that these characters rarely display the embodied emotional conditions related to melancholy or postmodern playfulness, and as such the duality of melancholy and postmodern pleasure is more akin to the sea of mental/verbal experience on which these characters float than a bodily experience of an individual. If we extend this analogy, we might say that they are caught in a process of being relayed between transmitters and receivers, where these are represented by melancholy and dark comedic pleasure (pleasure in insights that constitute the progression of a project with no hope of completion). We might also say, in their fictional guise, that these characters transmit signals of comedic pleasure and melancholy through the poetic formalisms of the text. In the following chapters I will explore the ethics that emerge from this passive violence, from the neutrality of agency that emerges out of the post-melancholy and comedy of the iconic relation.

Section 3

Abstract

In the following section I attempt to outline the ethics of McCarthy's novels, through their manifestation in an absent subjectivity animated by the art of disappearance into formalisms of language, technology and the anachronism of the trickster figure. In a world without a subject we might say there are endless formalisms. We might also argue that the field of formalisms absent the subject constitutes an objective expression of dualism, as each formalism contains the form of its own undoing; like symbolism, the success of a form leads to its death and disappearance, which can in turn lead it right back to its origins. By largely ignoring the traditional object of the novel form (the bourgeois subject or self), it is almost as if McCarthy removes Schrödinger from his own equation: without the subject doing the observing, everything enters an arena of dual potential or probability. The perspective absent the subject (the perspective of the object) sees everything at once, in its presence and absence. McCarthy's novels illustrate that duality, and in doing so the ethical mode identified by the object seeking the universal in us (and only really coming up with a coded set of formalisms). The universal ethics (the religious practice of the secular individualist) at play in the novels is understood here as an ethics of control and suspension modelled on the Enlightenment strategy of avoiding the uncertainty and instability of rhetoric simply by detouring around it, leaving it aside, or subjecting it to ridicule. Hence, a universal ethics begins to congeal around the absence of the subject, in the form of the violence directed at what I refer to as the gap of representation, where representation retains both its political and aesthetic meanings. These ethics are aligned against that gap, and are illustrated through the poetics of Madison's torture, Serge's technophilia and a simultaneously enforced and desirable passivity. Within this ethical imperative, irony emerges as another universal, demonstrated in the novels through a poetics of dualism that dissolves the two poles of contemporary literary ethics: modern discrimination and postmodern infinity. Irony is used to illustrate the concept of a "figure" that serves to *form* the movement of text, image and meaning (information), without supposedly conditioning the latter. However, in a world without subject, irony is universal, it is a condition in the sense that the subject is the only thing capable of putting an end to irony's linguistic vacillations. Irony is a universal form discourse *must* assume, when it has lost its relation to the subject. The ironic reversal of the symbolic relation leads to a universal pattern of ethics being revealed by their

very imperative: being identical with oneself. Irony constitutes the pattern of the ethics of positivity and presence, the ethics of the reality production imperative. Irony is the trace of movement, its repetitive pattern, trailing behind the disappearance of the subject in McCarthy's novels.

The trickster figure represents the universalized dualism that is the patterned (aesthetic or poetic) trace left of the subject, by the subject in its disappearance into these objective formalisms (themselves a constant mode of passage). The trickster figure is one universal formalism that seems to survive the disappearance of the subject, inasmuch as that disappearance into objects and signs liberates the subject into the position of the trickster. The trickster figure represents in the texts a poetic trace of a human paradox: the simultaneous desire for the comfort of confinement and the pleasure inherent in the risk of liberation. The trickster figure's traditional lack of concern for social boundaries and taboos, along with the tendency to confront and confound the gods, constitutes the universalism poeticized by McCarthy's novels. If there is a universal ethics identifiable in the absence of the subject or self, it is the dualistic ethics of self-consumption, which both speak to and reject this absence. If there is a mode of ethical resistance to be found in the form or content of the novels, it is a mode of challenge that lurks beneath the ideologically positive calls to produce more: more creation and creativity, more mediation, more reality, more meaning.

Chapter 7: The Power and Ethics of Disappearance

The idea of a post-melancholy state of being relies upon the possibility of detachment from what we might think of as a vital (life- and will-expressing) relation to *resistance* (an antagonistic assertion of will) at the same time as not suffering from the negative emotional affects of that lack. One explanation for this would be to suggest that this lack of relation to resistance is, at least partially, or for parts of society, a *relief*: even if it is or was a defining aspect of modern Western humanity's historical progression, it enacted conflict, violence and social division. Post-melancholy equates to something like a Pyrrhic *loss*: the loss (of a relation in this case) that actually amounts to a kind of victory, in the form of liberation from the condition of responsibility (in the way an amputation is a victory in the form of liberation from the condition of cancer or infection). However, it may be argued that along with the loss of the relation to resistance comes a loss of desire, or capacity, for the ethical or moral discrimination between actions, words or utterances that tend to intertwine with the ideal and responsibility of resistance. What replaces this tension without and within the subject is precisely a landscape of endless discrimination, lacking any ethical or moral gravity, thanks to the absence of an "other" that might confront this system with its own weight and unstable foundations.

Andrew Gibson for instance argues that discriminations of these sorts are essential to the modern literary ethics of certain prominent scholars. For Gibson, this brand of ethics "cannot allow for radical difference, heterogeneity, the thought of the incommensurable" (*Postmodernity, Ethics and the Novel* 11), which is to say that it is juxtaposed in his thinking with the ethically charged infinity of the Levinasian other. Gibson continues to suggest that this modern ethical thinking "[...] shrinks from imagining that there might be an ethical dimension to the relation to the indeterminable itself. Even more strikingly, perhaps, the ethics of the novel as classically conceived and as sustained by Rorty, Nussbaum, Booth, Parker and Goldberg seems to me to involve a particular form of what Albrecht Wellmer has called 'radical surpassing' and seen as characteristic of modernity" (*Ethics and the Novel* 11). Wellmer's notion of radical surpassing consists, according to Gibson, in "a movement whereby the given is transcended, observed from an Olympian height, constantly shadowed or overlooked by an ideal space" (*Ethics and the Novel*

11). In other words, radical surpassing allows for the relegation of the “incommensurable” from the ethical space of discrimination, thereby allowing discrimination to envision an eventual resolution. I intend to argue in this chapter that McCarthy’s novels represent neither a commitment to modern totalizing ethical criticism, nor a commitment to the Levinasian notion of ethical otherness supported by Gibson. Instead, what I hope to demonstrate is the convergence of the two strains of ethical criticism combined into the detached and indifferent ethical impulse of the reality production imperative. Albrecht Wellmer’s notion of radical surpassing is essential to this framework in that it represents the performative and ethical imperative of simulation (and the fundamental logical structure of de Man’s criticism of epistemology): the radical imperative to leave behind (to transcend our reliance on) all sources of the unpredictable, the accident, the disruption, death, friction and ambiguity in favour of an ascent into a “ideal space” of pure continuity. Serge in *C* views this ideal space from the observer’s seat in his airplane, a space whose gift (transcended “given”) is the certainty and comfort found in the notion that, “all displacement and acceleration, all shifts and realignments *must* proceed from the machine . . .” (*C* 156). The narrator of *Remainder* achieves this transcendence of the given (the appearance or aesthetics of it) by the end of the novel as he performs figure eights above the city of London, simultaneously acknowledging and ignoring his given fate: “Eventually the sun would set forever – burn out, *pop*, extinguish – and the universe would run down like a Fisher Price toy whose spring has unwound to its very end. [...] Or maybe, before that, we’d just run out of fuel” (*Remainder* 284). The given is transcended here by being divided: the fate of all life, to slowly wind down and die, is put into play not as fate but as one *possibility*. In *Men in Space*, this perspective is represented in one of the highest technological achievements of a failing empire: the cosmonaut orbiting the planet without a home to return to. The given of territorial disintegration and the chaotic historical passage between eras is combined within a perspective of impossibly wide scope, a perspective which itself, without the aid of political machinations, might serve to destabilize and reconstitute the meaning of the word “home”. *Satin Island* also deploys the notion of “home” in its landscape of radical surpassing. It sets out its position as a radically surpassed setting of productive opposition from the beginning through the anthropological aesthetics of the text: the potential discrimination between field and home, for instance, is always already absent. Like the cosmonaut, the global perspective of the Western anthropologist (the reality producing subject) now serves to problematize the “given” relation between self and other, raising the anthropological (subjective) perspective to the “Olympian heights” of radical surpassing, reproduced in the text when U. envisions the Koob-Sassen Project:

I saw towers rising in the desert – splendid, ornate constructions, part modern skyscraper, part sultan’s palace lifted from *Arabian Nights*: steel and glass columns segueing into vaulted cupolas and stilted arches, tiled *muqarnas*, dwindling minarets that seemed, at their cloud-laced peaks, to shed their own materiality, turn into vapour. Below them, hordes of people – thousands, tens of thousands – laboured, moving around like ants, their circuits forming patterns on the sand; patterns that, in their amalgam, coalesced into one larger, more coherent pattern, just as the meandering, bowing, divagating stretches of a river delta do when seen from high enough above. What were they doing, all these ant-like labourers? (*Satin Island* 63-4)

From the heights, or we might say the edge, of totalization, an ideal congeals in the form of a radical surpassing of that which might destabilize the modern ethical super-structure. U.’s vision of the Project replicates the heights of radical surpassing and yet through its anthropological guise (veil) it demonstrates the trace or remainder of nothingness, or an absence of understanding, which serves to leave the process open-ended (the question remains: “What were they doing [...]?”) and hence allows it to continue. Though an understanding of the meaning of the scurrying figures and their labour is implicit in the language of the text used to describe them (their nature as insects, and hence the nature of their work instinctual as opposed to willing, is implicitly given), it is obfuscated by the very anthropological imperative to form these kinds of questions, which persists as a trace of absent understanding in the form of the question that ends the extract above. Radical surpassing proposes a form of simulated continuity as the preferred method for confronting the reality of discontinuity, vulnerability and death. I would suggest that we might locate a linguistic form of radical surpassing identified by Paul de Man in the heart of enlightenment epistemology which informs the ethics of reality production as they are extended into contact with the ethical literary criticism mentioned by Gibson above. When considering the ethics of simulation or radical surpassing, what we are in fact considering is an ethical relation to what will be referred to below as the ‘gap of representation’. According to theorists like Jean Baudrillard and Umberto Eco, this gap is in the process of being (or has already been, in the case of the former) eliminated. To refer back to an Eco quotation in the chapter on timelessness, simulation refers to a situation where, “Absolute unreality is offered as real presence. [...] the sign aims to be the thing, to abolish the distinction of the reference, the mechanism of replacement. Not the image of the thing, but its plaster cast. Its double, in other words” (7). What I intend to assert in what follows is that simulation of this order, the modern capitalist cultural imperative to expose, reveal, and denude, is an ethical expression inasmuch as it views its culmination as the elimination of doubt, crisis, accident, sickness, vulnerability and death (a transcending of the temporal/spatial limitations of the body that compliments the ideological state of both in late capitalism). The humanist ethics of simulation, we might say, casts as wide a net as simulation

itself, seeking to gather together all information, all appearances in order that their referents might be made inert, predictable, and hence safe for human life.

The Ethics of Represented Absence

In an essay entitled “The Epistemology of Metaphor”, Paul de Man breaks down the process of radical surpassing in the epistemology of Enlightenment philosopher John Locke. He notes that Locke’s philosophy is the bedrock of the contemporary claim that, “the common sense of empirical British philosophy owes much of its superiority over certain continental metaphysical excesses to its ability to circumscribe, as its own style and decorum demonstrate, the potentially disruptive power of rhetoric” (*Aesthetic* 34). Locke establishes this perspective, ironically, through a metaphorical relation to women in his society, when he states that “*Eloquence*”, meaning rhetoric, “like the fair sex, has too prevailing beauties in it to suffer itself ever to be spoken against. And it is in vain to find fault with those arts of deceiving wherein men find pleasure to be deceived” (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk. 3, ch. 9, p. 88-87; cited in *Aesthetic Ideology* 36). As de Man puts it: “Nothing could be more eloquent than this denunciation of eloquence. It is clear that rhetoric is something one can decorously indulge in as long as one knows where it belongs [...] Out of place, among the serious affairs of men [...] it is a disruptive scandal” (*Aesthetic* 36). From the outset then, rhetoric is afforded a place in society by the philosopher: its proper place is floating free in the void of libidinal and economic meaninglessness (its features are enjoyment and transmissibility). It becomes precisely irrelevant, *merely* aesthetic, like Locke’s female contemporaries; it calls for ridicule if used in serious discussions *without knowing how it should be used* (without being an authority), and it equally stands as nothing special when deployed in serious discussion by those who do know that *it should not be used there* (like Locke here). Inasmuch as the ethical relation to rhetoric expressed here has been adopted by late capitalist society in general⁴⁶, it is precisely the diminution and obfuscation of the vital importance of fiction, rhetoric, and verbal misdirection that sneaks *exactly those agents* past the castle walls and into the ivory towers of objective and consensual knowledge.

The ethics of rhetoric expressed here are based on authority via/as knowledge: knowledge of the danger rhetoric poses absolves those that deploy it in the name of that knowledge, while ignorance of

⁴⁶ Primarily this can be seen in terms of what has come to be known as online discourse, or more broadly speaking, forms of expression relying on social media and comment sections. Without the mutually acknowledged gap of representation or interpretation to serve as the meeting point of perspectives, we are left only with blind assertions of validity and invalidity; the act of enunciation itself becomes the sign of the self-evident validity of the content.

that danger (the absence of authority) combined with its epistemological deployment constitutes that which must be corralled into appropriate spaces. These ethics, in a sense, are undermined (made redundant) precisely by the knowledge one has of them. If one knows the danger (is an authority on it), one is presumed capable of exercising that authority over the rhetoric or eloquence deployed. Rhetoric, in this sense, has been radically surpassed: its given danger has been circumscribed by the “ideal space” of philosophical authority. We can see a similar structure in the “Settlement” agreed to by the narrator of *Remainder*. The ethics of radical surpassing are deployed to obfuscate the nature of the accident and the identity of those responsible for it; as such what we are shown is a naturally (physically) and legally/economically enforced combination of potency and ignorance, a combination which allows for the ethics (the problem) of responsible action to be surpassed. Locke’s resultant theory of language that seeks to ‘know’ and hence acquire the capacity to bend rhetoric to the ends of knowledge, “turns out to be in fact a theory of tropes [...] Locke’s reflection on the use and abuse of words will not start from the words themselves, be it as material or grammatical entities, but from their meaning” (*Aesthetic* 36-7).

De Man begins by demonstrating that Locke’s *simple ideas* are in fact ideas so complex as to defy understanding or definition. Taking the terms ‘motion’ and ‘light’ as examples, Locke illustrates how attempts to define these simple ideas fail, but end up as successful translations, as *motion* translates to *passage* but fails to define it. In terms of ‘light’, Locke makes an attempt to break free of this chain of semantic associations by arguing that “to understand light is to be able to make this very distinction between the actual cause and the idea (or experience) of a perception, between apperception and perception. When we can do this, says Locke, then the *idea* is that which is *properly* light, and we come as close as we can come to the proper meaning of “light” (*Aesthetic* 38). This begs the ultimate question that distinguishes language as a theory of tropes: what is the meaning of X (where X in this case stands for “idea”)? For de Man, the answer to this question is an etymological translation of “idea” into its original Greek “eide”, which “itself means light”, culminating in the deconstructed tautology: “that understanding is to see the light of light and is therefore itself light” (*Aesthetic* 38). Hence, the same problem established by the “simple idea” of motion confronts the “simple idea” of light, or even the idea of idea itself. The motion required to grasp these “simple ideas” (translation) seems to be an uncontrollable one, one which tends to extend far beyond the scope of the original meaning, but at the same time always retaining a trace of the relation denied by this repetitive movement, persisting in the form of metaphorical similarity.

De Man then follows the path of this always-extending and yet always-circular movement into Locke’s consideration of “substances” and “mixed-modes”, the remaining two categories of his theory of

ideas. He explains that Locke understands substances to refer to both, “a collection of properties” and “an essence which supports these properties as their ground. The example used for the first model of a substance is “gold” (*Aesthetic* 39). Gold, in other words, can refer to a variety of expressions of the idea “gold”, from a nugget of metal and rock to “the shining yellow part of a peacock’s tail” (Locke, qtd. in *Aesthetic* 39). This, for de Man, shows that Locke’s properties “actually move and travel” (*Aesthetic* 39), which is to say that they are like tropes. Locke tempers his example of gold as a peacock feather by connecting this movement to the ineptitude of children for whom “the shining yellow part of the peacock’s tail is properly to them gold” (Locke, qtd. in *Aesthetic* 39). Gold in this reading is a trope, and as such Locke’s description of substance as a collection of properties gets closer and closer to a description of metaphorical similarity rather than definition. According to de Man:

The closer the description [of substance as collection of properties] comes to that of metaphor, the more dependent Locke becomes on the use of the word “properly”. Like the blind man who cannot understand the idea of light, the child who cannot tell the figural from the proper keeps recurring throughout eighteenth-century epistemology as a barely disguised figure of our universal predicament. For not only are tropes, as their name implies, always on the move – more like quicksilver than like flowers or butterflies, which one can at least hope to pin down and insert in a neat taxonomy – but they can disappear altogether, or at least appear to disappear. Gold not only has a colour and a texture, but it is also soluble. (*Aesthetic* 39)

It is this quality of disappearance, or solubility, that constitutes the connection between trope and substance-as-properties: the trope, like gold, contains the capacity for, or property of, its own disappearance. Hence, when Locke cannot find reason for the fact that “fusibility” is considered part of the essence of gold, and “solubility” just a property, he suggests that “no one has authority to determine the signification of the word “gold” (as referred to such a body existing in nature)” (Locke, qtd. in *Aesthetic* 39). This is to conclude that the proper meaning of gold-as-substance, is too easily found to disappear behind improper, childlike usage, so much so that authority over its meaning is abandoned to an endless tropic unfolding. The attempt to control the trope, or rhetoric’s meaning-production, must always fail. Hence, what is ethical is the radical surpassing of that inevitability through the assertion of the ideal space of authority. Once again, it is the concept of authoritative propriety in terms of philosophical knowledge that is established as ethical, and yet at the same time the nature of the impropriety this ethics necessarily establishes (and opposes) seems beyond control. Properties accumulated as substance are themselves unable to fix the meaning of the name of that substance, in this case “gold”. As de Man puts it:

Properties, it seems, do not properly totalize, or, rather, they totalize in a haphazard and unreliable way. It is indeed not a question of ontology, of things as they are, but of authority, of things as they are decreed to be. And this authority cannot be vested in any authoritative body, for the free usage of ordinary language is carried, like the child, by wild figuration which

will make a mockery of the most authoritarian academy. We have no way of defining, of policing, the boundaries that separate the name of one entity from the name of another; tropes are not just travelers, they tend to be smugglers and probably smugglers of stolen goods at that. What makes matter even worse is that there is no way of finding out whether they do so with criminal intent or not. (*Aesthetic* 39)

Properties, and what is proper according to Locke, have nothing to do with reality or metaphysics according to de Man, but rather with authority. However, this authority is weakened from the outset by the nature of the quarry it sets for itself, and de Man locates the slipperiness of tropes embedded in each of Locke's categories of idea.

This is where disappearance comes to assume its importance. What tropes like gold smuggle from point to point is precisely a trace of the absence, the nothingness, which is the essence or foundation of the tropological passage itself: the absence or solubility of understanding, of light, that begs the question of meaning and definition. What Locke is shown to do here in de Man's essay, is to secure the validity of his philosophy by circling around the absence at its heart long enough to make the act of circling (continuous surpassing) itself the source of validity. The control exerted by the superior British empiricism mentioned by de Man is precisely that of knowledgeable ignorance, a cultured and practised repression of foundational doubt, which promises both a foundation for self-importance and other-ridicule. Rhetoric and its semantic fecundity, in the case of *Remainder*, are precisely what is denied the narrator both by the accident itself and by the settlement that erases (legally and economically) the accident. If Locke's circling around the slipperiness of tropes is what lends validity to both his work and to Western Enlightenment epistemology generally, then the narrator's circling around the slipperiness of his memory (of the accident) first poetically in the form of coma-dreams of "sports stadiums mainly, running tracks and cricket pitches" (*Remainder* 6), and then in his re-enactments, can be understood as a re-iteration of the Lockean move. Locke establishes what is ethical through his own authority but breaks this ethical code in doing so, resulting in an ethical imperative which, like gold, suddenly appears to be defined by the precise and imminent nature of its solubility. This is because ethics are necessarily a derivative of fiction, of ideals, of discriminations between ideals, of meaning, which is to say, the moment where ethics dissolve and are made redundant is the moment of complete (simulated) ethical objectivity, of total understanding, a final settling of discriminatory accounts. The narrator of *Remainder* confronts from the outset a similar brand of authority, one that attempts to control the movement of one trope in particular: the accident. It seems, according to the rules of the Settlement and the ethics of exchange it represents, that a novelistic authority has succeeded where de Man claims such control is impossible in reality, precisely thanks (as with Locke and rhetoric) to the very thing it seeks to erase (the accident):

"What are the terms?" I asked.

"For your part," he told me, "you can't discuss the accident in any public arena or in any recordable format. To all intents and purposes, you must forget it ever happened."

"I've already forgotten," I said. "I never had any memory of it in the first place." (*Remainder* 8)

Eloquence controlled by eloquence in Locke, accident erased by accident in *Remainder*: each not only leaves a trace of that which it seeks to control or eliminate, respectively, but also *requires* that trace to perform the movements of control or elimination. In other words, the attempt to exert control over the trope of the accident in the novel is antecedent to its goal of control, which is to say, that which it seeks control over is precisely what exercises this mode of control.

For Gibson, the modern ethics of discrimination rely upon the novel's capacity for mimetic representations of reality. Gibson's analysis makes clear that the modern ethical critique of theory generally revolves around the unethical nature of obscurity and complex meanings, of anything that produces a stumbling block for ethical discrimination:

[...] the view of ethical value dominant since the rise of theory leaves the reader 'unconstrained by any substantive account of text-guidedness' in ethical judgement (*ETN*, p.29). The advent of theory and what Parker calls its 'neo-Nietzschean' challenge has made reading narrative merely a straying in a moral wilderness (*ETN*, p.32). Novels can no longer offer directives which tell us about the way people are and how to discriminate amongst them. Theory has stripped us of our faith in the constancy of moral structures, of novels as underpinned or determined by, even finally identical with those structures. (*Ethics and the Novel* 6)

In other words, a lack of clarity or mimetic relation between the world of the reader/writer and text is an ethical failure in that it denies the mimetic and hence ethical authority of discrimination. In this sense, this discriminatory agency is by definition not the reader themselves, but the text. This kind of text, through the deployment of an unthinking and mimetic self-evidence, thinks itself, much like the Great Report that U. fears is writing itself in *Satin Island*. We can extrapolate from the use of the term "text-guidedness" a certain enmity towards the *disruptive thought* of the isolated subject or theory, and toward directionless thought (like the roller-bladers in *Satin Island*), towards a moment where the simultaneity of sign and object is not stretched out into the coded slow-motion continuity of the contemporary, but is rather concentrated into the limited frame of our textual and metaphorical relation to things. In simpler terms, to be guided is to have momentarily eluded the nature and responsibility of reading: to actively (as opposed to reactively) confront ambiguity and undecidability. The only obstacle that remains is the process of decoding the language of the guide, a process which Serge demonstrates is taken to with a kind of dire (suicidal) enthusiasm in the disconnected isolation of a bourgeois English family in the early 20th century. Gibson articulates this desire for guidance by the object (text) as a fundamental aspect of a

modern notion of ethics that valorizes above all else discrimination, totalization and clarity; in other words, for the author modern ethics of discrimination are active in writing, but they actually make the reader a passive passenger of the text, tacitly lending its critical support to the least interesting, least disruptive, most comforting and commercial kinds of ethical discriminations (and novels). This ethics is confronted by Gibson through what amounts to a post-structuralist, Levinasian ethics of the “incommensurable”, which through reference to Levinas is centered around the concept of the “[...] the principle of infinity as revealed in the other. Levinas understands this infinity, in the Cartesian sense, as always overflowing the thought that thinks it. The ethical relation, then, is a relation to infinity rather than the thought of totality, and begins precisely as the other in its infinity exceeds my representation of it, in the faltering or failing or ‘ruin’ representation.” (*Ethics and the Novel* 57). This is an ethics based on the confrontation with what is infinitely beyond my idea of it, an “other” whose inaccessible depths of being exceed my capacity to completely understand, conquer, or control. What I want to argue, through reference to both Gibson and Baudrillard, is that neither the modern ethical sensibility related to totality nor the post-structuralist ethical sensibility related to the infinity of the other apply completely to McCarthy’s novels. Instead, these novels demonstrate the ethics of Baudrillard’s post-orgy society of simulation: they are the modern ethics of totalization applied to the already totalized world of globalized Western Enlightenment. The ethics of totalization, when faced with their completed project (the simulated appearance of it), enter into a circular logic meant only to sustain their validity by always circulating and producing *traces* of nothingness, death and incompleteness. They are a poetic ethics of completion, in that all ethical attempts at completion reverse into attempts at deconstruction and disintegration when only “nothing” seems beyond the horizon of totalization. In terms that will be explained below, the ethics of completion, the ethos of reality production in the form of simulation, realizes its opposite (its “other”) as absence, nullity and death, precisely because this ethos seeks continuity through their elimination. For this reason, we need to be able to read absence and presence at once, and understand the ethical import of the “gap” between the real and its representation.

Representation and the Gap

This gap is, according to Woodward, at the crux of Baudrillard’s simulation. Simulation is, in his terms,

[...] the loss of the distance between representation and the real. Baudrillard argues that when simulations no longer refer to an independent real, there is a confusion between models and their referents, resulting in a generalized epistemological nihilism. Theories float free from any

reference in the real: each theory produces its own “real,” and there is thus no independent reference by which one theory may be judged better or worse than another. Simulation therefore leads to a relativism of all theory and the impossibility of knowledge. (Woodward)

The fact that McCarthy still populates his novels with clear, detailed descriptions (almost exclusively of objects and their parts, almost never of human bodies) indicates a back-handed (reversed, twisted) reproduction of modern ethical criticism; his novels perform the idea of a traumatic obsession with knowledge, certainty, and reality breaking down and resorting to the use of what it imagines as part of its “real”: rhetoric, fiction, symbol. This is precisely, however, their vehicle of simulation. For example, after the accident the narrator of *Remainder* metaphorically illustrates the late capitalist mechanism of control that precipitates his perception of himself as inauthentic, in terms of “rerouting”: “Rerouting is exactly what it sounds like: finding a new route through the brain for commands to run along [...] To cut and lay new circuits, what they do is make you visualize things. Simple things, like lifting a carrot to your mouth” (*Remainder* 19). The visual premise is instructive, in that it speaks to the general tone and style of McCarthy’s narration in all of the novels: largely constituted by a combination of physical description and poetic, semantically charged representations of the banal. As Locke’s simple ideas in the hands of de Man are broken down into elusive meanings, the narrator proceeds to explain how this simple action can be deconstructed into its constituent movements and explained to him piecemeal: “Understanding this, and picturing yourself lifting the carrot to your mouth, again and again and again, cuts circuits through your brain that will eventually allow you to perform the act itself. That’s the idea” (20). Visuals, images, which is to say models or formalisms of reality, precede the acts they represent: this is precisely Woodward’s description of simulation in its premise of bringing representation and object together as one. And yet, what the narrator finds is that “[...] the act itself, when you actually come to try it, turns out to be more complicated than you thought” (20), not because of the complexity of the movements but because of the unpredictable physical nature of the actual carrot: “[...] they bring you a fucking carrot, gnarled, dirty and irregular in ways your imaginary carrot never was, and they stick it in your hands – and you know, you just know as soon as you see the bastard thing that it’s not going to work” (20). The narrator’s frustration comes through clearly in this passage, not as bodily affect but as an intellectual *fact* that has persisted beyond the event into the retrospective viewpoint of the narration, a fact that frustratingly survives the narrative: the gap between ideal and actual. The narrator summarizes this disembodied frustration with the rerouting process when he declares: “No Doing without Understanding: the accident bequeathed me that forever, an eternal detour” (22). The frustration on display in this poetic summary is precise: it is the frustration of the deferred arrival of the interim, a spatially and temporally extended passage, frustration disembodied (made superficial) by the desire to not jeopardize the *eventual* arrival at the destination. This

is frustration at being late to the fun, tempered by the optimistic encouragement of the detour: the road is not blocked, after all, only a little longer than expected. This is the forever-frustrated faith of the revolutionary: pre- and post-revolution, they confront the frustration of an endless series of detours that lead both towards and away from resolution, in their grappling between ideal and actual. This detour is the source of his inauthenticity, this need to understand ahead of time fixes him and his activity within the horizon of what is understood or understandable, denying him the relation to what Gibson has called the “incommensurable”, or the “other” which exceeds our idea of it. The narrator of *Remainder* treats this detour precisely as that which is incommensurable with his idea of reality (simulation), a gap that kept him from uniting completely with the world.

In an early scene with his friend Greg, the narrator explains that, because he must understand everything before he is able to do it as a result of the accident, he sees himself as “artificial” and “plastic” (*Remainder* 23). He then contrasts this feeling with the impression he gets of Robert de Niro’s character in *Mean Streets*, revealing not only his sense of authenticity but his sense of the real as well: “I mean he’s all relaxed, malleable. He flows into his movements, even the most basic ones. Opening fridge doors, lighting cigarettes. He doesn’t have to think about them, or understand them first. He doesn’t have to think about them because he and they are one. Perfect. Real. My movements are all fake. Second-hand” (23). What is real for the narrator is what Woodward describes as simulation: the absence of a gap between representation and object. In particular, the real is defined by the absence of a distinction or discrimination between de Niro’s *body* and everything else (a theme that is poetically repeated in the closing section of *C*). What is vital to note is that the narrator is alienated from his body, which is to say it does not meet his threshold of reality, precisely because of the need for and presence of knowledge of how it works. In the form of the moving image, everything appears unified into a single (unambiguous, stable) form for the narrator; this unity is exemplary of what Baudrillard calls the code. The code, according to Woodward,

[...] is a system of rules for the combination of stable sets of terms into messages. In capitalist consumer societies, these messages take the form of *signals*, signs which have a unidirectionality from sender to receiver and are irreversible. In this sense, the code is an objective system which imposes itself on subjects, who cannot in turn influence or change the code itself. [...] The code reduces ambiguity in meaning by imposing a structured system of clear distinctions and categories on social relations. Advertising is a means of disseminating the code, attaching specific sign values to specific objects and structuring social reality according to this reductive system of meanings. In its twin function of *reduction* and *deferral*, the code is in effect a semiological model of how nihilism manifests in the contemporary capitalist system: it employs the semiological theory of meaning to articulate the impoverishment of existential meaning. (Woodward)

The code is, in a sense, the positivized sense of the term 'detour', in that it is a system of reduction and deferral. This begs the question: reduction and deferral of what? The answer is the reduction and deferral of the responsibility towards "existential meaning", meaning not in a direct mimetic relation with a sign. The code serves in Baudrillard's early theory, as the film does in *Remainder*, to unite difference in an ideological and metaphorical celebration of similarity, the coded communication of sameness. Within the regime of the code, the meaning of the sign is fixed, and this fixity brings comfort by acting as the similarity it seeks: terms and signs are united in their semiological and semantic rigidity. Paradoxically, by coding reality along the ethical lines of control and predictability, we arrive at the point where what is completely out of control, completely unpredictable, seems to have (like the "Other" and the "field" in *Satin Island's* anthropological context) withdrawn from the field. In other words, an ethics of control inevitably simulates its absence through simulating its universal presence and singular authority. Total control, simulated or otherwise, establishes discrimination as redundant, which is to say: it would be a setting within which everything had already been perfectly outlined, extracted and discriminated.

If discrimination is necessary for ethics, then what possible ethics could an indiscriminate totality like the film image (or novel) express? The narrator here seems unable to discriminate between his being real and the reality of an actor on screen, or rather, he reverses the typical polarity of such a discrimination, indicating that the moving image is in fact more real and more authentic than his own body. This effectively re-illustrates de Man's notion of the Enlightenment's metaphorically ignorant child who cannot tell the difference between the literal and the rhetorical, while at the same time adding a patina of extreme positivity to this trope: the narrator is not *simply* the chaotic child who cannot choose between rhetoric and reality and hence is apt to unpredictably misuse the former to the detriment of the latter (though he is this as well), he has demonstrated the reversal or 'anastrophe' of that "problem" into itself, where the problem of rhetoric/representation is solved by representation. With a raising up of the image to the level of imaginary ideal the gap between representation and reality is resolved, and this is accompanied in *Remainder* by first establishing the body and the material as the promise of inevitable failure.

The first mention we get of the settlement and its silence clause is on the opening page of the novel: "And then there's the Requirement. The Clause. The terms of the settlement drawn up between my lawyer and the parties, institutions, organizations – let's call them the *bodies* – responsible for what happened to me [...]" (*Remainder* 5). This is a deliberate act of what we might call authorial or narrative discrimination which identifies that which is responsible for, or the source of, the accident that requires

the narrator be bio-medically and financially reconstructed. A similar act of discrimination occurs shortly afterwards, when the narrator describes the day he was notified of the settlement. After getting cut off, the narrator's lawyer repeats what he had just explained to him, before the narrator asks if the silence clause is truly enforceable:

"It most certainly is," he answered. "Given the status of these parties, these, uh, institutions, these, uh . . ."

"Bodies," I said.

"...bodies," he continued, "almost anything's enforceable [...]" (13)

Once again, the source of the accident almost defies identification, until the term bodies is settled on, for both the first and second time. This is, after all, a scene which necessarily preceded its recollection on the first page, and yet the initial indecision is repeated from a retrospective narrative perspective. I would suggest that this illustrates the virtually totalized conditions of what Baudrillard calls obscenity. Obscenity is described as the opposite of "the stage" with its "[...] gaze and distance, play and otherness" (*Passwords* 27). Obscenity is a condition of cultural imperative that Baudrillard sees as synonymous with the pornographic and the disappearance of the body as medium of unpredictability, ambiguity and secrecy: "[...] in pornography the body is, in its entirety, *realized*. Perhaps the definition of obscenity might be, then, the becoming-real, the becoming-absolutely-real, of something which until then was treated metaphorically, or had a metaphorical dimension [...] Here there is no play, no dialectic or separation, but a total collusion of the elements" (*Passwords* 27-28). Obscenity is in essence the reversed reality that the narrator perceives through the lens of his own inauthenticity: the shining truth of the moving image, the result of a "total collusion" between technical eye and object and the absence of the gap of representation, understood here as a "metaphorical dimension" of an object. This is what is presented to him as real and ideal during his reconstruction, specifically because his (scientific) reconstruction insists that a precedent understanding and knowledge is required of him before all his movements: it insists upon the reduction of the epistemological gap between executor and executed action in the form of understanding. What disappears is precisely the metaphorical element of the body that allowed for both play and death, and demanded the precession of a scientific model: the accidental. The bodies that do not ontologically grasp themselves and their surroundings totally (de Man's figure of the ignorant child) invite the accidental into their lives, hence, if we are to reduce the accidental, we must reduce the agency and centrality of the body. That the body or "bodies" is the source of the accident is clear; what is less clear is how this relates to the ethical.

In terms of the ethical, the body represents the nexus of both Levinasian ethics (in terms of the face) and the ethics of vulnerability, where the body is understood as a mode of conveying a universal and unifying experience in terms of empathy for and identification with bodily vulnerability like age, injury, trauma, violence, etc. (Ganteau 1). In The discrimination against the body and the material in general in the novels has been noted (Lea 467; Attridge; Deresiewicz 35; Sarikaya-Şen), yet it does not indicate the rejection of the modern ethics of totality in favour of the Levinasian ethics of embodied otherness or infinity, but rather their coming together (co-presence) under the auspices of what Baudrillard calls the “imaginary”. Woodward describes the imaginary as follows:

For Baudrillard, this term indicates that “other” against which the self is defined, or that which is excluded by a system in its self-definition. Each term in a binary opposition functions as the imaginary of the other term: man is the imaginary of woman and vice versa, the Third World is the imaginary of the First World and vice versa, and so on. According to Baudrillard, simulated systems which have lost their reference in the real hide this loss by producing an imaginary, an opposite, which maintains the illusion that this reference still operates by upholding the binary oppositions which require this reference. Baudrillard calls this “the strategy of the real” or “the strategy of deterrence”. (Woodward)

The imaginary in this sense is the consequence of simulation acting as an ethos of control, acting as a response to secrecy, death and absence (all metaphorical stand-ins for that which lies beyond the horizon of the system). However, it pursues this ethics of control through the reversal and realization of these extremes into the beneficent positivity of information and knowledge. As a result, the destruction of the negative is performed as the production of the positive: death, absence, secrecy and decay all acquire the presence of the visual, the apparent, or the image. This is, in effect, what the narrator of *Remainder* is trying to accomplish in his re-enactments: to realize the ideal space ‘beyond’ his own inherent inauthenticity, an ideal space that is ironically and perhaps even somewhat torturously dangled before his eyes on the film screen. That this ideal space is already realized in the form of the image represents the detour around the gap of representation, passing by the relation with the beyond rather than confronting it. Representing this absent relation for McCarthy involves, not withdrawal or subtraction, but addition: in the place of affect, emotion and bodily experience, he inserts a continuous flow of detached, intellectual poetics; poetics that speak to the absence of the incommensurable or the classic “other” through their irrepressible attribution of form, understanding and meaning to that which they confront. Bodilessness and indifference to the body can be poetically expressed in a variety of ways, yet Baudrillard describes the body that projects this imaginary in poetic terms that convert the body to a culpable “they”, in what reads *almost* like a collective character sketch from the perspective of McCarthy’s protagonists:

We are in a social trance: vacant, withdrawn, lacking meaning in our own eyes. Abstracted, irresponsible, enervated. They have left us the optic nerve, but all the others have been disabled. It is in this sense that information has something of dissection about it: it isolates a perceptual circuit, but disconnects the active functions. All that is left is the mental screen of indifference, which matches the technical in-difference of the images.

Like those people walking in the streets of Sarajevo who pass by with just a furtive glance at the body of a woman killed in the shelling, as though at a cat that had been run over. Neither mourning nor compassion. This is exactly the way the whole of Europe passes by the corpse of Bosnia, without any real emotion, except the work of mourning we carry out on ourselves. (*Perfect Crime* 144)

To a limited extent, this quotation speaks to the combination of content and style in McCarthy's work. There is a trance-like, dream-like pace (Namwali Serpell 250) to his writing, and we might very well describe the page in McCarthy's novels as a "mental screen of indifference, which matches the technical in-difference of the images" in terms of the affectless, formalized and largely emotionless perspectives we encounter. However, this first "indifference" also comes across in terms of the overwhelming absence of explicit ethical discriminations (lending ethical significance to the isolated moments in which they do arise); the latter "in-difference" speaks to the ontological unity produced through the code. Despite the presence of a vague and rhetorical connection to McCarthy's style generally, this extract speaks directly to one character in particular who embodies the bodilessness of this description: Serge's sister Sophie in *C*. First, we must think of this "social trance" as the consequence of seduction by the code. It is precisely through the poetics of taboo eroticism and communicational zeal that the reader is introduced to Sophie's obsession with codes and code-breaking. She begins being excited by the idea of the code (and the power/thrill of deciphering it) when family friend Widsun cracks the coded messages of illicit lovers in the daily newspaper over breakfast (*C* 59).

The code, which in Woodward's reading consists of a stable system of semiotic semantics, is reproduced through Sophie and Widsun in less theoretical terms. The code is not only a bridge between appearance and meaning, but the metaphorical bridge between Sophie's adolescence/innocence and her adulthood/experience. In fact, the gap that the code closes between word and object is analogous to the closing of the metaphorical gap between childhood and adulthood, in that both spaces are more than oppositional, offer more than a simple presence that confirms an absence. We might even say that Widsun stands for Locke and Sophie for the 18th-century figure of the child who does not know the difference between rhetoric and reality: but here we see that the child can be made into an authority (or operator of an automated kind of authority). This gap is precisely the space in which process, progress and change act out their unpredictability and ambiguity. By eliminating this gap, the code offers a sense of comfort, certitude, and epistemological and ontological stability in its place (to both Widsun and Sophie). However,

as we see in the novels and as is expressed in Baudrillard's quotation above, the comfort and stability of the code produces a subject whose connection to those positive outcomes is almost entirely visual and detachedly intellectual. It is precisely this social position, that of the detached and isolated retina, that is ethical and good because it is the position that accommodates and facilitates the *making-present* of things.

For Baudrillard, information 'dissects' the body towards which it is aimed, making every human sense but that contained in the visual cortex excessive, cutting them away and leaving only the eye. Sophie represents precisely this subject dissected and pornographically revealed by her embedding in the code. The poetics of Sophie's short life lead us from the code as point of traumatic departure, through a series of metaphorical sexual encounters (on mental screens both literal and figurative), to death, dissection, re-animation, taxonomic classification and finally suicide. Her narrative is a shorthand for the basic structure of all the novels: the search for connection in a state of suspension, consisting of repetition and leading inevitably to death either as concept or veiled experience.

The first sexual encounters of Sophie and Widsun are depicted with a certain metaphorical indifference given their illicit nature. Sex in these scenes is interpreted through what Serge heard and saw, without the cypher of experience to break down the walls separating him from and defining for him what he thinks is an energetic act of code-breaking: "Serge, no longer allowed into Widsun's room with her, hears shrieks and squeals each time she finds or breaks a cipher, mixed with Widsun's deep roars of approval. Occasionally she passes him in the corridor as she emerges with her hair messed up and ink splattered and smudged across her face" (C 61). In the act of code-breaking, discrimination is ethically irrelevant, in that the act is just a matter of discrimination in the form of guided repetition, until the message is revealed: it is the act of revelation (denuding) that is ethical here, independently of the content of the message revealed. The reception and semantic discrimination of a single message might be an ethical statement if the situation somehow charged this message with the stakes of death or suffering. However, the reception and deciphering of all messages all the time cannot claim the same tension or discrimination, this would be an ethical expression only in an ideological context of information positivity: where a code constitutes both a challenge to the present and a promise for the future. In this relation the content of the message is definitively meaningless, what matters is its revelation and addition to the mosaic of reality which will one day be completed. The 'reality' of the coded message (the code) is found in the innate and functional reversibility of it and its hidden meaning: the attempt to obfuscate meaning (with the application of a code) is what sets meaning or reality in place for all to see. In the example above

a metaphorical and ethical indifference is presented on the literal “mental screen” of the novel’s page; on this screen, in other words, sex is code-breaking and code-breaking is sex. It may seem unethical to turn to metaphor to depict (discriminate) an immoral act, especially a metaphor that hews close enough to what has been presented up until this point in the novel as Sophie’s character as to potentially convince the reader that the noises and smudges were in fact traces of instruction in code breaking and not the results of an illicit act. However, the subtlety of the imagery perhaps speaks to the radical potential of the “almost”, in that there is just enough that seems ‘not right’ with this scene (the remainder left after we ignore what might be believable or conceivable) to compel the reader into an act of interpretation rather than strictly absorption. Sophie’s body is a bearer of meaning and coded symbolism, but Serge’s veiled gaze (veiled by walls, metaphorical and physical) does not bear the trace of affect, feeling, emotion or experience, which is to say that the body/eye as source of ethical discrimination is replaced by the body as bearer/receiver of the coded continuity of mass communication and sexual intercourse. The source of this coded continuity is metaphorically the incestuous event in the opening section of the novel, and yet, we might also view that ‘original’ event as the result of the generalized incestuous impulse of the ethos of reality production (a production process producing difference through the assertion of a technological and metaphorical similarity). In effect, Sophie’s body became like the walls separating her and Serge physically in the house and metaphorically in the mind: a screen that denies the truth of what is occurring through a clarity of meaning that defers an ethical reading by both the reader and Serge. The same idea is re-iterated, although with less aesthetic subtlety, after the Versoie pageant, when Serge witnesses Sophie and Widsun having sex through the formalism of the kinoscope sheet. What he sees speaks to the second kind of “in-difference” native to the social trance, an incestuous visual continuity created by the screen that reformulates the body into an indifferent carrier of codes and signals. He watches,

[...] some kind of moving thing made of articulated parts. One of the parts is horizontal, propped up on four stick legs like a low table; the other is vertical, slotted into the underside of the table’s rear end but rising above it, its spine wobbling as the whole contraption rocks back and forth. The thing pulses like an insect’s thorax, and with each pulse comes the rustle, scratch and chafe; with each pulse the horizontal, low part squeaks, and the vertical part now starts emitting a deep grunt, a gruff, hog-like snort. (75)

The indifferent mental screen produces images relating a separate kind of in-difference: the indifference of the code. The screen itself is the source of the code, creating for Serge something “more real and present than the trickle of the stream or chirping grasshoppers [...] his mind merges with the bright bedsheet, lit up with the possibilities of what might dance across it in the next few seconds” (57). The screen through which the body disappears is precisely the “mental screen” of the code and the

subsequent reduction (or retreat) of Serge's body to the eye. As an example of Baudrillard's "social trance", Serge's narrative perspective demonstrates its connection to Bataille: Serge, in effect, is *embedded* within a *continuity* of connections that the narrator of *Remainder* is seeking. Serge, like U., has some sense of this embedding, while the narrator of *Remainder* and Nick in *Men in Space* seem to dream it and seek it out as if they were floating freely like the saint in the icon. Bodies in their discontinuous and ethically disruptive (criminal) state disappear behind the coded aesthetics of the machine and the insect; the body is present on the screen and in the formalism, but only inasmuch as it is the hidden trace left by the tropic movement from body to insect to machine.

Finally, Baudrillard's description of the European indifference to the victims of war in the Balkans is implicitly and semiotically reiterated in Sophie's obsession with categorization, dissection, classification and scientific research. The first instance of this could be derived from Baudrillard's use of the example of the indifference shown a dead cat, as a figure representing the indifference with which postmodern Western European society dealt with death and war in Bosnia. What interrupts Serge's discovery of the truth hidden by the kinoscope screen (Sophie and Widsun as discontinuous bodies performing continuity) is precisely the same: the death of the family cat, Spitalfield. While the maid Maureen is shocked, and shows her compassion in her response, both Serge and Sophie demonstrate certain levels of indifference, the former passive, the latter active. Sophie's reaction in particular speaks to the potential for active positivity to be found in Baudrillard's notion of indifference. This is what he means by "the work of mourning we carry out on ourselves": precisely the post-melancholic combined expression of affective or emotional indifference and seduction by information, dissection and connection through the code. Sophie performs precisely this kind of indifferent obsession with information when she decides, "[...] to accord Spitalfield proper funeral rites. [...] Serge, perched on a chair in her lab's corner, watches her empty out his stomach of its organs, guts and juices, then peel the skin back from the skull towards the spine and ribs" (76). Narratively speaking, Sophie's first response is to deny responsibility, and from there she literally empties the dead body of its contents. Next, she calls Serge to watch,

[...] a trick of which she is extremely proud. Sticking two electric wires in the cat's left hind leg, she throws a switch on to complete the circuit – and the leg, galvanised by the current, twitches and then flexes, as though Spitalfield were trying to walk. [...] As she animates the leg over and over again, she shakes with laughter that's sparked up afresh with each new quickening – as though she were also animated by the current, which was somehow running through her body too. (77)

After emptying the body of its contents, symbolically of functions, she replaces them with an electric current, a single source of energy and function which her laughter implies she shares with the

dead cat. Sophie is performing the ethics of reality production, which is to say the ethical impulse to establish a network of epistemological connection that relegates the body/subject to the role of obstacle, to the source of accident and ambiguity. In its post-death animation, Spitalfield and Sophie come to represent two different nodes of the same fundamental network of energy. As in simulation, the body is emptied of its natural evil (vulnerability, death, decay) and replaced with a source of life that is much more predictable and eminently more controllable in its repetitions. The dissection and emptying of the body precedes the investment of a different kind of energy into the body: energy controlled by a switch, and by mechanical laws. However, in this context, this energy and the meaning of its shared presence in Sophie and Spitalfield's corpse suggests an indifference established between the actually alive (Sophie) and the artificially alive (Spitalfield). It suggests, in other words, the bridging of a gap, like that between the literal and rhetorical, through the application of scientific authority. The concept of indifference as the condition of a world of information is given voice when Serge finally begins to speculate, "if perhaps the morbid and hypnotic sequences being executed by the dead cat's limbs contain some kind of information – "contain" in the sense of enclosing, locking in, repeating in a code for which no key's available, at least not to him. . ." (77). What the movements of the living dead "contain" is precisely a trace of life before its emptying-out and re-animation by the universal electric current of information. These electrically motivated movements correspond to the visual information that denies death and the incommensurable their place, paradoxically by making these things visual, by making them twitch across the foreground of the 'mental' screen. Serge emphasizes this understanding of things soon after, through his experience with the wireless machine:

One night, at about half past two, Serge looks out of his bedroom window and sees a white figure gliding over the Mulberry Lawn [...] It looks like Sophie; he leans out further but the figure disappears from view before he can identify it. The experience startles him – not least because it plays out in the real and close-up space around the house an aspect of some scenes that he occasionally intuits but never quite pins down when riding the dial's highest reaches: vague impressions of bodies hovering just beyond the threshold of the visible, and corresponding signals not quite separable from the noise around them [...]. (85)

The figure of the body here is the subject of a failed attempt at identification, which is to say, discrimination. This is further emphasised by its comparison to "vague impressions of bodies [...] beyond the threshold of the visible", the imaginary bodies derived from the visual models provided by wireless signals. Like the trace of life that Serge intuits as contained in the re-animated movements of Spitalfield, the body is definitively beyond the scope of the visuals derived from both the re-animation and from the time he spends using the wireless machine. The body is not present in any of these scenes, so much as its technological and metaphorical reconstruction. It is reconstituted in the context of the novels and in the

work of Baudrillard as a trace of that which the ethos of reality production seeks ideally to eliminate from view. What is essential to note is that Sophie's actual body and the bodies Serge only ever gets "vague impressions" of are made equivalent, or in-different, in these lines, alluding to the concept that the pages of the novel themselves (and its narrative perspective) are Baudrillardian "mental screens" of indifference, which is to say that language or literature itself becomes such a screen when it is compelled to confront a reality that now shines with the brilliance and certain reproducibility of a code.

The day immediately following this episode, Serge decides to pay Sophie a visit in her lab to ask her about what she was doing in the garden the night before. Sophie, however, has seemed to have outgrown the childish laughter that accompanied the re-animation of Spitalfield and replaced it with a partisan devotion to connections, codes, images and information. Her obsession with the concrete discriminations (ethics) of science leads not to an explicit goal or end, but to the semantic and visual cacophony that Serge encounters in her lab:

In front of her, on the desk's surface, microscope slides smeared with variously tinted substances fan out like card-hands; dotted around these, like tokens wagered by invisible opponents, or perhaps the miniature opponents themselves, are insects, dead ones: beetles, grasshoppers and dragonflies, rigid as the dog-avatar in the Realtor's Game [...] Beneath the heading "Poisonous Qualities of" a complex set of lines – straight, curving and dotted – threads disparate Latin words and sequences together. (85-6)

If we return briefly to de Man's metaphor of controlling the trope in terms of capturing insects "which one can at least hope to pin down and insert in a neat taxonomy", we might suggest that the poetics of this scene indicate that the control of the trope, the pinning down of insects into a taxonomy, has already been accomplished. This is to suggest that in coded communication the message is the meaning: to decode is to capture and pin down in a necessarily pre-existing semantic taxonomy. Though we know that Serge in particular demonstrates the vulnerability of language when he encounters uncoded words without being able to fix their meaning, we can also say that through the metaphorical fixity of the code the control of the trope is at least made visually rigid. Sophie's lab represents the visual field of the code, in that with its diversity of items, names, connections and disconnections, it may appear as a collection of difference, but "[t]o Serge's mind, cluttered with RX traffic, the sequences appear like call-signs. Its not just the compounds on the chart that make him think this way; Sophie has highlighted certain letters of the wall's various texts, making them stand out by drawing over them in yellow, blue or purple crayon, as though tracing from one to the other a kind of continuum, a grander alphabetic sequence slowly emerging from the general eclectic mesh" (86). The lab walls offer the promise of something clear emerging from

something of an “eclectic mesh”, which is to say that Serge recognizes the promise of the code in the chaos of Sophie’s research.

We can also see more direct references to the disappearance of the body, such as when Serge begins to notice that Sophie no longer eats:

As far as Serge can tell, Sophie only takes breakfast, and doesn’t even seem to eat that: each time he visits her lab over the next few days he sees sandwiches piled up virtually untouched beside glasses of lemonade [...] Above these, on the wall, the texts, charts and diagrams are growing, spreading. [...] Bizarrely, Sophie’s started interspersing among these texts and images the headlines she’s torn from each day’s newspapers. These clippings seem to be caught up in her strange associative web: they, too, have certain words and letters highlighted and joined to ones among the scientific notes that, Serge presumes, must correspond to them in some way or another. (87-88)

The slow dissolution of the body is placed beside the increasing expansion of the “associative web” of connections produced by Sophie’s research. As the breadth and scope of her research widens, it seems as if her body becomes detached from, or is left behind by, the mind in connection with these formalisms. Within this expanding network of connections, bodies lose their ethical meaning as bodies (as markers of the infinite or as discreet entities) and acquire meaning only as nodes of connection marking the passage of a much grander network. Her work is therefore more than an attempt to catch, kill and taxonomically fix meanings or insects, she is seeking, as Walter Benjamin puts it in regard to the methods of modern philosophy and mathematics, “the truth as if it were something that came flying in from outside” (*Tragic Drama* 28). In a passage that evokes a similar ethical tone to that of de Man in his discussion of Locke, Benjamin offers an interesting corollary to the literary aesthetics of Sophie’s research when he suggests that “Inasmuch as it is determined by this concept of system, philosophy is in danger of accommodating itself to a syncretism which weaves a spider’s web between separate kinds of knowledge” (*Tragic Drama* 28). It is precisely this epistemological spider’s web which cannot help but catch all information and reduce it to different expressions of the same code, different formalized iterations all speaking to the absent, and flawed, body of the subject.

Some days later, Serge once again sees Sophie outside in her sleeping gown in the middle of the night. He goes down to ask her what she is doing in the Crypt Park:

“Looking for the Balkan Beetle.”

“What’s that?” he asks.

“A type of flying insect, made by Pilcher,” she answers absently. Her eyes turn down, towards the grass – then sharpen, as though catching sight of something couched within it. “There are all these segments,” she murmurs. “Broken bodies.”

"Where?" asks Serge.

"Everywhere," she replies. "When one antolie colony attacks another, they cut the victims up, and leave their limbs and torsos lying around the battlefield."

"What's an antolie colony?" asks Serge. (89)

Derek Attridge notes the potential for confusion of the reader when he asks, like Serge, "What does she mean by 'antolie,' a word neither Google nor the OED acknowledges?" (24). Thematically, there are echoes of Baudrillard's quotation from *Perfect Crime* above, beginning with the example of Spitalfield and Sophie's energetic indifference to his death, and leading here to a similarly indifferent reference to the Balkans and the presence of "segments" and "Broken bodies [...] lying around the battlefield". These odd fragments are unified in the narrative perspective of Serge's desensitized eye, betraying no bodily experience on the part of himself or his sister. This short extract demonstrates the embodied disembodiedness of the code, in that it combines Serge's disembodied eye with Sophie's ghost-like body that has become the screen on which disparate chunks of information acquire an ungraspable but evident connection. Even this notion of lacking comprehension does not constitute the challenge of the "incommensurable" in Levinasian ethics. It does not lead Serge to any particular understanding or infinity or open relation to otherness, in that her obscure explanations (or lack thereof) are not felt negatively. Instead, Sophie (an authority compared to Serge) acquires the disembodied embodiedness of the insect metaphor (*like* the ethically charged human body and hence different): "Slowly, her head turns fully away from him again, and she moves onwards through the long grass – ponderously, her exposed legs angling sharply at the knee, like an insect's articulated limbs. "You'll catch cold," he calls after her, then heads back to his radio set. The next day, sure enough, she does look ill – although not colded: more ravaged, as though worn down by fatigue yet at the same time fired up by a manic sense of purpose" (C 89). The Levinasian symbol of otherness, the face, turns away and is replaced by an insect metaphor. Not other, Sophie (and hence authority) is but another subject of the taxonomy, pinned in motion and approachable through metaphor. Serge's visual perspective reveals no sympathy, empathy, familial closeness, affect or emotional depth whatsoever towards his sister, only the intellectual interest the postmodern ideological eye takes in its visual field. Beyond the metaphorical structure of the scene, Sophie is literally physically deteriorating from lack of sleep and lack of food; her body is being left behind in her pursuit of a truth that can only be accomplished in the absence of the body and the incommensurability it represents.

In her obsessed focus, she has left her reality somewhat when she speaks of antolie colonies and Balkan Beetles; neither the nonsensical nor the anachronistic is incommensurable in this ideological context. The former does not seem to have any literal meaning whatsoever; however, given the time

period, our knowledge of Widsun's connection to military intelligence, and the mention of battlefields, bodies and Balkans, we might assume that "antolie colony" is a disfigured rhetorical form of *Anatolian* colony, or in other words, the Balkans that were Ottoman-controlled until 1913. Although it is difficult to know what year this scene takes place, we know that Serge was born around 1898-99, and hence it is possible that Sophie has heard or knows something about the Balkan Wars of 1912-13 and could envision that violence spreading "everywhere" in a prescient description of WWI. The Balkan Beetle, on the other hand, is apparently much more alien to their world, in that it is an insult used by *Tintin* character Captain Haddock (Wordnik). Both of these items represent the 'problem of representation' spoken of by Benjamin and de Man in action: they are tropic slippages produced out of an obsession with clarity, distinction, and systematic (imperial) expansion (the ethics of the reality production imperative), but they do not seem out of place in this context. The trope's passage is implicitly compared to that of political violence and even the passage backwards in time and across multiple levels of representational formalism. Sophie's attempted passage towards the consistency of the code leads her right to the evil of linguistic inconsistency (rhetoric). This is precisely the outcome of Sophie's "manic sense of purpose", something I am trying to equate here with Baudrillard's notion that it is with an enthusiastic "imperialism that present-day simulators attempt to make the real, all the real, coincide with their models of simulation" (*Simulacra* 2). In this episode that leads up to Sophie's suicide, the reader experiences both Serge and Sophie's objective expressions of a desire or impulse to put everything together, to make sense of or resolve their perception of the world. At this point in the narrative, it seems that it is knowledge itself that is overwhelming Sophie's capacity to discriminate between reality and fiction, especially compared to Serge, who seems not to absorb information but to admire it as it passes him by. Sophie seems to be under a certain pressure, to be experiencing a certain tension which is driving the expansion of her web beyond the scope of reality and into the destabilizing trails of tropic passage. Structurally, there are two 'veils' intersecting in the text at this point, Serge's passive narrative eye and Sophie's active being: they intersect here in the form of answers that are not answers, but which nonetheless do not prevent a smooth conclusion to the exchange. This is to say that while the connections presented by Sophie may have passed over from reality into fiction, the tension she seems to be struggling with in her active pursuit is absent in Serge's passive pursuit (a kind of seduction, or pursuit through receptivity). We might say that while Sophie struggles with the responsibility of authority, eventually, like Locke, driving herself in circles around an irresolvable problem, Serge has explicitly turned the power and responsibility of ethical discrimination over to her authority. Serge is a passive, indifferent, but fascinated consumer of the aesthetics of Sophie's being in the formalisms of authority and information, lacking any ethical motivation other than the

unspoken desire to view and to be continuous with what is viewed. It is precisely this relationship that is confirmed in the last exchange between Serge and Sophie.

The last meeting between Serge and Sophie occurs in Versoie's Mosaic Garden. Not only are mosaics figurative stand-ins for the coherent spatial and aesthetic unity of difference, Benjamin also speaks of an epistemological ethics in terms of the mosaic, suggesting that, like the individual pieces that make up it up, "The value of fragments of thought is all the greater the less direct their relationship to the underlying idea, and the brilliance of the representation depends as much on this value as the brilliance of the mosaic does on the quality of the glass paste" (*Tragic Drama* 29). The mosaic, for Benjamin, shines brighter as a whole the more detached the individual piece is from the "underlying idea". This is to suggest that the further the appearance of the piece is from the overall image created, the better the overall image. Benjamin seems certainly to value the gap between representation and what is represented. If we consider an individual like Sophie as one of those pieces that help to reveal, when in concert with the rest, the image of the whole, then we might read Benjamin here as suggesting that the more different and dissociated a fragment of reality seems from the "underlying idea" of reality, the more it reveals of the truth of that underlying idea. If we interpret this reading into the exchange between Sophie and Serge above, then Sophie's own passage into a state of dissociation from reality (in linguistic and temporal terms) constitutes her increasingly indirect relationship with reality, and doing so reveals the truth of that predicament (the underlying idea) described as universal by de Man and philosophical by Benjamin: the problem of representation that establishes clarity and the code as ethical (and essential) concepts and structures.

Sophie, having pursued the truth through these structures, seems to have passed beyond the horizon of objectivity and into the realm of what Benjamin calls the treatise. With the treatise as with the epistemological flux into which Sophie has passed, "Its method is essentially representation. Method is a digression. Representation as digression – such is the methodological nature of the treatise. The absence of an uninterrupted purposeful structure is its primary characteristic" (*Tragic Drama* 28). Both mosaic and treatise are structures that imply that distance is required from the "underlying idea" or "purposeful structure" of reality in order to reveal its truth: the irrevocable distance of representation. Accordingly, in the Mosaic Garden Sophie acts towards Serge not as an accomplished student of science, but as a chaotic and cryptic marker of this reversed passage from experience to innocence, Crypt Park (death) to Mosaic Garden (life), mimesis to representation, bouncing between spatial points like an unmoored signal code:

He finds her outside, in the Mosaic Garden. She's moving among the flowers, pacing from one spot to another, back again, then onwards to a third spot, a fourth one, as though following a strict set of instructions. As he comes near, she leaves the path and starts moving around the flower bed itself, her lower body lost among the iris-stems, like some giant grasshopper. (91)

Sophie is once again perceived in terms of an insect, her arbitrary movements lacking agency or will, as if being instructed by animal instinct. The meaning of this rhetorical figuration of his sister alters radically when she reveals to him that she has "[...] got a lover" (91): "Serge is overtaken by a sudden sense of vertigo – as though the surface of the path he's standing on, and of the lawn and flower beds around it, had all turned to glass, affording him a glimpse into a subterranean world of which he's been completely unaware till now although it has been right beneath his feet: a kind of human wasp-nest world with air-filled corridors and halls and hatching rooms" (91-2). The fundamental pre-existence of the gap is revealed here. And yet it is expressed in the insect aesthetic Serge's eye is fond of, in terms of the hexagonal structure of a wasp-nest smuggling the tropes of sex, signals and economic production with it. But it also bears striking similarities with a short story by Jorge Luis Borges: "The Library of Babel".

This story is told from the perspective of an everyman inhabitant of "The universe (which others call the Library) [...]" (*Labyrinths* 78). The Library is described as "composed of an indefinite and perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries, with vast air shafts between [...]" From any of the hexagons one can see, interminably, the upper and lower floors" (78). The people of the Library spend their lives traversing these connected rooms, searching for "[...] a book, perhaps the catalogue of catalogues [...]" (78-9). This search is described in terms of a variety of cultic expressions of discovering the idealized ending or culmination of the Library, endings tacitly rejected by the narrator when he recalls, "[...] the classic dictum: *The Library is a sphere whose exact center is any one of its hexagons and whose circumference is inaccessible*" (79). One of the people of the Library had determined that,

[...] all the books, no matter how diverse they might be, are made up of the same elements: the space, the period, the comma, the twenty-two letters of the alphabet. He also alleged a fact which travellers have confirmed: *In the vast Library there are no two identical books*. From these two incontrovertible premises he deduced that the Library is total and that its shelves register all the possible combinations of the twenty-odd orthographical symbols (a number which, though extremely vast, is not infinite): in other words, all that it is given to express, in all languages. (81)

Like U. in *Satin Island*, these people are forced to confront the idea that the world is written ahead of time. At first, this brings them great positivity and hope, in that this totality promises to contain the solution to things like disease and mysteries like the origins of the universe. Religions and inquisitors arise to coordinate the search for these things but "This much is already known: for every sensible line of straightforward statement, there are leagues of senseless cacophonies, verbal jumbles and incoherences"

(80), and as such, "Obviously, no one expects to discover anything" (83). This former line links the people of the Library with the condition of Western epistemology in de Man or the problem of representation in Benjamin. Like U., these people are confronted with a world in which the Great Report "had *already been written*" (*Satin Island* 123), and they initially descend into depression (*Labyrinths* 83). But, like U., they also respond with a desire for violence and destruction:

The certitude that everything has been written negates us or turns us into phantoms. I know of districts in which the young men prostrate themselves before books and kiss their pages in a barbarous manner, but they do not know how to decipher a single letter. Epidemics, heretical conflicts, peregrinations which inevitably degenerate into banditry, have decimated the population. I believe I have mentioned the suicides, more and more frequent with the years. (85)

This lonely denizen of the Library ultimately reveals his perspective on the nature of the Library that bridges the divide between the cults of the finite (modern ethics) and infinite (Levinasian ethics): "*The Library is unlimited and cyclical [...] My solitude is gladdened by the elegant hope*" (85-6). In one sense, the world of the Library is alien to Serge because of his aversion to written words, in another sense it represents Sophie's world, her laboratory acting as her own hexagonal cell and her own search for the code. This world of the Library is an analogy of the world of the revealed secret, the world Serge has yet to experience directly, the passage from innocence to experience.

Sophie's metaphorical or aesthetic relation to the insect figure and its associated warren of subterranean codes reveals not continuity but discontinuity, marking her as a denizen of the underworld of *sexuality* that Serge has already experienced, repressed and has yet to consciously cross into. However, this gap in his experience presents itself to Serge's eye as transparency, the falling away of the base (the surface) that serves to strand the body, to suspend it between infinite sky and absent ground, as just another point in the network of endless connections, or the perpetual centrality of any one hexagon in the Library (always connected, but never approaching the horizon). But it is also an act of denuding, metaphorically corresponding to Sophie's sexual denuding in her acquisition of the code. His sense of connection to Sophie, their connection in the code (incestuous trauma), has been tangentially (tropically) revealed, along with the source of her epistemological authority; the code reveals a continuity between underground and sky, but an obstacle remains in the form of language. Serge understands the term 'lover' only in the sense of the unity/continuity of the code, he still reveals no recollection of his infantile experience. However, once again in a moment where Sophie's language eludes Serge's capacity to create meaning, he is not confronted by an otherness that leads not to an epiphany or confrontation with the infinite, but by a continuity that demands the serial production of apophany.

This is to say that Serge is not required to overcome the ambiguity of affect, or the ungraspable infinite. Instead, the surface of things vanishes and he gets a glimpse of a world he has always been a part of, without knowing it, indicating that the world of surfaces sustained this disconnect. He quickly tries to regain this superficial nominative grounding when he responds with a question: "More to regain his bearing than for any other reason, he asks Sophie: "Who is he?" (92). She responds that,

"He's my instructor in-" she begins; then, cutting herself short, says: "He's secret; its all secret. But he's made me sensitive. He's done stuff to me. I can see things that . . ."

"That what?"

"See things. What's coming. When the bodies meet and separate, and more bodies come out, the parts all lie around in segments."

"What bodies? Where?" asks Serge.

"In London, Stamboul, Belgrade, everywhere," she says. "It's all connected. I feel it inside me."
(92)

The reader might assume that Sophie is speaking of Widsun and their continued affair. However, this confession has not returned the narrative tone to the surface along with Serge's question. Sophie keeps the exchange subterranean, staying vague and asserting the importance of secrecy. Names are an issue for the grounded, and Sophie is trying to convey something far deeper, something that sits below the surface of events and coded messages. We get a clue in the use of the term "sensitive". It appears Sophie has become sensitive to clues and indications, to the future massacres of WWI, to the political machinations that are leading towards this slaughter (where bodies stand also, as in *Remainder*, for institutions and polities). Sophie seems able to feel the connections that are leading to this event, and yet cannot really articulate what she means. She can produce nothing but disconnection in a field of connections, all leading back to the body (hers), and to deconstructed bodies, but not to any final statement, any final name she can place on this network and its ultimate meaning. In this scene, Sophie begins to demonstrate one particular aspect of the early stages of schizophrenia as identified by German psychiatrist and neurologist, Klaus Conrad (1905-1961).

In his research Dr. Conrad studied many soldiers; one such example, named Karl B., serves here to link Sophie's behaviour to that of the protagonists, and to generate a picture of what kind of underlying ethical impulse this behaviour represents. Karl B.'s problem was that he was convinced everyone around him was in fact conspiring against him, receiving secret instructions that must be kept from him: "The patient is unable to explain how he sees this. He simply "sees it" (Mishara 9). On the way to the hospital, "Everything along the road, e.g., piles of stone, construction sites, sheep crossings, is arranged to test

whether he notices" (Mishara 10), which is to say, the world itself exists only to draw his visual and intellectual attention. To a certain extent, this mode of viewing hews very closely to the general tone of McCarthy's narration. In the quote above, Sophie declares that she has been made "sensitive"; according to Jan Dirk Blom, "Today the term apophenia tends to be used in a much looser sense [...] to denote an excess of perceptual or heuristic sensitivity leading to the discernment of patterns or connections in random or otherwise meaningless data" (Blom 33). This kind of sensitivity has been noted in contemporary Canadian writer William Gibson's novel *Pattern Recognition* (Wegner 187) in which it is converted into the toolkit of the "coolhunter" Cayce through whom patterns and connections are converted into marketable products. Wegner associates Cayce's sensitivity to patterns and connections with the figure of the writer/novelist, and McCarthy does something similar when he writes about the anthropologist as the figure which would remake "the entire globe into a collage of recurring colours, smells and patterns", or as the pursuer of "Master Meaning!" (*Satin Island* 29). Everything, from the objects in the world to the people who populate it and their will/intentions are directed towards, seduced by, coordinated and given meaning through Karl B.'s body. The primary distinction to be drawn here between Conrad's psychiatric theory and the expression it has received in literature, is that in the latter case the complete delusion is inevitably challenged by some kind of failure, accident, or flaw on its universal surface. The body at the center of this unified perception is at the same time made absent from a lack of attention paid to *it*. However, "When [Karl B.] reaches Dr. Conrad's military hospital, the delusions have progressed from external space to the inner space of his body" (Mishara 10). Sophie, in Serge's eye, suffers the same fate:

Right now, she's looking straight ahead of her, but her eyes have emptied – or, rather, seem in the process of being filled from somewhere else. She's muttering [...] She looks as though she were tuning into something – as though she had somehow turned *herself* into a receiver. [...] The notion seems ridiculous. And yet some kind of transmission seems to be coursing through her body. As he watches her, her eyes grow brighter, which makes the sunken parts around them, their ridge-shadowed sockets, darken and become more cavernous. (93)

The eye is the central figure of these lines: they represent the perspective of Serge's eye (no affect, emotion, empathy; just description), the hollow centrality of Sophie's and the primacy of the visual sense as the body becomes the analogy for the subterranean itself, leaving the isolated eye on the surface. Karl B.'s experience of inwardness is described in eerily similar terms: "The patient reports that a 'wave apparatus' controls his movements from some distance through electric current. Adjusted by a dial, the current changes from having negligible control over his movements, preserving his 'free will,' to having complete control, at which point, the machine 'inputs' commands" (Mishara 10). The body as transmitter

and receiver is here the result of the early stages of schizophrenic delusion; in *C*, on the other hand, it is a central theme reiterated in terms of the expansion of the Realtor's Game into real space, Serge at his wireless and at war, Sophie in her decoding and research, in her experiment with Spitalfield, etc. Serge's vision of Sophie is beginning to reveal to him that he shares this situation (a suspended subject position animated from the outside) with his sister. They are both fixed within a network of signals that need decoding; and yet, the fact that he identifies this as "ridiculous" despite his own reproduction of it in using the wireless set indicates that a certain trace of Sophie's otherness remains, that Serge cannot reduce their perspectives to the same one yet, and as such confronts this notion with ridicule. The metaphorical terrain of this gap opens beneath Serge upon Sophie's revealing that she has a "lover", and widens further after she declares to Serge that:

"He taught me the transpositions. Then he'll slink into my dormitory, and wreak carnage."

Serge feels a chill. The air is cold, but it's not that that makes him shiver: it's the sense that Sophie's talking about things he's simply not equipped to understand, an apprehension that gulfs as wide as frozen interstellar distances are opening within her words, expanding beyond measure the gap between her and him. (93)

Despite the epistemological and ontological (coded) unity of their perspectives, despite the fixity of their visual frames, the notion of 'carnal knowledge' or physical experience trumps the aesthetic totality developed by Conrad's psychiatric scheme or by the modern totalizing ethics of novel writing. The gap emerges within that unified field precisely in the form of the "incommensurable" or the not-understood, and yet, Serge does not express any kind of ethical revelation, and in fact experiences something closer to what Conrad called apophany in the form of the self-centered response: "You're crazy" (*C* 93). His incomprehension is blamed on the failure of Sophie to be understandable as opposed to the fact that Serge only understands 'love' in this context through image and text, rather than experience.

Though both brother and sister express certain aspects of apophenia, they represent not a progression through Conrad's stages but the repetitive after-image of their accomplishment: anastrophe according to Baudrillard, or "a folding back, a reversion in time" (Coulter, "Never Travel On An Aeroplane With God: The Baudrillard Index" 337). Dr. Conrad's progression ends with "anastrophe", or what is described as, "a reflexive turning back on the self in which the universe is experienced as 'revolving' around the self as middle point" (Mishara 10). The sensitivity leads to a complete and inescapable perspective unified by the body that is definitively peripheral to it; the absent body described above in terms of a "social trance" is precisely an example of an ethics of control that has gone out of control, that has undermined its own premise in the pursuit of its goals (like Sophie, who has moved through decoding

and taxonomy to the invention of non-existent and anachronistic terms and species). Serge *feels* the gap between he and his sister, his body returns in the form of a sensation that grounds the gap denied by the primacy of the eye. The pursuit of the code is poetically illustrated here as an unconscious abandonment of the body combined with an obsession with knowledge, taxonomy, naming, connection, pattern and meaning (and a tacit vilification of everything that cannot be subsumed within this matrix, everything that inhabits the “periphery” or “beyond” of a total system). The imagery of apophenia in essence conveys the ethics of neoliberalism/late capitalism as an inherited and largely indifferent compulsion. Like capital, there are benefits and costs to this ethical processing of the world and body: the cost is otherness, your body as affect, personal relations, emotional range or depth, control over endings. The benefit is the pyrrhic loss of all these things and their associated ethical responsibilities: it is a new lightness of being which, like the saint in the icon in *Men in Space*, is plugged into and fuelled by the technological landscape. However, like the saint, there is only sufficient fuel to make it to a mid-point between the earth (grounding) and the sky (infinity), suspended as if in a physical substance (space) definitively apart, but tantalizingly near to everything in the scene, including the darkness contained by the ellipse. The apophenic body is both center and periphery at once, that which grounds and that which disperses the ground, it is in its clinical sense a kind of reality ethos stricken of its social, economic, or cultural grounding, reduced simply to bodily malfunction. It is itself, therefore, an emblem of the vulnerability of the body to the code, to that which it makes the universal source of things. We might therefore argue that the emphasis on the visual and the processing away of the body, both in the novel and in Dr. Conrad’s theory, constitute an excessive performance of the modern Western ethos of reality production, and each demonstrate the basic lack of alienation such a condition produces. The gap, which is a feature of representation and in Benjamin’s terms a mode of thought-provoking digression, is illustrated in the form of physical/sexual experience, a gap that exists for Serge despite that, “He knows what lovers do: he’s seen photographs, in a magazine he found lying on a bench in Lydium” (C 92). Knowledge and physical recall are distinct here, in that the former cannot make up for (or objectively establish) the absence of the latter.

Like the ethos of reality production produces multiple images and iterations of itself and its own internal logic (in the form of language, capital, etc.), the body trapped within this irresistible ethos multiplies into representations, information, images, gaps, accidents, etc. This is the body’s form of escape/disappearance into the generalized and automated movement of reality: it integrates via viral infection of the gap of representation by the models of simulation. Sophie becomes physically suspended in her lab, forming a network of connection between word, image, name, letter and event. Signals of

meaning and similarity pass through her spatially contained body and into her projected network of connections; meanings which are lost in their transmission into Serge's narrative eye, but which succeed in smuggling a trace of the absence that unites both the siblings to each other (in the form of repressed sexual trauma) and that which unites their shared ethos to the 'problem of representation' and the philosophical solutions mentioned here. Serge finds his ideal position to be passively 'observing' in the back of an airplane, sending invisible signals of physical erasure to the ground below and receiving them back through his cocaine-laced retinas in the form of connections made of "streaks and puffs" (185), explosions that are "calling the zero hour of a new age of metal and explosive, geometry and connectedness [...]" (200). These siblings represent an ethical position suspended *inside* the gap of representation, an ethical position whose primary condition is that of the problem of representation in that what can be seen is *anything but* the gap. This is the ethics of the icon, of the saint who, like Serge, Sophie, the officer, the narrator of *Remainder* and U., is inexplicably compelled to be suspended in space ready to receive any and all signals, meanings and images. As Klára in *Men in Space* explains, and is implied in the use of the term 'zogography' to describe icon-making, "Icons are cosmic maps [...] They narrate transcendence" (110). Hence the suspended ethical position is a narrated one, narrated by a space conceived "metaphorically" (*Men in Space* 110) through representation, leading away from the body "into the world of the spirit" (*Men in Space* 110), which is to say, back to the intolerable reality of the Library, of the endlessness and cyclical history of a world already written. Apophenia in terms of the novels can be understood as the manic mode of post-melancholy, in that it reproduces an instant series of connections or patterns combined with a simultaneously absolute sense of their validity, thereby overcoming the given terrain of the representational problem by turning to the combination of representation and mimesis in the formalism. Sophie represents the same position as the suicidal inhabitants of the Library, knowing that there is certainty to be found out there at the same time as they are dogged by the certainty that they will not be able to find it. If Serge perceives anything animating Sophie's behaviours, it is not emotion or affect. Where Dr. Conrad indicates certain emotions and affects that accompany these stages of delusory connections, very little of the manic connection-forming processes in McCarthy's novels are accompanied by affect, emotion or bodily presence at all. Serge and Sophie's apophenia manifests itself almost as a forgetting of the body and giving over of the self to the manipulative current that plagued Karl B.. Sophie and Serge are seeking this out (despite being already inculcated within it), and as such they represent not the origins of apophenia, but its disappearance into the sanity of indifference by virtue of new repetitive technical forms of filling the gap of representation.

Conclusion: The Body as the Gap Traversed by Information

McCarthy's novels describe a world where faith in resolution is not just certain, but an obfuscated *given*, able to slip through the gap between presence and absence, literal and rhetorical, signifier and referent for precisely this reason. We can think of this gap in terms of the metaphorical relation and the philosophical mechanism of control it engenders, as described by de Man. The ethics of epistemological control through epistemological authority is a response to what he calls the "perennial problem," of "[m]etaphors, tropes and figural language in general" (*Aesthetic* 34). The problem is in essence an ethical one, in that it is predicated on the need for an evident difference, for the capacity to discriminate, between the literal and the rhetorical without uniting them aesthetically or semantically. The very universality of the problem makes it a ripe terrain for capitalist exploitation and profitability, but even beyond this, the basic relation existing between the system and its subjects is in essence metaphorical, and as such the potential for strengthening or weakening the metaphor (widening or shrinking the gap) becomes an ethical one.

The gap is built into the metaphor (as the thing excluded), and yet the ethic described here is an ethic of filling that gap, closing this distance, a metaphorical ethic of epistemological similarity through the mass production of difference. Because the fragility of the metaphor, the need for exclusion/discrimination of difference (for transcendence into something 'other' or "beyond"), is retained as a trace in the very body it inherits, it can still be projected onto the most strengthened metaphorical similarity (because this ironically is also its most vulnerable and weakest point). The subjective body, within this ethical context, in its relation to its being and to the object through language, represents the persistence of this gap. McCarthy situates this gap poetically in each of his novels, expressed most explicitly in the copying of the icon in *Men in Space*: a process of mimesis whose goal is to cause the original to disappear into the immanence of the criminal copy. In this case, the artist Ivan Maňásek precisely re-produces the disappearance of the original behind the exactitude of the copy, by literally making a third copy of the icon and attempting to pass off the two copies as the planned copy and the original. This second crime constitutes a meta-level of criminality that goes beyond the original theft, in that it is a crime done to criminals: it serves as the central premise of the novel and as a central analogy for simulation in the text.

Simulation is an ethical context in which the "other" is absent in its form as the infinite, which is to say that the gap between representation and the "other" represented has been reduced to zero (or nearly zero); simulation, through its elimination of the gap, is a form of detached ethical discrimination

(detached because it is merely the mindless repetition of an already established discrimination). In place of the gap we will find Baudrillard's conceptions of the "code" and the "imaginary" operating an ethics of continuous indifferent reality production. The ethics spoken of above by Gibson do not operate in the world of simulation, because within such a world only *nothing* exceeds the idea of it, nor is it possible to ethically discriminate between objects, actions or ideas if ethical discrimination derives from the authority or capacity to distinguish between fiction and reality or the literal and rhetorical. The modern system of ethical discrimination of this (ontological) sort succeeds, ironically, to the point where such discriminations are made impossible by the simultaneity of object and idea. Simulation, according to Ashley Woodward, is Baudrillard's response to what Woodward calls the "paradox of representation":

This paradox states that the more a copy resembles an original, the less it resembles it. If a copy resembles an original *exactly* it is no longer a copy, but another original. A copy which is too good is paradoxically a bad copy, and by the same reasoning a bad copy might be a good copy. The essential point of this paradox is that the copy and the original need a space, a gap, or a difference between them, in order to be distinguished as copy and original. Representation and reality, a model and its original, function in the same paradoxical way. (Woodward)

This paradox speaks to the impossibility of both the modern and post-structural conceptions of what is ethical in novel writing, in that representation is shown to paradoxically require both a concreteness and an absence at the base of its relation to its object. If the modern and ultimately scientifically inflected ethics of mimesis and totalization today dominate over those of the "incommensurable" (I would argue they do, at least aesthetically), they create a scenario where one half of the equation leading to representation, an absence or gap, is now missing. If we consider that gap the terrain of the infinite as it is spoken of by Levinas, then the success of modern mimetic ethics (not through literary channels but through technical ones: science and information technology) constitutes a path that leads further and further from the ethically upright conception of reality described in their own terms. As Woodward argues, when this gap between representation and reality is bridged by mimetic writing and technology, the distinction between reality and fiction, between the literal and the rhetorical described by de Man as "our universal predicament", collapses along with the power of discrimination which served to separate these binary concepts. Baudrillard understands just such a collapse of distinctions in terms of simulation. As Woodward explains, "because the representational system can only function on the basis of a distance between representation and the real, once the gap has closed and it has lost contact with the real, it has to *produce its own* real in order to continue to function" (Woodward). This independent "real" is the third copy of the icon in *Men in Space*, the copy that is produced in order to obfuscate the second disappearance of the original. Maňásek has added a "small red mark on the side" (142) of the icon

he claims is the original. This red mark is *added* to the original, to confirm its authenticity, (ironically) its reality, and yet thanks to the nature of copying, we can never really know if Maňásek added this mark to the original or to one of the copies; the copies are so good it does not matter, the original is the one with the additional mark of the code. Theoretically, this mark that stands in for the absent gap or “real” is precisely the excess of signs that are produced free from their signifieds and referents (produced after the gap has closed) combined with the code buried deep within that semiotic network. Woodward describes this context in terms that reflect the relation of criminality to simulation:

With simulation, signifiers float free of any anchorage by signifieds or referents, since they produce these terms as their alibis. What Baudrillard describes is in a sense a loss of the real, but Baudrillard’s analysis takes place on two levels: on the level of the “alibi,” or the explanation simulated systems give themselves (a *descriptive* level), and on the level of Baudrillard’s own analysis of what is “really” going on (a *normative* or *critical* level). On the descriptive level of the alibi that systems of simulation work with, the real has never been more real. Simulation does not dispense with the real, but attempts to “realise” it by capturing it within its own system of representation. Simulation and hyperreality are not simply a product of an abstraction from the real, but the product of an excessive attempt to “realise the real” which inadvertently results in this abstraction. In hyperreality, we have not moved too far *away* from the real, but too far *toward* it. (Woodward)

The analogy of simulation constituted by the meta-crime of icon-copying (the crime that follows, and even upstages in the context of the novel, the original crime) “realises” the real after its disappearance behind the identical copy by concentrating it into that small red mark. Simulation is hence driven by an ethics of accomplishing the already accomplished, of producing reality where reality is confronted by its perfect-seeming copy. This is poetically alluded to in Baudrillard’s own concept of the post-orgy society seeking to re-liberate itself after its orgy of liberation. Simulation abandons (circles around) the value and importance of the absence, the nothing, the gap between representation (sign) and reality (object), and puts in its place the excessive positivity of mimetic information technologies. In the example of the icon, these technologies and the codified ontology they present are converted into the red spot that marks reality out from its simulation. This gap and its absence are confronted in the other novels as well, demonstrating an ethics of totalization and its failure at once, which is to say, a truly totalizing ethical perspective that takes “radical surpassing” for granted and presents the gap poetically as the source of dizziness, nausea and other uncomfortably embodied affects that, in other instances, flow largely from the semantic ambiguity of language/words. The ethics of a world of simulation as such must contend with both a system of representation so powerful that it is always in the process of undermining itself (positivity which denies, but at the same time cannot help but lead to, the gap constituted by negativity and otherness), and a persistent but unintentional trace of that negativity and otherness being converted into

reality and information (negativity, absence or incongruity so intractable as to demand immediate representation in the form of the red spot).

The body in this context constitutes a marker of both the territory it occupies (and that occupies it: the gap) and the eye of the “social trance” which pushes that territory into the periphery in order to generate incontrovertible difference in the foreground; it is the marker of both presence and absence. For instance, when Serge has sex for the first time, he demands his lover turn around, because he “wants to see [her] back” (C 143). Even as he demands she turn her face, the ethical nexus of infinity, away from his sight, he tacitly replaces it with an encounter with her disfigured back: “There it is, right under his face: the crook, rising beneath her shoulder like a ridge with valleys running down its side, flesh-rills held up by bones under the skin” (144). Between the ridges, valleys, and rills (streams) Tania’s body has the presence of a formalism, a relief map, or a battlefield seen from above, absent the affective and sensory receptivity of the traditional body. It is effectively the simulated terrain or model of *passage*, or of a gap filled by simulation. This is reiterated as Serge experiences penetration into that map (their sexual continuity) as a passage across the gap of innocence and experience generated previously by Sophie’s confession: “He runs his own hand down her back, so hard the nails puncture its surface [...] The surfaces of ground and woods and clouds are gone too, fallen away like screens, encumbrances that blocked his vision, leaving the hollow – not of the indentation but of space itself: an endless space in which he can now see with piercing clarity. What he sees is darkness, but he sees it” (144). Finally acquiring consciousness of the physical experience of sex, Serge confronts, through the falling away of screens, not the double of the world as the subterranean wasp-nest (this is what lies beneath the surface of Sophie’s experience), but the dualistic clarity of the inhabitant of the Library that has finally determined its “*unlimited and cyclical*” nature (an endless and clear darkness). Serge, unlike Sophie, reflects the calm of the narrator of Borges’ short story, without his sense of ethical outrage or concern over the violence of unfolding events, which is to say, Serge is both calm *and* indifferent. Sophie comes closer to what Baudrillard (and to a certain extent Dr. Conrad) describes as the “Abstracted, irresponsible, enervated” (*Perfect Crime* 144) subject of the “social trance”; the combination of promised clarity and seemingly endless darkness for Sophie, as for many of the inhabitants of the Library, leads to suicide. Serge, in his detached observation of Sophie’s funeral, demonstrates the difference between himself and Sophie in the poetic zone his particular detachment engenders:

A female mourner’s gazing at him, tearful, pitiful eyes trying to tell him that she understands his grief. He looks away. She can’t; he doesn’t feel any. He knows he’s meant to – but it’s not there, and that’s that. What he feels is discomfort: at his priapic condition and, beyond that, at

a sense he has of things being unresolved or, more precisely, undivulged. The charts, the lines, the letter-clusters, and the fragments Sophie was pronouncing as she wandered through the Mosaic Garden – and, beyond these, or perhaps *behind* them, the vague, hovering bodies and muffled signals he's been half-seeing and -hearing at the dial's far end [...] these, he's more and more convinced, *mean* something and are issuing from *somewhere*, from a place he hasn't managed to track down before the one person from whom he might have learnt the what, where and why of it all elected to go incommunicado . . . (103)

Once again, a brief exchange of glances is broken off by looking away, reiterating the face as an absent ethical nexus. The finality of “that's that” indicates the irreversibility and precession of Serge's deadened “social trance” (*Perfect Crime* 144) and its elimination of otherness. Otherness in this context has slipped into the space of Serge's repressed memories and technical-scientific intuitions. Serge's indifference revolves around a self-centered desire for resolution of this intuition, the resolution he believes Sophie could have offered in the form of a scientific explanation of this “place” he intuits but has never found. The only affect we get from Serge here is erotic discomfort, and this is the only trace in this moment of that “place” he intuits. The affect his erection produces is the trace of this place in an embodied sense: it is the discomfort of the promise and potential of orgasm (or reaching the intuited space) categorically denied expression or deferred by the context in which it is experienced. Both the funeral itself and Serge's childhood experience, deny him the capacity to even understand what it is that he is seeking: orgasm, death, the *complete* transcendence (resolution) of the given. His experience in war confirms this, through the combined poetics of height, automated movement, coded communication, erasure, drug use and orgasm. However, this poetic but absentminded pursuit is particularly clear in his disgust as the war ends right before he was to be executed and thus before he can unite his vision with the nothingness he intuits beyond the veil of surfaces:

Hodge drops to his knees and starts to cry. The soldiers begin walking away too, withdrawing. Superimposed across the clearing, as though projected there, Serge sees the image of a boat pulling off from a jetty at a point where several canals intersect: as the boat draws away, it takes the intersection with it, leaving him behind. For the first time in the whole course of the war, he feels scared. “Hey!” he calls after the soldiers. “You can't do that. Wait!” (C 238)

Presciently envisioning the beginning of his return trip home from Egypt in the final pages of the novel, Serge sees his experience of impossible unity escape his grasp, leaving him without an “intersection”: without the choice of which path to pursue the fleeting experience of death. Following the failure of the war to deliver this transcendence, Serge's narrative eye seems to abandon the gap of representation or the passage of transcendence, as if it had been left no other option. In its place, upon his return to Versoie, a perspective emerges that emulates the poetics of simulation and of technical indifference:

Versoie seems smaller. Its proportions are the same [...] But, taken as a whole, they seem to have shrunk. The left-swerving passage from the house's front door to the Low Lawn [...] a passage each of whose sections used to comprise a world, expansive beyond comprehension, filled with organic density and volume, with the possibilities of what might take place within it, riven with enclaves and proclivities every one of which itself comprised a world within the world, on to infinity – now seems like a small, inconsequential circuit: a transceiver loop or well-worn route round a familiar parade ground. It's as though, in Serge's absence, the whole estate had, by some sleight of hand, been substituted by a model [...] Versoie seems smaller, and the world seems smaller, seems like a model of the world. (241)

For Serge, the end of the war and his survival constituted a lived renunciation of transcendence, of escape velocity, of alternatives. In layman's terms that could even be stretched to encompass the project of Western enlightenment, if mechanized world war could not kill him and set him (or the Western enlightenment project) on another path, what could? Without recourse to transcendence of this kind, Serge's social trance comes to reflect this (social and personal) impossibility through the assertion of the model. The model (another example of a formalism) in this case serves to confirm the failure of transcendence, acting as the single frame within which all attempts at representation must fail: nothing can escape the immensity of the model. However, unlike Sophie, who succumbs to the seduction of suicide, Serge persists in simulation. One of the reasons for this persistence, it would seem, is that Serge is still capable of feeling 'good' within this context. Serge laments the shrinking of Versoie in terms that reflect the limitation of the Library's 25-character code, suggesting, "beyond [the shrinking], that the inventory of potential experiences – situations in which he might find himself, conversations and interactions he might undergo – has dwindled so low that they could be itemized on a single sheet of paper" (42). In other words, he perceives the post-war world as one lacking the chaotic *potential* of the battlefield, the possibility of actual transcendence, and is entombed in what has already been written, like the inhabitants of the Library. Yet, like the inhabitant of the Library, this entombment is not without its pursuits and pleasures, its totality does not preclude an ethos of exploration and explanation, which in Borges' tale generally relate to cults and social institutions (bodies). For instance, when Serge undertakes the *passage* between Versoie and London by car,

As [the landscape] streaks by and the horizon accelerates towards him, it seems that he himself has become still – and, in these moments, he feels the same sense of satisfaction that he used to in the nacelle of the Rumpitee or the cabin of the RE8: the sense of being a fixed point in a world of motion. [...] The air carries the smell of lime – not the fruit but quicklime: the plain's been used as a giant burial ground for victims of the recent flu pandemic. The calcium oxide penetrates his nostrils and sinks deep into his lungs, making him feel alive and good. (243)

Lamenting the absence of the subterranean (the hopeless search for resolution exemplified by the inhabitants of the Library) in the simulated model of Versoie, Serge still seems to find that the "good" ethical position is the apophenic one. In other words, the poetics of the scene indicate that "alive and

good” equates to being in the process of a passage, one that causes the world to pass by like a film-strip, and which situates the body as the still nexus of signals being sent from the underworld. This spatial and poetic configuration reiterates the scene at Serge’s wireless station early in the novel, where he expresses that his flatulence “carries signals, odour messages from distant, unseen bowels” (83). This is an ethics of stillness enjoying motion, or visual passage; an ethics dependent upon and celebratory of the sending and receiving of signals from unseen spaces. The suspended position idealized by Serge, Sophie and the saint in the icon of *Men in Space* places the body at the center of a void, a void that must be set in motion around that body in order that the frailty of the body and of the reality ethos be washed away in “a world of motion” (C 243). Serge has returned, after the war, to a space in which he can receive signals, like the smell of calcium oxide, as traces of the mass-deaths that resulted from the Spanish flu epidemic and at the same time of the transcendence the war failed to provide for both Serge and the Western world in general. In other words, Serge still seeks transcendence, he simply does so without a will of his own; he is capable of feeling ‘good’ so long as he can simulate the experience of transcending the body, of leaving the body in a state of vestigial stillness, so that his eye and mind might merge with the flow of signals and information passing the body by. In such a space, Serge’s body does not represent *either* the infinite or the discriminate, but instead represents the object of the positive ethics of the “social trance”: the body is both vehicle and obstacle, but it is replaced as both in a world of technical information. Its centrality to movement is replaced by the machine and signal sent from unseen locales; its centrality as obstacle is challenged by information. To turn motion over to the machine and the eye, which is to say to be motivated by the machine and the eye, to turn control over passage to these things, is to be seeking and be satisfied by a simulated passage out of the body and its uncontrollable movements. This is where bowels and mass graves poetically merge: each signify the uncontrollable remainder, the incommensurable sure thing passed by, but not escaped, by technical means: death. Serge acquires a brief sense of connection by sharing in the act of passage, by actualizing passage. Hence, what is good in this case is the feeling of being a still point in the midst of a maelstrom of signals and movements. *Satin Island* offers an equally compelling ethical poetics of suspension and control, through U.’s lover, Madison.

Madison’s body-as-gap is the most instructive example of contemporary ethics in McCarthy’s work. Her capture, traumatising, and disciplining by state and anonymous authorities is exemplary of contemporary power and the ethics of its operation. However, it is accompanied in its retelling (filtered through U.’s eyes and Madison’s) by a lack of emotion, and results in no real embodied affect or emotion from U. The immediate temporal context of the scene is a depressing or disappointing one for U.: he has just questioned his role in the Project and fantasized about sabotaging it, his theory about the skydiver

has failed to come together, Madison has explained to him why his dreams of sabotage are childish and unrealistic, and his friend Petr finally succumbs to the cancer that he has been suffering from. The opening of the scene is replete with references to these failures and disappointments, establishing a poetics of the cyclical failure of, and return to, the ethos of reality production (and its need for answers to wash away ambiguity):

About three days after the funeral, I cornered Madison. Confronted her. Pinned her down. I *really* want to know what you were doing in Torino-Caselle, I said. We were in a restaurant. [...] I'd ordered deep-fried squid; the tentacles, reprising a vague image of a previous reverie, reminded me of parachute cords, and hence my now-defunct theory. I think it was the sense of impotence this brought about that spurred me into getting all aggressive on that other front. [...] She finished her mouthful, laid her knife and fork down and said: I'd been in Genoa. What had you been doing there? I asked. Demonstrating, she said. Demonstrating what? I asked. No, demonstrating, she said, more emphatically. Protesting. Oh, I said. What against? The G8 summit, she said. In 2001, it was held in Genoa. I didn't know you were an activist, I said. Used to be, she corrected me; it was a long time ago. (*Satin Island* 141)

Through U.'s own voice we understand that the rigorous pursuit of this questioning is the specific result of a sense of impotence which was itself caused by the variety of failures and disappointments described above. In other words, the aggression with which this inquiry is undertaken is a direct expression of the previous failures at theorizing and understanding (the Great Report, the Project, the death of the skydiver): the desire to denude this anecdote/situation is the consequence of the failure of previous attempts at denuding. U.'s inquisitive tone is strictly factual, his follow-up questions demand (and receive) recognizable names and terms, not difficult to parse explanations of personal motivation or ideological historicism. His goal is obviously the resolution that eluded him with his theory about the skydiver. However, what he receives is another subjective retelling, this time of an incident which *actually happened* (in our world) in Genoa in 2001, through the eyes of a fictional victim and witness.

Madison describes where she and her friends were staying as, "a school building in the middle of the city, where the classroom had been turned into dormitories, independent media centers and discussion rooms. It wasn't only protestors: there were journalists and academics too" (142). Knowing what follows in the novel, it seems safe to argue that this "school building" represents the Diaz Pertini building which, in 2001, served to house 93 G8 protestors before a massive police raid reduced, "the makeshift dormitories to what one officer later described as 'a Mexican butcher's shop'. They and their colleagues then illegally incarcerated their victims in a detention centre, which became a place of dark terror" (Davies). The parallels between Madison's experience and the account of what happened during, and after, the raid on the Diaz Pertini building are incontrovertible. Madison describes the initial raid as follows:

They kicked down the school's doors in the small hours of the morning, when everyone was asleep, rushed up into the dorms and started attacking people in their beds. Shit, I said. Yes, she answered. [...] The raid was well planned. What did you do? I asked. We held our hands up and surrendered, she said. But that didn't matter: they attacked us too. They stamped on people's legs, and heads, and chests; I saw this one guy's chest crumple as they stamped on it – and heard his ribs cracking too. It's a strange sound, she told me; a bit like those old chocolate bars – the ones with the synthetic honeycomb inside, that used to crunch when you bit into them. Crunchies? I asked. Yes, she answered, that's right: Crunchies. Those were good, I said. Yes, she concurred; I'm not sure you can get them anymore. (142)

Before addressing the parallels between this fictional account of the raid and an 'actual' account, it first serves to confront U.'s voice in this extract. As when he initially hears about Petr's cancer, his immediate response to the unprovoked attack is the emotionally and affectively detached, "Shit". In this context, it serves simply as a sign of attention being paid to the story, a sign of tacit interest and desire for continuity. This is effectively the response of the reality ideologue, pausing to innocuously comment and declare a personal presence, but not to contemplate, interrogate or disrupt; simply to signal connection and desire for continuity. The same can be said of the question: "what did you do?" This is not a question meant to extract deep meaning, ethical analysis, Madison's internal struggle leading up to an heroic exploit, or to convey empathy or sympathy, it is merely a momentary acknowledgement of a mystery or absence in U.'s understanding that serves to break up the continuity of Madison's story and as such to reiterate the ethical demand that it continue. In turn, even Madison's perspective is contained within the indifference of the social trance: the connection between breaking ribs and Crunchy bars is purely descriptive on the level of her conveying her sensory (but not bodily or emotional) experience to U., it confers no discrimination or judgement or even incommensurability on the event she is describing, nor sympathy nor empathy. Nick Davies describes the (real) event as beginning with the brutal beating into a coma of an English journalist named Mark Covell, an assault whose conclusion he describes in the following terms: "It was at that moment that a police officer sauntered over to him and kicked him in the chest with such force that the entire left-hand side of his rib cage caved in, breaking half-a-dozen ribs whose splintered ends then shredded the membrane of his left lung" (Davies). It seems as though Madison has transposed this description of events into her own recollection, adding a descriptive but dehumanising layer of consumerist aesthetic over the brutality of the violence. Davies continues to describe the carnage in terms that link with Madison's description, citing several victim's accounts:

A group of 10 Spanish friends [...] woke up to find themselves being battered with truncheons. They raised their hands in surrender. More officers piled in to beat their heads, cutting and bruising and breaking limbs, including the arm of a 65-year-old woman. [...] numerous other witnesses have described how officers set upon [a young German woman], beating her head so hard with their sticks that she rapidly lost consciousness. When she fell to the ground, officers circled her, beating and kicking her limp body, banging her head against a near-by

cupboard, leaving her finally in a pool of blood [...] 'Someone suggested lying down, to show there was no resistance. So I did. The police arrived and began beating us, one by one. I protected my head with my hands. I thought, 'I must survive.' People were shouting, 'Please stop.' I said the same thing ... It made me think of a pork butchery. We were being treated like animals, like pigs.' (Davies)

The emphasis on stamping and beating the prostrate and those who had surrendered is shared in both accounts. At this point in Madison's description, her experience seems to match closely the experience of those who were there. Though she was not beaten as badly as some, Madison "got pushed down the fire escape, she said. I bruised myself, but it wasn't that bad" (144). Though seemingly an innocuous aspect of her grammar, the fact that she articulates the event in terms of self-harm, as in, "I bruised myself", speaks to the ideological processing which we as readers have yet to encounter in the text, but which for Madison is already accomplished.

This processing begins in a courtyard where the protestors have been brought by truck; they are surrounded by a square made up of "more police, fresh ones, all fired up and ready to let loose. Which is exactly what they did: they clubbed and stamped on people to their hearts' content" (144). Another round of indiscriminate violence brings the protestors together in a swirl of indifference, dehumanizing and decontextualizing both them and the violence they suffered from. They were being beaten to within an inch of their lives because they represented the performance, the actualization, of an imaginary alternative to late capitalism and its indifferent approach to its negative effects, one that cannot relate to the mimetic values of the ethos of reality production except as the target of its ridicule and violent derision. In other words, these beatings were doled out to those who persisted with, and placed their hopes in, representation and its distance, whose motivation for being there *was* the distance between how the world presented itself (through authority) and how they saw it. It is at this point in Madison's story that the facts she reports begin to merge with McCarthy's literary aesthetic and split from Davies's account of things, in a way that poeticizes the ethos that might justify the actions of the police as 'good' ones.

According to Davies, "Several victims describe a sort of system to the violence, with each officer beating each person he came across, then moving on to the next victim while his colleague moved up to continue beating the first. It seemed important that everybody must be hurt" (Davies). This translates into an abstract representation in *Satin Island*, with Madison describing the police "organising all the people in the courtyard into groups. I don't know what the logic of it was [...] they'd make five of us go and stand in one corner [...] Then they might move four people out of one group and make them join another [...] Whatever rationale was behind it, they carried out this sorting quite assiduously, for a long time" (145).

The logic of the system at work here is unidentifiable by Madison, and there is no clarification or explanation given. This part of the story reveals the ethical programming Madison has undergone since, which is to say the ethical programming of the event itself. Though it might seem simplistic, one would imagine that the average G8 protestor would have understood the logic of police violence: control via intimidation, threat, pain and dehumanisation. That Madison does not understand the logic of this kind of sorting is understandable in the moment: the face value of the act is difficult to grasp in its randomness (an analogue to assessing late capitalist ethics). It might be argued that this was simply a way of tiring the bodies and dulling the minds of the prisoners through the random repetition of constant shifting and movement. However, the fact that she does not speculate, guess or insist on an ideological (critical) post-hoc reading of these actions indicates the success of this processing; she is not adding a moral or ethical patina to her re-telling (because to do so would imply a choice to be made between different morals and ethics). The officers are not described as beasts or animals or devils, their basic humanity (and that of their actions) is left undisturbed by rhetorical flourishes of moral or ethical judgement; in other words, their humanity and their actions are united under the auspices of a certain, heightened perspective: the radical surpassing of the gap of representation through violence. This scene is followed by one which fairly directly reflects the story of the actual events, in which the prisoners are taught and forced to sing “fascist songs, from Mussolini’s time” (*Satin Island* 146). It is at this point that the departure from a reflection of actual events into McCarthy’s own aesthetics is accomplished, when Madison explains that from the forced celebratory singing she was placed in a car and driven around, until finally arriving at “[...] this villa. Inside it was like a big family house – either that, or some kind of institution” (147). If we recall the use of the term “institutions” as synonym of the concept of “bodies” in *Remainder*, Madison’s beating and passage to the villa constitutes a forced return to the body, a controlled return by authority to the vulnerability of the body and its ideas (anastrophe as opposed to catastrophe). The systematic violence of the raid serves to return the idealist protestors to the pain and vulnerability of meat, forcing them into a physically and psychologically violent “butcher’s shop” in which their ideals drain away like blood and energy through the grating and are replaced by the strict desire to survive expressed through hopeless and passive obedience. I would argue that the survival instinct the system attempts to seduce out of these protestors is precisely a copy of that which Baudrillard attributes to “reality”, an instinct internal to the system which it attempts to disperse into the group of protestors through violence and humiliation, which is to say, reality’s “[...] propensity to submit unconditionally to every hypothesis you can make about it. [...] You can subject it [...] to the most cruel torments, the most obscene provocations, the most paradoxical insinuations. It submits to everything with unrelenting servility” (*Perfect Crime* 3). This is precisely what

Madison embodies for the remainder of the incident in Genoa and what the “authority” seeks: a subject made to feel vulnerable, isolated, in pain, impotent, victimized, and completely lacking in control of her own body. By dealing out these bodily experiences, the police raid serves to prepare these human traces of dissent for a complete remodeling of body and mind; they are reduced to nothing before then being built back up within a context of technological and scientific positivity akin to that which drove Sophie to suicide and which makes the narrator of *Remainder* declare his fundamental inauthenticity.

Throughout this retelling, U. has maintained a detached interest in its details and continuity (as if he were watching a film or television interview), but not in Madison’s feelings, personal theories or thoughts on the matter. After Madison mentions that she was next taken to a room in which an old man was sitting, U.’s questions continue to demand further detail in description of appearance, “What did he look like? [...] What type of room was it?” (*Satin Island* 148), without even approaching the problem of meaning or reasoning that the tale produces. Madison answers, “About sixty [...] He was smartly dressed, she said; quite portly; he had grey hair that was turning white, combed neatly back [...] sitting in a red leather armchair” (148) and replies to the latter question, suggesting that it,

[..] looked a little like a doctor’s room or a laboratory. There was this strange contraption at the far end [...] it was like a chair as well, but with appendages and segments that looked as though they could be manipulated and adjusted – kind of like a dentist’s chair, an old one. Everything in the room was old; I don’t know why I said it looked like a laboratory. Maybe I meant an old laboratory [...] But there were no chemicals, and no shelves. (148-9)

The aesthetics of this room repeat the isolation and obsession of Sophie in her lab, inasmuch as Madison’s narrative eye smuggles Serge’s insect theme into this vision, with the chair acquiring the “appendages and segments” of the insect body. That the room looks like an old, but largely empty, laboratory smuggles the trope of mimesis and taxonomic discrimination into a space that should engender such a thing, but which in fact only speaks to the already discriminated, the pre-determined nemesis of the ethos of reality production: where there should be something, there was nothing. This is not a space of active discrimination or judgement, but the execution of the boundless prejudice of the reality ethos; in order for discrimination to take place, there must be more than one option to choose from. The incident in Genoa demonstrates not a post-modern act of discrimination, but the late-capitalist assertion of reality through systematic violence against that which it perceives as dangerous fantasy or ideology (humiliating, derisive violence). Hence, simulation does not operate an ethics of discrimination so much as erasure or elimination: an ethics grounded in an *accomplished* discrimination, one so dependent upon (vulnerable to) discrimination that it pushes it to the periphery.

Through the image of a laboratory with no recognizable equipment or objects McCarthy offers the aesthetics of 'the systematic' as evocative of the incomprehensible or the absent. The same kind of aesthetic occupies the walls of Sophie's lab: a web of connections constituting some kind of system, but one that the narrative eye of Serge could not connect to any particular underlying meaning/reasoning (nor, for that matter, could its creator, Sophie). The connections are clear, the meaning is not. In turn, the room in which Madison finds herself indicates further connections to C: "[...] there was a drape that hung along the wall: this big, wrinkled curtain. I don't know why it was there – maybe for warmth; behind it there was just a wall, as far I could tell. But the curtain gave the room the look of a theatre, or an auditorium – or maybe a recording studio, with the drape there for muffling" (*Satin Island* 149). The presence of the curtain speaks perhaps to the central imagery of the screen-that-hides-nothing and in doing so reveals everything: the "veil, an over-pixelated screen" (*Satin Island* 3), or the kinoscope screen in C. In a sense, the veil metaphor is itself a metaphor for the imaginary of what Serge describes as "beyond": the screen (its potential to exhibit the real) is what absence/nothingness imagines is excluded from itself. The screen constitutes, like simulation, both the irrevocable imminence of reality and the endless draw of the information/dissection metaphor, which is to say, the desire to look behind the screen. This is something Serge demonstrates twice: once with Sophie and Widsun behind the kinoscope screen (which gets interrupted by the death of Spitalfield), and second at Sophie's funeral, where Serge simply knows what's behind the curtain, without having to look (C 104). In turn, the look of a theatre speaks to the connection this scene shares with apophany, in that "Once the apophany takes over the perceptual field, no aspect of the field remains untouched. Then, 'everything becomes conspicuously salient. The patient often interprets the course of events as if a film were being made, or a theatre piece performed'" (Mishara 10). As we will see, this curtain comes to represent the imaginary "beyond" of this room; it will serve to aesthetically fill the place of the potential or promise of transcendence implicitly at play in the processing that Madison undergoes from this point on. It will serve as the inert symbolic counterpoint to the activity of the technological "gizmo" she identifies upon entering the room: "What do you mean, a gizmo? I asked. A *thing*, she said. A piece of electronic hardware. Maybe a receiver, a detector, a wavelength modulator, I don't know. It was too old: the kind of thing they'd have used 20 years ago, perhaps more. It made an electronic noise. When I came in, said Madison, this man was fiddling with this thing, as though he were tuning it" (*Satin Island* 149). The reduction of the world to the body/self that occurs in apophenia, where Karl B. believes himself to be under the control of a "wave apparatus" (Mishara 10) that position of suspension from lines of unseen signals, is precisely the next stage of ethical processing that Madison undergoes in the "institution".

This process begins with an inspection, one which starts life as a trope of sexual objectification but which swiftly retreats into the aesthetics of medical inspection (with, perhaps, a tinge of empathy): “He beckoned me over and told me to turn around in front of him: revolve, rotate. I had a scrape on my neck, which he looked at closely, holding my hair back. He asked me, in English, where else I’d been injured, so I told him: [...] and I thought for moment that he was a doctor. [...] But he wasn’t” (150). After this inspection the old man picks up what appears to be a “black wand”, and then “a glove – a thick one” (150):

He slipped the glove onto his right hand; and, holding the wand in this, he touched the thin end to my midriff. Then the glove twitched, and I felt a huge electric surge run through me. What the fuck? I said to Madison. It was a cattle-prod I guess, she told me. Did it hurt? I asked her. Yes, U., she replied, it hurt. It hurt more than anything I’ve ever felt before or since. But it was over very quickly; and I was too startled to shout or scream or anything. [...] I somehow knew, though, that he wasn’t going to keep on zapping me: he just wanted me to know that he *could*, if he wanted to – and wanted me to show him that I understood that. Which I did, by standing still. Once this understanding had been reached, we could begin. (150)

This scene is a reiteration of both the actual event and the raid in the novel, technologically and metaphorically condensing the ever-present threat of overwhelming physical violence on the part of authority into a single instant of violence delivered electronically. In turn, it tropically links with the reconstruction of the narrator of *Remainder* (his anastrophe, or return to the body after the accident), in the necessity of “understanding”. This imagery constitutes the merging of information and violence that persists into the next phase of Madison’s processing. She explains that for the next few hours “he made me strike up and hold certain postures. Postures? I asked. Postures, she repeated; like a fashion shoot” (150). Failure to execute or hold the postures was met with the threat or use of the cattle-prod. Though once again there seems to be a sexual tone to these postures, their meaning to the man seems to be largely technical: “All the while, while forcing me into these shapes, he was consulting with and nudging at this other thing [...] The gizmo-thing, she said; this modulator or detector” (151). These postures are as such the process by which Madison will be ‘tuned into’ the dominant wavelength like Karl B.: a metaphor in this case for coercion, collusion and conformity. This part of the process exemplifies Madison as the ‘bodiless’ or ‘disembodied’ body, in the sense that her physical presence persists beyond its being emptied of control, will or a mode of resistance through the imminence of threat and the seeming innocuous nature of the “postures”. Even though she agrees that some the of the postures were erotic, “Sometimes I had to bend over and stick my arse up in the air, or pull up my culottes and show my thigh, or slip my shirt down off my shoulder. But all this was pretty mild; I mean, he could have made me strip, or raped me, or done anything at all, given the situation. The positions he was making me assume were more like

the postures of classical statues, or old paintings” (152). These postures, and the act of forcing them on her, are made in effect acceptable or acceptably inevitable by virtue of the extremity of the persistent implicit alternative. That which lies “beyond” the postures is in effect established by authority as a known incommensurable (unbearable pain): known because it has been experienced and is always imminent, and incommensurable in the sense of being incommensurable with living ethically (or at all). However, there is also the aspect of mystery surrounding this process; for instance, in her recollection Madison postulates that the old man was the source of “the raid on the school, the beatings, the weird sorting and dividing in the courtyard, all that stuff – this man, somehow, seemed *behind* all that” (152), but, that he in turn “seems to be governed by these messages crackling and zigzagging their way to him from . . . I don’t know: from somewhere else” (152). Beyond the code of the postures there is the concept that there is something more, something beyond the postures, something that ostensibly is their source: the absent original. The postures are the imaginary of the body (of the original body Madison has been returned to by authority, in all its vulnerability and malleability), they are the simulated models of what a real body imagines is beyond it (the perfection of repetition and appearance found in the code). Madison is being operated inside the imaginary of her vulnerable body, as a kind of escape into detached presence, through the optic nerve of the social trance. These postures are precisely the (singular, simulated) reality of the body that replaces the (divided, unreliable) reality of the body in simulation; they represent the repetitive certainty of advertising and social networking aesthetics that serves to detach the body from the physical vulnerability of the ever-present threat of violence, decay and death (and replace that with the veil of the code). Neither the body nor the object any longer serves as the grounding of its metaphorical (undecidable) element, instead it finds its grounding (its reality) in its in capacity to realize its imaginary (the alibi for its absence), in the code that gives the imaginary “the form of reality”.

At this point in the processing, Madison notices something about the old man’s reactions to her postures: “He was getting off on it, though, kind of: I could hear his breathing growing heavier, and hear these quiet grunts, these moans, coming from deep inside his chest. But these were beyond sexual” (152-3). This scene now begins to resemble the poetics of Sophie and Widsun’s sex/decoding scenes, with echoes of Widsun’s “deep roars of approval” (C 61) and the “deep grunt, a gruff, hog-like snort” (C 75) heard from behind the kinoscope screen. Like Sophie, Madison is made to learn the code through the persistent presence of, and potential for, sexual authority and violence: social roles are learned as internal to the reality of the way it is. This is confirmed by what follows in Madison’s account: “If they *were* sexual, the excitement wasn’t exactly for *me*, but for some kind of relation between me, the angles of my limbs and torso, and the machine, the rhythms of its crackles, beeps and oscillations. When these fell into

alignment, when we got it *right* – well, then he'd moan more deeply, with real pleasure" (153). Hence, the pleasure sought by authority is singular, even if it produces a double aspect of itself (sexual pleasure and the pleasure of control): the transcendent goal of authority is sought through alignment with the imaginary, or with the model. Serge similarly finds pleasure under conditions of strict control in the air force.

What this demonstrates is the elusive dual poetics and ethics of power and authority in late capitalism. This erotic connection to absorption by the formalism, to perfect mimesis (the combination of desire and reality), dominates the remainder of the scene, persisting in the form of an erotic poetics of synchronicity. Madison begins to "recognize these rhythms [...] these sequences of pitch and frequency [...] that faded into one another and then came back round again, only a little differently each time" (153). This allows her to "recognize these sequences", which is to say, "[she] came to know just what it was he wanted, how [she] had to move; he didn't need to keep telling [her] what to do. This made him really satisfied. More than just satisfied, she said: it seemed to move him deeply" (*Satin Island* 153). This is exemplary of the ethical indifference produced by this process (or the hidden pleasure of being dominated in the form of absolved responsibility), in that Madison indifferently describes successfully and bodily anticipating the will of this old man, and this provides the old man evident pleasure. It is at least arguable that this is the only real indication of the reversibility of power in this context: the power of seduction to mollify authority in the form of simulation/mimesis. From this point on, it seems as though the threat of violence has been supplanted by the mutual enactment of an erotically charged ontological choreography:

He and I kept this up for an eternity. Time seemed to have stopped [...] Time seemed, she said again, to have just . . . stopped: to be suspended, while we two performed this strange ballet being choreographed from elsewhere [...] He was moving too. At first he moved his body and limbs to show me how I had to move mine; then, as I learnt the sequences, his own movements grew less emphatic, and then almost imperceptible. [...] He was, like I said, deeply moved. At one point I saw big tears rolling down his cheeks. You saw . . .? I started asking, but she went straight on, cutting me off. Then these gave over to sobs, she said. *Sobs?* [...] Eventually he sat down in the leather chair, slumped deep into it and gave me to understand that the spectacle, charade, the game, was over: I could stand down. (153-4)

The poetics of ideal suspension are repeated here again, specifically in terms of timelessness, mimesis and repetition. The old man and Madison seem to be approaching a mutual mimesis, and yet, this potential for synchronization is regarded with indifference by Madison (it is understood at this point, there is nothing inspirational about it) and hopeful, pleasurable anticipation by the old man. Hence his tears and sobs at the inevitable conclusion that this ultimate synchronization remains deferred. The game of representation, the ideological game of radical surpassing played with the gap of representation, "is over",

failing to resolve itself once again. The old man gives the black wand (the violent potential of authority) to Madison, who places it on the ground, noticing afterwards that “his face had gone all vacant” (155), and that the wavelength machine “had gone all vacant too, just like its operator . . .” (156). Despite the apparent completion of the processing, there remains a trace of what was given up on, the “beyond” of the body and authority, the thing that grounds the code, in the form of a “kind of sonic dribble” (156).

What follows constitutes the erasure of the crime that is evident in Madison’s indifferent tone of recollection and U.’s indifferent interest in the completion of the story (the explanation for why Madison was at Torino-Caselle airport). Once the “game” was over, Madison and the old man fall asleep together, he in the chair and her on the ground beside it. When she wakes up, the old man is gone and a young man approaches her, speaking in English like the front-end staff of a hotel checking out a guest:

[...] he asked me if I’d rested; and I told him yes, I had; and he said: *Well, we’d better get you on your way.* [...] This man, she went on, handed me my receipt, which he must have been given by the plain-clothes guy, to the receptionist, and I got all my stuff back. And he said: *There: all accounted for?* – something like that. [...] and he said, still in a friendly, helpful voice, that I shouldn’t go back to the center of town, since police were still rounding up people who looked like protestors. *Go this way,* he said as we got to the road, pointing to the right [...] (157-8)

The escape route from the processing turns out to be, in fact, yet another stage of the process. The helpful, positive and commercial (service industry) tone of the young man indicates the ethical aesthetic of this processing, as if it was a favour being done for Madison. The final advice Madison receives from anyone at this institution is two-fold: people who look like protestors will be rounded up and processed, and, in order to avoid that rounding up, she should go to the right. This is reinforced along with Madison’s conscious or unconscious participation in her own processing when, after following the young man’s directions, she comes across “[...] this clothing shop. I went inside and bought some new clothes with my credit card: a shawl, a hat, a skirt. They weren’t particularly good clothes; just the kind of things that middle-aged, suburban women wear” (158). Without hesitation Madison executes once again the postures dictated to her by her processing: she switches her “protestor” look for that of the “middle-aged, suburban” woman. From there, she finds her way to a train station and a train that will get her to the airport, “And that, Madison concluded, laying her hands, palms-down, across the tabletop and looking at me with a frank and empty gaze, is how I came to be in Torino-Caselle Airport” (158-9).

Given the context of the event that is being re-imagined in this section of the novel, it bears comparison with what Baudrillard calls the ‘perfect crime’:

Were it not for appearances, the world would be a perfect crime, that is, a crime without a criminal, without a victim and without a motive. And the truth would forever have withdrawn from it and its secret would never be revealed, for want of any clues [*traces*] being left behind. But the fact is that the crime is never perfect, for the world betrays itself by appearances, which are the clues to its non-existence, the traces of the continuity of the nothing. For the nothing itself – the continuity of the nothing – leaves traces. (*Perfect Crime* 1)

The ethics of the contemporary subject, in other words, constitutes a collective attempt at executing the “perfect crime”. It is due to the nature of criminal authority that there exists a mechanism through which the crime is forgotten or erased. In actuality, something metaphorically similar happened in the aftermath of the true event. To begin with, some of the protestors, such as Melanie Jonasch, were beaten so badly that they are simply unable to remember what happened to them (Davies), like the narrator in *Remainder*. Secondly, as Madison notes, the ethical violence of the police was swiftly obfuscated by the threat represented by the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001 (*Satin Island* 143). However, as Baudrillard mentions in the quotation above, the crime is never perfect, and in the last page of this chapter that has consisted almost entirely of Madison’s story, she shares with the reader the trace or clue of the “nothingness” that is left behind after her processing, a trace, we might even say, of the absent Levinasian other banished by simulation:

Madison sat back in her chair. As her face retreated from me, it grew indistinct. The thing about Turin, she said after a pause, is that it’s where . . . [...] The famous philosopher, she answered. Kierkegaard or Schopenhauer or someone; the one who said God was dead. Oh, I told her: you mean Nietzsche [...] Whoever, she replied; it doesn’t matter: the point is – I found this out later – he saw a horse being beaten in a square in Turin, and he lost it. Can you imagine? After all the questions that he must have grappled with, the complex, universal stuff [...] it was a horse that did his mind in: a dumb horse. [...] Nietzsche or whoever saw this act of cruelty and it wacked him out, sent him insane. He never wrote another book. For the first time in the conversation, she looked genuinely disturbed [...] Her voice had gone all faint. So had her face: darkness was gathering around it, smudging its parameters more and more with each passing minute. (159)

The trace of the nothingness reveals itself in the appearances, the aesthetics, of this passage in two ways. First, her memory of Nietzsche’s episode with the horse is instructive in the sense that it represents precisely what has been denied the subject of the ethos of reality production: the capacity to be driven insane by wanton cruelty and violence. Without verbalizing it, Madison is lamenting the loss of the affect of shock, the loss of the event that could stun the intellect into *silence*, into abandoning its self-interested and detached pursuits. She is lamenting her sanity as the reversed product of a similar situation: having witnessed the brutal beating and humiliation of these protestors, her processing negates her capacity to suddenly and irrevocably lose faith in the code, in reality. This same trace makes its aesthetic presence known in the periphery of her face, as a kind of vague darkness that serves to disrupt its strict parameters,

to overwhelm not U.'s thoughts, but his vision of her. Where Nietzsche at least had the space to react, to withdraw in the face of incommensurable cruelty and violence, that space is denied the subject of late capitalism through the incessant assertion of an ethically upright "reality" one might effectively disappear into, like the clothing of the suburban woman.

The potential for ideological conflict, on the plane of ideas, is beaten, coerced and driven into non-existence: there is no alternative, no "other" to late capitalist coded reality. Like the implicit threat of the cattle prod, the incident in Genoa demonstrates the swiftness and brutality with which the authorities respond when an "other" option is imagined/performed. In its affective and emotional inertness, and in its intentionally strict use of metaphor, the recounting of this processing is understood here as representational: there are elements of this recounting that demand the reader take pause to consider. This is an example of the interim described by McCarthy, the space and time of fiction and violence (*Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* 124), and hence of the gap. This is also an example of Benjamin's digression as method, demanding a pause, or we might say a *lived* gap out of which thought/discrimination might emerge in the form of ethics. Because the will, which is to say the ethical intention, of the scene in the institution or body is absent through the silence of the perpetrator, we are compelled as readers to go searching for it; or in other words, as Baudrillard has it, the silent image of late capitalist ethics speaks through the cracks in its façade, through the trace of the "nothingness" it seeks to erase: the notion that something does in fact lie beyond the horizon of the model. We are forced to judge the events as they unfold for us, and are only implicitly or cynically informed of Madison's or U.'s ethical or moral position. As such, McCarthy seems to deploy the tropes of both modern ethical criticism and its Levinasian alternative, privileging neither in his demonstration that each works in coordination with the other under the auspices of the ethos of reality production. Modern ethical discrimination and totalization leads only to the discovery of "clues" that reveal its ultimate failure; the ethics of the infinite cannot cope with the irrepressible flow of information about the "other". The subjective experience of the "unlimited and cyclical" (Borges 85) failure of these two tropes (infinity and totality) reveals the ethics of the ethos of reality production, an ethics grounded not in discrimination or the infinite but in the endless revelation and permutation of the "code". This is an ethics of absorption and unification that attempts to seduce universality from difference within a single framework (the code), and we will see another expression of this ethical directive in the next chapter discussing the coming together of the realist and satirical impulses first in the late 1800's (also the opening moment of *C*) and then in McCarthy's work generally.

If the way that the Western tradition has dealt with remainder, rhetoric and “continental metaphysical excesses” is through an ethics of erasure and detour, what McCarthy’s work demonstrates is that ethics in an analytical context is itself caught in the “problem of representation”. Ethics as a signifier relies heavily for its reality on its signified, as opposed to its referent. Ethics, in this sense, operates aesthetically from the outset like simulation: “real” ethics proceeds from the model (the signified/signifier), and not the other way around. There is no ethical referent that is not preceded by a particular idea, or formalism, of ethics. Hence, ethics within the ethos of reality production succumb to both the “problem of representation” and the solutions offered by technology and epistemology. In the following chapter I will push further into the notion of literary ethics through an analysis of irony, comedy and what Aaron Matz calls satirical realism applied to McCarthy’s novels.

Chapter 8: The Endless Irony of Ethics

Laughter is an essential element of the comedic genres, whether we are speaking of a Shakespearean play or a biting social satire from the likes of Jonathan Swift, Juvenal, or the makers of “South Park”⁴⁷. Despite its often implicit thoughtfulness it seems reasonable to argue that most residents of the late capitalist West would describe comedy and laughter in friendly social and entertainment terms, as largely positive for the individual, the economy, the community, etc. In his extensive analysis of the concept of humour in the West, Michael Billig addresses precisely this popularized approach to the topic in terms of what he calls “ideological positivism”:

This pattern is part of a more general perspective, in which the ‘positives’ of life are to be stressed. This is ‘ideological positivism’ that represents an optimistic, can-do outlook in a society that offers its inhabitants the dream of constant, positively productive pleasures. The cruelties of this social order are overlooked, as if there is an imperative to wish away negatives (*Laughter and Ridicule* 10).

Billig returns to the essentially disciplinary approaches to humour, in an attempt to critique this understanding of humour as ethically positive (assuming one performs ethically as a result of some coerced or freely perceived sense of the property of ‘goodness’). McCarthy enacts a similar textual movement in the opening of *Men in Space*, where a gangster, Anton, jokes with some merchants his boss is providing protection for. The traditionally comedic aesthetic of discrimination morphs into an ironic form that reverses the polarity of this aesthetic, in an ironic version of Billig’s “ideological positivism”.

Speaking to two vendors, Bulgarians like him and his boss, Anton tells a joke in a style that represents the early superiority theory of humour:

“Have you heard the joke about the Russian pilot and the English pilot both crashed on the same desert island?” [...] “The English one is looking through a telescope and he sees a St Bernard dog – one of those giant dogs with tiny barrels of rum tied to their necks – swimming towards the island. So the English pilot says: ‘Hey, look! It’s man’s best friend!’ And the Russian pilot grabs the telescope and looks through it and says: ‘Yeah, and there’s a dog with it!’”

There’s a pause, then both men double over in laughter. (7-8)

In this instance, the men are sharing the joke at the expense of Russians, reinforcing the implicit community they share (Bulgarian) and tacitly ridiculing the figure of the Russian as an alcoholic. This joke is an example of the notion that laughter and humour bind societies or communities together through the

⁴⁷ Long running and extremely popular American cartoon that satirizes contemporary social phenomena and issues.

shared enjoyment and implicit knowledge of the act of derogatory judgement or discrimination. However, in an illustration of what will be shown to be de Manian irony, Anton does not stop there, and tries to extend his comedic success into a second joke, one which has a different actual and semantic consequence. The joke begins with an impending American visit to a Soviet factory, a visit in which “the Party” hopes to avoid admitting their anti-Semitism, despite having fired all the Jewish workers the year before (8):

So they say: ‘OK then, choose a worker and we’ll give him Jewish papers and we’ll call him Comrade Rubenstein, and when the Americans come he’ll show them his papers and he’ll tell them that he’s treated just as well as everyone else.’ [...] So the American delegation comes and sure enough they ask the question about anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union, and the chief says: ‘Gentlemen, there is no anti-Semitism here. Our own Jewish comrade, Comrade Rubenstein, will tell you as much. [...] They wait, and wait some more, and some more still, and after ages the assistant chief comes back and whispers in the chief’s ear: ‘Chief! Comrade Rubenstein has emigrated to Israel!’”

This time the laughter’s forced.

“That’s Jews for you,” says Spasiev, prefacing his observation with a click of his tongue.

There’s an awkward silence. They think he’s Jewish too. He’s not: solid Orthodox. (8-9)

An ironic reversal has occurred here, in the form of a disruption of the previous joke pattern. The jovial atmosphere of the first joke, its combination of shared positivity and ridicule, is broken by a movement which will be shown below to be the trace of a particular brand of irony. What remains pertinent beyond that is the ethical implications of this movement. There is laughter as a result, but it is forced, or performed. The space between these jokes illustrates an allegorical motion from the Soviet Russians as the external ‘other’ of both Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria to an internalized and perhaps even unrecognizable (unconfirmable) other in the form of Jews; the latter being an ‘other’ without the direct relations to power of the former, a ‘serious’ other where the former is comedic, one that cannot co-exist with (automatic) humour, one whose diminishment by laughter is simulated. From a connection-strengthening joke to one that evokes the simulation of connection (laughter) when connection is uncertain (as uncertain as Anton’s religion in their eyes), this simulated laughter is a performance of positivity that veils the suspicion (simulated knowledge) of trickery, that implies *deception* as the true evil of this internal ‘other’ (connecting deception to what will be explained below as the ironic turn). This is not an example of the Levinasian ‘other’, but rather comes closer to representing the duelling facets of Freud’s conception of the joke. Though Freud maintained the essentially social nature of joking and mockery (Billig 144), which is to say their need for a social grounding for discrimination, he alludes equally to its consequences in terms of its connection to pleasure. However, this ethically positive understanding

is shadowed in its deployment by a persistent trace of control and containment: “We might not be able to strike our enemy directly, but, as Freud wrote in *Jokes*, by mocking our enemy, ‘we achieve in a roundabout way the enjoyment of overcoming him’ ([1905b] 1991: 147).” (Billig 154). As such, we can say that this joke illustrates the false (ideological) tension between the known and unknown, the literal and rhetorical, or the real and the fictional, that has replaced the political and economic tension of the Cold War. It attempts to make a humorous discrimination at the expense of the Soviets, but fails, and in doing so it confirms the movement from an outward dialectical view, to an inward, implicitly genocidal view. In its failure to enact dialectical connection it reveals what haunts their new world, newly unified under the banner of global capitalism: the possibility that something it contains lies beyond its fully expanded horizon, something indecipherable and elusive that might disrupt its circulation and open new spaces of critique, expansion, perhaps even the reincarnation of the experience of Soviet oppression in the guise of the oppressed.

Laughter and comedy, according to Henri Bergson around the turn of the 20th century, are derived from, “‘something mechanical encrusted upon the living.’ Where did the comic come from in this case? It came from the fact that the living body became rigid, like a machine” (*Laughter* 49). In effect, he suggests that the “person who attends to the petty occupations of his everyday life with mathematical precision” (9) would be an ideal subject on whom to play a practical joke, like replacing the ink in his pot with mud, or removing his chair completely, because the precision with which this subject moves through life blinds him to the alterations he must make in order to avoid the pratfalls set in store for him. As Bergson puts it,

Habit has given the impulse: what was wanted was to check the movement or deflect it. He did nothing of the sort, but continued like a machine in the same straight line. The victim, then, of a practical joke is in a position similar to that of a runner who falls, -he is comic for the same reason. The laughable element in both cases consists of a certain MECHANICAL INELASTICITY, just where one would expect to find the wide-awake adaptability and the living pliability of a human being. (*Laughter* 9-10)

In other words, Bergson’s comedy discriminates between life that appears disordered (and hence requires attentiveness) and an *order* of life (the life of pre-planned precision, of mechanical encrustation) in a mode that implies the ethical nature of laughter as vehicle of social discipline and cohesion. The latter (encrustation) becomes in McCarthy’s work a repetitive *condition* that pre-exists the protagonist and sometimes the narrator. In place of the traditional modes of laughter and comedy, which will be briefly outlined below (and are tacitly united in their interest in consensus/control), comes a generalized

heightened narrative receptivity to the very comedic aesthetic they elaborated, described below in terms of inferiority and humiliation, mechanical rigidity, and the happy ending.

These tropes of laughter and comedy are smuggled beyond the horizon of Bergson's absent-minded tumble, the civilizational superiority theories of the Greek, Roman, and modern Western empires, beyond even the Freudian complex of repression and expression, into the prevalence of ridicule, hyperbole, *ad hominem* attacks and rhetorical flourish generally at play in semiotic networks and virtual social media environments (Western culture, economy and politics). Bergson's analysis of laughter relied almost exclusively on physical humour, on what it means when we spontaneously join in the laughter when we see a distracted man slip and fall in the street, or objects take on a life of their own on the film screen. The laughter that results from ridicule and the prevalent language-acts described above enforces a mode of discrimination that does not judge and *choose* (or respond automatically to a definite distinction) between options (as in Bergson's elaboration), making one right and the other wrong, but rather suspends both in an extended simulation of the very choice/ discrimination being deferred. The object of ridicule may be aided or directed, beaten, or violently coerced, but it is always suspended before the subject who refuses to (or cannot) enact their ethical discrimination beyond the horizon of the *sign* (whose ethics are contained, as a suspended choice, in the sign): an icon of a choice never completely resolved, but at the same time a simulation of resolution that is evident in the extreme nature of the rhetoric of suspension itself (the violent language of mockery that seeks to simulate the feeling or experience of the conquest of the other).

This is an ironic mode of ethical discrimination: a processing away of disruption, only without the philosophical grounding necessary to put an end to this process. What I want to show here is that when laughter assumes the posture of condition rather than interruption (when the moment of laughter is artificially suspended and extended), everything becomes awash in the comedic gaze. Everything becomes identifiable to ridicule in terms of its disruptive capacity, its incongruity, its moral and ethical inferiority, its subtle or implicit meanings, all of which are forced to assume the intimate proximity of the screen and as such ironically deny the distance necessary for laughter (intellectual distance) even as their presence demands it. This negative capacity is assessed and processed into the mosaic of a total image, relegated but still eternally available, while undisruptive meaning is produced for it out of the shifting sands of information media.

Control through suspension of this type is effectively the allegory that replaces the metaphorical 'ground' necessary for traditional ethical discrimination in the novels; the ground of being in the novels is

the very absence of such a social connection, the very notion of social connection rejects the reversibility of metaphor as the ground for subjectivity or ethics (rejects the use of the term 'ground', for the same reason we need to place this term in inverted commas). This suspension is allegorical in the sense that de Man gives to the term when he is contrasting it against the symbol: "[...] in the world of allegory, time is the originary constitutive category. The relationship between the allegorical sign and its meaning (*signifié*) is not decreed by dogma; [...] it remains necessary, if there is to be allegory, that the allegorical sign refer to another sign that precedes it" (*Blindness and Insight* 207). Hence, while symbol refers to the *presence* of dogmatic belief, allegory is always referring backwards to something that is by definition *not present* (past). This suspension is positive in the same way that the digital photo is positive, in that it appears as a trace of social being leading both away from and back towards the subject; the subject is grounded, therefore, not in a fallible linguistic structure but rather by the technical temporal manifestation of the recent past. No firmly grounded society exists in the novels, no stable source of ethical or moral codes (except perhaps in *C*, whose late imperial setting implies an imperial ethics). There is no 'social body' to return to, as Serge notes upon his return from war to Versoie, only the shrinking landscape and the repetitiveness of social interactions. Socially conscious perspectives occur in the novels, for example through Catherine in *Remainder* and her desire to see the narrator's money spent helping impoverished Africans (*Remainder* 32-33), Madison before her conditioning, or even U. in his momentary surge of revolutionary zeal (*Satin Island* 128-29), but are quickly snuffed out. Like the object of ridicule, this desire to act as if one has social responsibility must be allowed space to express itself, primarily so that it can be shown to be the alibi for an absent tension, or to have simply withered away under the auspices of a near totally automated system. The novels are dominated by (white male) perspectives that almost never discriminate along the lines of social responsibility. We rarely get any clear sense of why Serge of *C* does anything, even if fighting in WWI and erecting radio towers in Egypt could, for a more typical character, imply a sense of civic or imperial duty. U. of *Satin Island* seems to be motivated primarily by his being, or role as, an anthropologist, as well as an underlying desire for recognition and fame. There seems to be little concern for social responsibility in *Men in Space*; among the artists, art critics, musicians, students, gangsters, art dealers and police officers that populate the novel, few of their actions seem motivated by their capacity to augment the public good, or act in any direct way to that end (demonstrating the irony of a post-revolutionary moment). In *Remainder*, if anything the narrator shows a certain kind of (were it not for his persistent indifference) gleeful insistence in the way he expresses his desire that his money avoid aiding or abetting the expression of any persona other than his own, not to mention his orders to have all his re-enactors killed. The social voices in the novels are either absent, ignored (Catherine

Remainder), defused (both U. and Madison in *Satin Island*) or traumatized and sent to tread the path of insanity and suicide (Sophie in C)⁴⁸.

In place of these voices and the individual/society relation they represent, is a relation between a subject and a world of objects. Society in this equation is a concept accomplished in (consumed by) the subject itself, the dialectical distance between subject and society has receded from view, and in its place arrives the formalism, a relation of pure navigation, pure articulation, we might even say of pure space (the space of the detour in *Remainder*). This is the consequence of an ironic perspective that inevitably turns on itself: the subject who perceives this pure, fixed, real space still requires a map (a representation, a double) to navigate it. This relation will come to be understood in terms of the “thetic”, or self-referential. Without dialectic or incongruity between individual and society, laughter of the Classic through to Bergsonian variety recedes into the background, becoming the condition (the reality) that replaces *its own* dialectical tension (between individual and society), and so does the act of committed discrimination (and its meaning) that once distinguished the individual from society (once again, replacing the former tension it expressed with the continuity of a condition). I want to demonstrate that this can be understood in terms of a certain kind of irony, described largely through de Man and partially through Baudrillard. The ironic relation between subject and objects is a relation dominated not by the ethical or rational discrimination of science or even committed politics, but rather by the metaphorical discrimination of the internal linguistic relation between the “I” and the objects populating the “I”’s world. In other words, ethics, in the ironic context or structure described below, becomes merely a sign allegorically referenced by language that is meant to demonstrate an ethical present as opposed to past. This is at the same time the relation between the narrative eye and its ironic mode of perception which, as will be shown through de Man and McCarthy, is the mode of the novels. The subject without grounding, suspended in space, in a permanent distance from the horizon and proximity to everything else, turns and “detours” incessantly, like irony and allegory, always appearing to refer to something concrete, but something which itself is merely an extension of this endless detour. Rather than being comedy or satire, McCarthy’s novels operate through what de Man demonstrates is at the core of Western philosophy’s (Fichte’s and Hegel’s) conception of self and hence history: irony. Irony in this analysis will therefore be treated first as trope (following the general consensus), an approach which will then be considered retrospectively in its guise as figure. Figure as it is used here emerges out of Quintilian’s definition, which,

⁴⁸ Sophie can be considered a social voice I believe, even if it was only by accident that she seemed to express concern for, and a desire to put a stop to, the imminent carnage of WWI.

while suggesting a certain difference between tropes and figures, ultimately decides that, “For just as men remain the same, even though they adopt a new name, so these artifices will produce exactly the same effect, whether they are styled tropes or figures, since their value lies not in their names, but in their effect” (qtd in Harlos 213). Hence, because trope and figure are similar in terms of their effect, according to Quintilian, they are necessarily different in other respects. Similarity is in effect confounded by a loose distinction of form: “The name of *trope* is applied to the transference of expressions from their natural and principal significance to another, with a view to the embellishment of style [...] A *figure* on the other hand, as is clear from the name itself, is the term employed when we give our language a conformation other than the obvious and ordinary” (Quintilian qtd in Harlos 212). My reading of this description focuses on this single distinction: a *trope* appears to be a movement, or a trace of a movement, whereas a *figure* corresponds to a structure which allows for such movement without being ‘in motion’ itself. Figure is, in effect, that which conditions this type of movement.

As figure, irony serves as a framework of discrimination in simulation (a scene dominated by the ethos of reality production), as the ground of the multifaceted explanation: when the cause of negative phenomenon X is not A, but rather an indescribable mosaic mixture of A, B, C, D, etc., then the ground for discrimination between causes becomes the very thing that is absent from this scene: the invisible, but unifying, factor uniting all these disparate elements or ‘properties’. We might call this the image, or the spirit, that might demonstrate the unity of these isolated but connected forms. That which lies beyond the horizon of the multifaceted explanation and tempts its narrative “I” is, ironically, the promise of a single explanation, or what U. in *Satin Island* refers to as “Master Meaning!” (29): the broader more realistic perspective ironically leads itself back to, secretly or openly, worshiping what it sought to delegitimize in the first place.

Laughter, Comedy and Satire in their Social Guise

In *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour*, Billig outlines the development of the concept of humour, from the ancient Greeks through to what he calls the “ideological positivism” of contemporary Western society. Beginning with the ancient Greeks, humour is established early on in a moral context, which lasted, according to Billig, until it was challenged in the 18th century by the incongruity theory of humour. What is called the “superiority theory” of humour implies that laughter is the result of degradation, or “the derogatory impulse in man, his tendency to look out for and to rejoice over what is mean and undignified” (Billig 39). Billig argues that Plato, through Socrates, asserted that humour should not be directed against lofty philosophical ideas and values by the lower castes; neither,

however, should it be directed at those of lower castes like slaves. It must be reserved for mocking those objects and figures that might serve as poor examples for the citizens. Mockery is reserved for that which damages society through inadequate representation of what are in essence Platonic forms (42-3). This represents a theory of moral authority that grounds laughter, where laughter and humour are moral if deployed against the failure to live up to the ideal. Billig extends this further through the passage of time leading up to the 18th century. From the Greeks through the Romans to the Medieval Christians and modern Puritans, mocking humour is explained as something that is good only when appropriately deployed, in other words, only when mocking evil or disruption of the culturally specific good (social and religious order). It should not be frivolous, for its own sake, or at the expense of moral authority. In essence, these approaches to laughter and humour constitute the historical anamorphosis of the 'superiority theory' across cultural and religious lines, always maintaining its association with exclusionary discrimination, while at the same time placing humour in a relation to the failure to conform to certain (philosophical, behavioural, aesthetic) ideals.

As Billig traces his path through the 18th and 19th centuries, through Hobbes, Locke, Spencer and Bain's theories of incongruity and degradation, respectively, to Bergson's concept of laughter and duration, what persists through Billig's reading of all these approaches to the social function or value of humour is the sense that humour relates in some way to a distinction, to the creation or retention of a (possibly only momentary) discrimination. Several authors and interviews have mentioned McCarthy's relation to Henri Bergson (Deresciewicz; Namwali Serpell 231), and he is mentioned by McCarthy five separate times in his work of theory, *Tintin and the Secret of Literature*. However, as Billig explains Bergson's theory of laughter, certain vital elements, properties of the theory that make it work, are essentially absent from McCarthy's novels.

Billig describes Bergson's theory in terms that establish laughter and ridicule as ethical processes that seek to address the disruptive quality of "rigidity":

The theory tightly links cause and effect. Laughter's cause – namely rigidity – produces the effect of ridicule that, in its turn, is designed to prevent further repetitions of the cause. Bergson was attributing a necessary function to laughter. He was proposing that all societies need to hold the threat of mockery over their members. Otherwise their members might be tempted into the sort of rigidity that would threaten the continuation of society. In consequence, laughter, by means of the disciplinary function of ridicule, 'pursues a utilitarian aim of general improvement' (ibid.: 20). Without laughter, social life would fall prey to rigidity; it would ossify. That is why the cruelty of ridicule is necessary. (128)

Bergson's notion indicates rigidity as superficial and fluidity or duration as fundamental, but what about the society that is rigid beneath the surface and fluid and flexible on top? To argue that society fundamentally rejects rigidity is to have an ideal conception of society; in Bergson's case, this ideal is understood as "duration", but it exists in contact with an irrefutable materiality. As Billig points out, Bergson's theory also depends upon the presumption of a dispassionately realist perception of the world through our senses (134), one that is effectively and poetically denied by McCarthy through the persistent imagery of the veil, the screen, the caul, etc. In fact, Billig demonstrates how McCarthy's veil-imagery exists in Bergson's *Laughter* in the form of language itself, as language exists for this theory as a kind of obstacle:

The distrust of language appears as a theme in *Laughter*. Bergson suggested that we do not see things themselves but in most cases 'we confine ourselves to reading the labels affixed to them'. This occurs because the 'word, which only takes note of the most ordinary function and commonplace aspect of the thing, intervenes between it and ourselves, and would conceal its form from our eyes' (ibid.: 153). This is as true of the perception of inner states as it is of outer physical objects. Our inner states, writes Bergson, are screened from us, because we interpret them with the categories of impersonal language. (136-7)

Language, in Bergson's estimation, acts as the veil that obscures the real thing from our perception. In other words, Bergson sees laughter as primarily dealing with the bodily and material, and language as a screen to be gotten rid of in order to get to the essence of social life. Aside from the importance of language and the material, Bergson's theory of laughter is further related to McCarthy's novels, and *C* in particular, through the historical and personal context of its development, outlined by Billig:

Bergson lived a quiet life with his wife and daughter Jeanne in their secluded house in Anteuil. The quietness would have been significant. Jeanne, who was born seven years before the publication of *Laughter*, could neither hear nor speak. Bergson's philosophy, that downgraded the importance of language, must have matched the quality of his home life. He could utter no *bons mots* or funny jokes to Jeanne, nor receive them in return. Her spirit of creativity – her life force – would be deadened had it purely depended upon the utterance of words. (137-8)

Hence, we might understand Versoie in *C* as the allegory of Bergson's home, an allegory of the ostensible silence, the detour around language, at the source of his theory of laughter. Serge's home is populated by the deaf and mute as well, both in the form of students of his father's day school, and in the characters of his mother and Bodner the gardener. The former are taught mechanically rigid and strictly repeated muscle-movements by Simeon Carrefax in order to 'correct' this deafness and muteness, while the latter continue to communicate through sign language. Hence, if my hypothesis regarding the aesthetic nature of Versoie and Serge's family is true, it can only be so if we can read a sinister, perhaps ironic twist to this allegory, as if it were a reflection in a specially angled carnival mirror. It is clear that

Versoie is financially maintained by the sale of a variety of *veils*, the tapestries woven from silk, the technology of mass communication, and the elimination of silent communication (in the form of producing voices). Simeon Carrefax effectively articulates the reversing of the order established by Bergson when he suggests to prospective students and their parents that,

“The Word was with God,” Carrefax continues, “and the Word *was* God. Which is to say: speech is divine. Speech itself breathed the earth into being – and breathed life into it, that it in turn may breathe and speak. [...] Breathing, we live; speaking, we partake of the sublime. In our conversing each one with the other – listening, responding – we form our attachments: friendships, enmities and loves. It is through our participation in the realm of speech that we become moral, learn to respect the law, to understand another’s pain, and to expand and fortify our faculties through the great edifices of the arts and sciences: poetry, reason, argument, discourse. Speech is the method and the measure of our flowering into bloom. It is the currency of our congress in the world and all the crackling wonders of its institutions and exchanges.” (17-18)

Contrary to the Bergsonian premise, Simeon Carrefax elaborates a perspective that comes closer to the “ideological positivism” described by Billig, or the positivity of Habermas’ theory of communicative action: speech and communication are here being sold to the audience as not just exclusively positive, but in fact as the basis of a moral and ethical existence⁴⁹. It is interesting to note that this turn away from Bergson’s dismissal of language in fact returns itself to the basis of Bergson’s critique: language and communication is used first to sell (to create appeal for) a service, and the mode of that impulse is to relegate the negativity from itself, to present itself positively. Language is a veil in *C*, as it is for Bergson, but it is a veil that ultimately cannot be avoided completely, and is instead forever being circled around, seen and re-seen, woven and re-woven in different guises.

Serge himself distrusts language, he cannot get a grip on it and it presents itself to him early on as something beyond the horizon of his comprehension: “He sees letters streaming through the air, whole blocks of them, borne on currents occupying a zone beneath the threshold of the comprehensible [...]” (47). Codes, however, he seems to deal with perfectly well. McCarthy recreates this Bergsonian setting of silence but adds to it the prosthetic and rigid movements of the machine and technology; the laughter that frames the opening scene, “[I]t sounds distorted, slightly warped – ventriloquised almost, as though piped in from somewhere else” (*C* 4), is a technical echo of an order that has passed, or, is in the process of passing. The world of Serge’s birth is a world where flexibility has become rigidity, where flexibility is

⁴⁹ Given the breadth of Carrefax’s statement, with its inclusion of societal institutions like art, science and poetry, I feel the simultaneity of the two terms bears out, especially as they are both products of language.

humiliated and rigidity is eroticized as reality (as in the case of Tania's hunch-back on page 144) and pursued as a goal.

However, as is evidenced by Serge's disappointment in surviving the war, the rigidity he finds in the topography of Tania's back, or the rigidity of his position fixed into the seat of his airplane is made productive and pleasurable precisely by the movement that accompanies it: repetitive sexual movements in the first case, mechanical ones in the second. These turn out not to be corrective of Serge's uneasy relation to language, but rather a series of allegorical allusions backwards to the scene where the reader is told about language and its intractability in Serge's eyes. Serge cannot appreciate the irony in the fact that reproducing the repetitive and continuous movement of tropes and words in a sexual encounter or in a war-machine, is precisely what gives him the sense of having escaped that instability (his post-coital vision of clear darkness, or his feeling of 'rightness' in the observer's seat). Hence, the pursuit of rigidity as the reversal of the Bergsonian order does not amount to a theoretical or philosophical corrective in this case, so much as a tropic turn away from the silent idealism that dominates Bergson's theory of laughter and the comedic. Serge demonstrates a dismissiveness towards signs which are unmoored, towards meaning that cannot be "pinned down" (47), to that which lacks a fixed position, in a sense alienating Bergson's notion of duration and flow. Bergson's theory is in essence an ironic one, in that the vilification of rigidity amounts to a kind of rigidity of its own. Serge's perspective on language is equally ironic, in that it takes his actualization of the floating movements of words inside the nacelle of his airplane to establish for him the rigidity he seeks: the rigidity of being suspended inside a moving world set in motion from somewhere else, like the engine of the plane, a center of imperial power, or even the work of the Romantic genius Hölderlin, whose words become bullets in Serge's gun (216-17). We can say then that it is not society, or a consistent social perspective that grounds Serge or his behaviour in this novel, but rather ironically the elusive and repetitive movements of the trope, of language (which, like allegory, can always be traced back to another scene). Language and its floating ambiguity, as the very thing that pulls the ground from beneath him, also draws him upwards into the sky, it serves Serge as the model of the movement that will ethically ground his experience through the rest of the novel. This concept has been more intimately dealt with in previous chapters, but it serves to be repeated here in the context of comedy and laughter: without a solid and recognizable social grounding, without truth beyond the ambiguity of language, comedy of the typical corrective sort is impossible.

The same can be said of the possibility for McCarthy's work to be considered under the auspices of satire. Satire, like the theoretical elaborations of comedy and laughter above, implies the possibility of

a corrective effect on the society towards which its aesthetic has been directed. Hence, like these other concepts of comedy, satire depends upon both a stable social ground and on the stable mimetic capacity for language to reproduce that ground for comparison or ethical critique. Even if with satire it is the order, the 'normal' that is often the object of ridicule, it must be agreed upon between writer and reader: the order of power must be located and identified in order to be critiqued (Merziger 133). At first glance, the properties of satire seem to fit the poetic mould of McCarthy's oeuvre rather well. For instance, the largely urban settings of *Remainder*, *Men in Space* and *Satin Island* all speak to the notion that "A troubled metropolis breeds satirical discourse" (Maczynska 61). In turn, E. M. Dadlez speaks of the "ethical salience" of satire (and irony and sarcasm) in terms of the necessity of revelation, of revealing "some previously unconsidered or neglected truth or (even more directly) on the exposure of a moral flaw" (Dadlez 2). McCarthy's novels are replete with moments where it appears that something is being, or about to be, revealed to the narrator or protagonist, only for that moment to be detoured around, or interrupted or simply denied and flattened into a repetitive aesthetic by the nature of the narrative structure itself. Aaron Matz, in his elaboration of what he calls "satirical realism", outlines precisely what amounts to an inherent connection between the two genres: "Satirical realism is the most ambitious kind of satire. It takes its cue from Juvenal's pledge in his first satire: 'All human endeavours, men's prayers, fears, angers, pleasures, / joys and pursuits, make up the mixed mash of my book' (5, lines 85-6). We should remember here that *satire* comes not from *satyr* but from *satura*: a medley, a combination of things. Juvenal promises nothing less than a complete treatment of his world" (*Satire in an Age of Realism* 29). As was mentioned above, for comedy or satire to maintain its disciplinary hold over subjects, it must retain the capacity to establish a discriminatory and mimetic image of that which it seeks to confront and ridicule. McCarthy seems to rely upon his capacity to establish the world of his novels as the world that we now, or once did, live in. And yet, the mimetic tone of his novels is incessantly interrupted by a variety of interlopers: dream-sequences, waking visions, comas (all bodily intercessions), misinterpretations, words in motion, and even the purely fictional, noted by Derek Attridge in his reading of *C* in terms of species of plant that simply do not exist (21). The ground, both mimetic and actual, that would serve to stabilize critique of all kinds, is not missing, it simply (along with critique) no longer serves the cause of correction. Instead, it enacts the stability (rigidity) of a *constant flow*, the ideological detour around language that is attempted by Bergson made into a network of living machines (and words) capable of moving the world, as information, around the subject suspended within it (just like Serge and his airplane) and hence transcending Bergson's distinction between life and rigidity by reversing the terms and making mechanical rigidity (and its operation) the source of the flow.

Without the potential for correction, what meaning might be produced through the literary formalism of satire? Northrop Frye, as mentioned in the introduction (p.46), links satire and irony in a variety of ways. Firstly, he links satire to what he calls militant irony in the sense that it is irony given an order, a goal, or a finite structure. In turn, Frye infers the basic premise of Matz's argument when he suggests that, "Irony is consistent both with complete realism of content and with the suppression of attitude on the part of the author" (224). Finally, Frye suggests a distinction which serves to separate irony and satire further, when he states: "Hence satire is irony which is structurally close to the comic: the comic struggle of two societies, one normal and the other absurd, is reflected in its double focus of morality and fantasy. Irony with little satire is the non-heroic residue of tragedy, centering on a theme of puzzled defeat. Two things, then, are essential to satire; one is wit or humour founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or absurd, the other is an object of attack" (224). What I am suggesting here is that McCarthy's work comes closer to the idea of presenting a trace of a tragedy (like the trace of the crime), where that tragedy is precisely the universally human and idealist theme of "puzzled defeat", than it does to the notion of a morally intentional attack, nor does it contain much wit or humour. Aaron Matz connects realism and satire through their shared reliance on mimesis. However, he argues, as these genres merge in late 19th-century English literature,

[...] that satirical realism is a realism that refuses the curative or restorative promises of science; it is therefore a kind of representation that cannot be assimilated to the scholarship, dominant in recent decades, that examines Victorian literature through the lens of nineteenth-century science. Most important, satirical realism is non-corrective because it rejects the comic principle of correction that we instinctively expect from satire generally. Satire very often seems to promise us that it will cure us through laughter. [...] But satirical realism either produces a very dark comedy whose laughter fails to be curative, or else it forbids us from laughing at all. (34)

I believe this to be applicable in general to each novel, but to a particular degree in the poetics of failure at the heart of scientific pursuits in *C*. It seems safe to argue that McCarthy's novels share in this lack of faith in the capacity of science to redress all the incongruities and inconsistencies of human existence. It would seem equally salient to point out that several prominent instances and characters demonstrate the second property of satirical realism pointed out here: an incapacity to address or correct the problems that confront the characters through the narrative perspective, an incapacity related to the very scope necessary for realism and satire.

There are several examples of this, the most prominent being the narrator of *Remainder's* acceptance that he cannot do anything to correct his sense of personal inauthenticity (24), and Madison's insistence that U.'s fantasies of founding the "sexiest, best-dressed, most orgasmic revolutionaries ever"

(*Satin Island* 128) were absurd, that they could never correct the system or blow it up, only sit back and watch as “the explosion’s taking place already – it’s always been taking place. You just didn’t notice. . .” (129). Correction seems impossible because there is no ‘other’ scene to refer to as model and against which we can compare our flawed reality: there is only the singular model provided by hegemonic simulation and the variety of alibis the missing dialectic fosters in the form of terrorists or, in the example of the jokes above, “Jews”. What we can confront in McCarthy’s novels is precisely the space of the extended moment after that stable grounding becomes total (simulated by the sign), which is to say, an allegory of the collapse of the poles of the Cold War in *Men in Space*, or of the global expansion of wireless communication in *C*, referring backwards to these notions from the present: the dissolution of the dialectical relation into the singularity of simulation. Ironically, this suggests that stable ground is stable only when in the midst of a confrontation, hence Baudrillard’s description of the sign as an alibi for this missing but vital tension. Left to itself, unperturbed by opposition or otherness, stability disappears into itself, like the movement of the jokes from the opening of *Men in Space*, moving their attention from centralized foreign interloper to internalized agent or vector of sickness.

Whether it be understood in terms of the superiority theory, incongruity theory, Bergson’s duration, Freud’s psychology, or satire, all these forms of laughter and comedy are derived from the pre-existence of an established social or epistemological grounding. It is my argument that these latter structures are definitively lacking in the novels and as such the comedic element of the novels must necessarily be understood in a different light. This movement between jokes in *Men in Space* serves as an allegory for the passage from grounded power and social relations to certain uncertainty, from Cold War polarity to global capitalism, from a subject who looks toward the horizon nervously to one who looks aimlessly, but with a sense of anticipation (like the roller-bladers in *Satin Island*). From the automated mirthful clarity of comedic discrimination (the effect of moral, ethical, and aesthetic superiority that arises with laughter) we arrive at the automated response of artificial laughter, laughter which reveals the *lack* of distance at play between those who laugh and the object of their laughter, their shared terrain, perhaps even bodies: Anton may be their momentary fetish, but the “Jew” they are concerned with is precisely the totalitarian propaganda image Anton’s joke is both making light of and reproducing; the tropic movements of comedy/laughter in the Anton example allude to irony not as a trope, but as a structure for the attribution of reality to signs. This is *their* image, put into play to anchor their aimless social reality, to offer them an image of the ‘other’ that acts as an alibi for the other now absent after the collapse of the USSR, and it is their *proximity* to this image (the fact they have internalized it) that allows only for the hollow mechanical laughter we hear at the beginning of *C*; this is, in other words, the thetic version of a

Jew, derived completely self-reflexively and not through a relation between self and other, or even subject and object, which speaks to a self-generated 'reality' where Jews are uniformly understood as untrustworthy, deceptive, treasonous, etc. (but also the persecuted minority). This is an allegorical laughter, a re-enactment of and gesture towards the laughter of a grounded social subject, a laughter capable of uniting past and future with present. We could even say, as Namwali Serpell noted her laughter at the idea that Naz "had it coming" (*Remainder* 280), referring to his state of shock at the end of *Remainder* (Namwali Serpell 266), that Anton deserves his treatment given that his joke was (at least partially) at the expense of Jews. What the passage between jokes reveals is the avenue that leads from comedy that breeds the affect of (moral, ethical, biological) superiority to an epistemological comedic condition that generates an affectless assertion and circulation of knowledge of an image. Laughter here (as simulated, recorded, not irrepressible/unpredictable etc.) marks an ironic condition of knowledge: the looming truth of the rhetorical figure.

Irony and the Comedic Condition

In her analysis of *Remainder*, Namwali Serpell notes that the narrator deploys the word 'funny' to mean 'odd', and even recognizes humour in the speech of others, but cannot seem to experience it himself. He has been left, "immune to humor in the usual sense [...] He can perceive humor— he describes someone's words as "funny and intelligent"—but cannot react to it" (264). She argues that *Remainder's* treatment of laughter and humour is productive of a "dramatic irony", leading her to quote McCarthy describing his own interest in de Man's concept of irony:

So comedy is basically, like, a man falls over in the street, and we watch him and we laugh. That's basically it, right? But de Man says that some people can be both the man who trips *and* the man who is aware of the trip and laughs. Only a special few can do this, only artists and philosophers. And this is both a blessing, because we're elevated to the position, but at the same time it's a curse, because we're splitting, having both experiences — we're doubled, and we can never be an authentic, singular self. Our only response to this condition can be to repeat the experience of doubling on more and more self-conscious levels. And he calls that irony, which he says is *the* mode of the novel. ("If You See Yourself, Kill Him")

While identifying this sense of doubling with her overall topic, synchronicity, she points out, correctly in my opinion, that for all of *Remainder's* irony, these instances are "not actually that funny" (265). She puts a fine point on this sentiment when she says that "[t]he narrator may be aware when he trips, but he does not laugh, and neither do we" (265). This comment implies that what McCarthy is describing is precisely the tripping and laughing occurring inside the same *time*, as a simultaneity (or synchronicity) that she notes is lacking in the narrator. This perspective requires that we take the laughing and falling described

by McCarthy literally, not as the metaphor for the troubling knowledge of the universality of human folly that prevents the artist and philosopher from fully accepting their authenticity as such: Namwali Serpell seeks laughter in the text as a trace of this perspective. Instead, McCarthy offers a reading of de Man that situates irony as the *meaning* of the comedic (*Tintin and the Secret of Literature* 174). He describes the doubling of falling and laughing not in the literal terms of reproducing those actions, but in terms of confronting a problem: “The problem is that, like the fetish, as soon as a person is duplicated or multiplied, they become fake – and then their artist’s or philosopher’s gift of self-awareness will only make them conscious of their own fakeness. And awareness of one’s own fakeness can have disastrous consequences” (*Tintin* 174). The meaning derived from the comedic condition is irony, and irony constitutes in this context a motion of language constantly turning away from itself, a double-vision of the self which is confronted with a certain temptation. In de Man’s words,

Almost simultaneously with the first duplication of the self, by means of which a purely “linguistic” subject replaces the original self, a new disjunction has to take place. The temptation at once arises for the ironic subject to construe its function as one of assistance to the original self and to act as if it existed for the sake of this world-bound person. This results in [...] a betrayal of the ironic mode. Instead, the ironic subject at once has to ironize its own predicament and observe in turn, with the detachment and disinterestedness that Baudelaire demands of this kind of spectator, the temptation to which it is about to succumb. It does so precisely by avoiding the return to the world mentioned by Starobinski, by reasserting the purely fictional nature of its own universe and by carefully maintaining the radical difference that separates fiction from the world of empirical reality. (*Blindness and Insight* 217)

The irony, therefore, of the ironic mode, is found in the temptation to treat the turn away from the authentic self towards its linguistic double not as a splitting but as an amplification. In effect, the ironic subject is caught between a temptation to ignore the double image, or to sustain it by “reasserting” the inauthenticity that it reveals: this does not mean we should expect them to be illustrated laughing at their own folly. What de Man is describing is a subject who holds the temptation to regard him-/herself as authentic, as ironic; given his/her knowledge of fiction and its vital role in this regard, what the ironic subject holds in place and observes is precisely the tropic motion of irony. The experience of irony, for the ironic subject or the ironist, is what de Man calls, through Friedrich Schlegel, “permanent parabasis”, where parabasis describes when an author intrudes in the text, as in *Satin Island* when U. parenthetically promises that the novel lacks events (*Satin Island* 13), and “disrupts the fictional illusion” (*Blindness* 219). Irony is, in other words, the continuous and repetitive disruption of formal illusion by a certain element of that form. As de Man puts it, through his analysis of Schlegel, “The dialectic of the self-destruction and self-invention which for him, as for Baudelaire, characterizes the ironic mind is an endless process that leads to no synthesis. [...] In temporal terms it designates the fact that irony engenders a temporal

sequence of acts of consciousness which is endless" (*Blindness* 220). De Man establishes that irony is best understood in temporal terms, that the ironic condition,

[...] reveal[s] the existence of a temporality that is definitely not organic, in that it relates to its source only in terms of distance and difference and allows for no end, for no totality. Irony divides the flow of temporal experience into a past that is pure mystification and a future that remains harassed forever by a relapse within the inauthentic. It can know this inauthenticity but can never overcome it. It can only restate and repeat it on an increasingly conscious level, but it remains endlessly caught in the impossibility of making this knowledge applicable to the empirical world." (*Blindness* 222)

As McCarthy points out, de Man's concept of irony constitutes a temporality of the novel and the temporal structure of confronting its 'fakeness', "[...] its experience of time, of language and the world all revolving around the question of inauthenticity and various doomed attempts to overcome it. Other modes may be more bombastic, more intense, but irony seems to provide a channel that runs beneath all these, enabling them." (*Tintin* 177). The ironic turn away is the only response to an ironic condition, and it incorporates both a hopeless inability to stop, and the potential to "enable" other fictional modes; irony enables fictional modes in literature, as much as the mode of the "linguistic subject" who comes to the aid of the "authentic". Irony is, as McCarthy points out through de Man, the novel's temporality; or in terms that fit closer to its usage here, a *temporal structure*. It might be thought of as the temporality of late capitalist modernity as well, if we consider that mediums from the photograph to the digital has allowed time to unfold continuously in terms of information: like a trope, each formalized moment of 'real' time brings with it a turn away from and a turn back to itself, each moment also contains the potential for that turn away to be sublime, momentous, epic, all in real time. This endless process is exemplified in what follows the narrator of *Remainder's* understanding that his inauthenticity is in fact more usual than usual.

While the narrator may not laugh when he trips, he does have a sense, and knowledge, of the "inauthenticity" that plagues the artist and philosopher. His double vision of the trip and the laughter is converted (objectified) into a division between the film-image of de Niro and his self-image, which then resolves into a passive acceptance of his amplified normality, his augmented inauthenticity that results from the accident: "I wasn't unusual: I was more usual than most" (*Remainder* 24). As such, the narrator seems to have succumbed to the temptation, presented as matter-of-fact by his friend Greg, to convert knowledge of his inauthenticity into a reinforced normality that benefits and extends the 'original' self. From this acceptance and redoubling of inauthenticity with Greg, he goes on to suggest that he was most real when he first met Catherine in Paris. It was at this time that he was "least self-conscious" (25), or least conscious of the presence of his self, implying that his authenticity relies upon leaving his experience

of himself and his body behind. U. in *Satin Island* describes the anthropological desire for the “purity” of their object in similar terms of escaping the self and its judgements: “[...] the ‘purity’ they crave is no more than a state in which all frames of comprehension, of interpretation and analysis, are lacking; once these are brought to bear, the mystery that drew the anthropologist towards his subject in the first place vanishes” (18-19). While the narrator’s confirmation of personal inauthenticity points to the knowledge that results from the ironic condition, the narrator demonstrates through the assertion that authenticity relates to the least amount of self-consciousness that he does not experience the double vision described above. Irony for de Man and McCarthy constitutes a forever *increasing* self-consciousness, and I would argue, an equally increasing temptation to detour around this self-consciousness by perceiving the self-image, the linguistic subject, as not simply coming to the aid of the ‘original’, but as the alibi for the absence of the original. As such, the narrator is tacitly succumbing to the temptation described above. If he did not, his own image would be the avatar of both the authentic and inauthentic, and it would be inside this dichotomy that this temptation plays out. Instead of maintaining the distance between fiction and authenticity in the mode of an ironic double vision of the self, the narrator establishes the authentic as the unity, the real, that is definitively beyond himself inside the film image. The narrator equates this feeling of authenticity to feeling as if he and Catherine had “got away with something” (*Remainder* 25), which is to say they got away from themselves, were able to lose themselves and be “more in-the-moment” (25); in other words, the linguistic simulation of subjective disappearance is the key temptation confronting the ironic subject. The narrator recalls these moments in a reverie that soon drifts out of this ostensibly historical and philosophically charged feeling of authenticity, and towards sexual fantasy.

The lynch pin of this transition, what we will come to see as a rhetorical interruption, is twofold: Catherine’s imminent visit to London and the letters that Catherine and the narrator began to share after their time in Paris. After learning of her imminent arrival, “Our letters acquired a sexual undertone, something our in-person friendship never had. I started imagining having sex with her. I developed various fantasy scenarios in which our first seduction might take place, which I’d play, refine, edit and play again” (25). I would suggest we view these letters as examples of what McCarthy calls “fictional devices” that “give the fiction itself the veneer of authenticity” (*Tintin* 5). In other words, these letters provide their undertone with a veneer of authenticity, the very thing the narrator is missing; it is this veneer of authenticity that ironically turns back towards the fictional. His relation to this authentic undertone is illustrated as a precession of the essential structure of the entire novel, and a poetic echo of the movement of jokes in the opening of *Men in Space*: “In one of these scenarios, we were in my flat. We were standing in the hallway between the kitchen and the bedroom [...] I’d say something witty and

suggestive, and Catherine would reply *You'll have to show me* or *Why don't you show me?* or *You're really going to have to show me that*, and then we'd kiss, floating towards my bedroom" (*Remainder* 25-26). Very much like the first joke that Anton shares with the reader, this quotation in isolation betrays little connection to irony (except as a late-capitalist, mass-media allegory of the 'happy ending' of the romantic comedic genre); in other words, the meaning of the words used have not been changed by a tropic movement. In fact, if our impression of the narrator were different, if we saw or expected some kind of personal development, we might even read this as an expression of a genuine if clumsy kind of sexuality or sexual desire. Instead, I suggest that the poetics of this quotation imply a stable fantasy world that combines self-denuding (showing) with an ideal form of seduction: he seduces her by suggestively implying that he has something she will want to see. This first imaginary scenario is definitively banal *and* ideal; the narrator's imagination is tacitly understood to be quite limited in its scope, when what he imagines as ideal is merely the re-enactment of banal entertainment industry tropes.

His second imaginary scenario, however, is where we get a sense of a condensed introduction to what the rest of the novel will consist of in the form of his re-enactments:

I'd driven her out in my Fiesta, then drawn up and parked beside a field or wood. I'd have her standing in profile, because she looked better this way [...] we'd kiss and then we'd end up making love in the Fiesta while treetops full of birds chirped and shrieked in ecstasy.

I never got this second sequence quite down, though, due to the difficulty of manoeuvring us both into the car without bumping our heads or tripping on the belts that always hung out from the doors. [...] The other scenario too, the corridor one: as we floated to the bedroom I'd remember there were loads of mouldy coffee cups beside the bed, and that the sheets were old and dirty. [...] or – well, *something* always came along and short-circuited these imaginary seductions, fucked them up. Even my fantasies were plastic, imperfect, unreal. (26)

These sexual scenarios are conveyed like a process that plays itself out in an almost exact model of his future re-enactments: the turn away from the dilemma of irony (inauthenticity) takes on the form of producing a fiction or fantasy, which, when extended into contact with material reality, leads back to the very basis of his inauthenticity: the need to understand and navigate the rigid matter of space. In the end the narrator, despite the conclusion arrived at in terms of inauthenticity, decides (only after revealing that they would not be sleeping together that night) that he likes the real Catherine far less than his memories of her, that he prefers "her absence, her spectre" (37). Out of the knowledge of his inauthenticity, the narrator sets off in an ironic pursuit of that which he knows he is not, and which he has never been, which is to say, he sets out on a mission of endless and hopeless simulation. As such, we can say that he is doing his best to use his money to turn away from this self-knowledge (the inauthenticity of his physical being), only to forever return to it, or a marker of it, in the form of the interruption of matter. Irony in de Man

traces the path ahead of and behind itself, creating stability out of the irrevocability of its incessantly looping structure.

In the essay by de Man that McCarthy is referring to we get a sense that this double perspective is the mode of literary irony and the novel, but is not exactly their *form*; as is explicit in the quotation above, this double perspective is the exclusive terrain of the artist and philosopher, not necessarily the protagonist of the novel. It seems to be quite the opposite at the extreme of what de Man calls “absolute irony”, and in the following quotation, we get a slightly different sense of what the product of a literary or artistic irony might be:

When we speak, then, of irony originating at the cost of the empirical self, the statement has to be taken seriously enough to be carried to the extreme: absolute irony is a consciousness of madness [...] a reflection on madness from the inside of madness itself. But this reflection is made possible only by the double structure of ironic language: the ironist invents a form of himself that is "mad" but that does not know its own madness; he then proceeds to reflect on his madness thus objectified. (*Blindness* 216)

This description does not exactly cohere to the notion of the learned philosopher or committed artist able to not only be in two positions at once, but to then re-produce that perspective in another medium; in the case of absolute irony, the subjective “consciousness of madness” lives in madness by establishing a self-image that conforms to the conditions of madness and presumes their banality, confirming it in the passive indifference of its narrative “I” or eye. Rather than dealing with the double-perspective of the artist or philosopher, I suggest that in the novels as in contemporary Western society, we are dealing with an ironic *condition*, which we might consider as the viral and endless reproduction of the ironic perspective (the view through the screen, yourself in the screen, your profile absent your bodily presence).

The extreme consequence of the ironic, its saturation, therefore, is the madness resulting from and obfuscating the knowledge of one’s own inauthenticity. The narrator is precisely unaware of his “own madness”: his inauthenticity is *fact*, the authenticity of de Niro is a *fact* and these are facts that he is always trying to transcend, even after establishing their irrevocability. Hence, the product of the ironic condition of the author or philosopher is not an exact copy (which is to say a bad copy) of the ironist’s own double perspective, but rather an allegorical performance of what the double-vision denies the philosopher or artist: an authentic, singular existence. Even if the narrator of *Remainder* sees with a kind of split vision, seeing himself as fake and the image as real, this is not the double vision of the artist or philosopher, for they see both fake *and real* in themselves. The distinction between “I” and “not-I” collapses for the artist/philosopher. The narrator, on the other hand, persists with the notion that he is

fake while the image is real, hence resolving the temptation to see the linguistic self as an extension or improvement of the 'original' self; he does not realize that his inauthenticity and the authenticity of the image are in fact ironic mirror images of one another. In other words, the narrator has assumed the position of the "not-I" and relinquished authentic self-hood to the formalism of the film image. The narrator does not conform to the idea that "[T]he ironic language splits the subject into an empirical self that exists in a state of inauthenticity and a self that exists only in the form of a language that asserts the knowledge of this inauthenticity. This does not, however, make it into an authentic language, for to know inauthenticity is not the same as to be authentic" (*Blindness* 214). The narrator exists in a state of inauthenticity and yet it is this same state that knows its own inauthenticity. Simply put, the narrator does not exactly conform to the figure of the artist or philosopher in de Man's description because he simply cannot see himself in the image of reality or authenticity he adheres to: he is inauthenticity squared. While he observes the people on the street passing by as he sips his cappuccino:

They reminded me of an ad – not a particular one, but just some ad with beautiful young people in it having fun. The people with the screen in the street now had the same ad in mind as me. I could tell. In their gestures and their movements they acted out the roles of the ad's characters: the way they turned around and walked in one direction while still talking in another, how they threw their heads back when they laughed, the way they let their mobiles casually slip back into their low-slung trouser pockets. Their bodies and faces buzzed with glee, exhilaration – a jubilant awareness that for once, just now, at this particular right-angled intersection, they didn't have to sit in a cinema or living room in front of a TV and watch other beautiful young people laughing and hanging out: they could be the beautiful young people themselves. See? Just like me: completely second-hand. (50)

The narrator's inauthenticity is caused by his having to re-learn the basic movements of being human, and by his need to understand everything before doing it. The passers-by are inauthentic because they have learned their movements through the advertising trope of a group of young attractive people having fun. The narrator's madness, his insistence on the reality of images and the inauthenticity of the body, is objectified and contemplated in the form of the passers-by. After connecting to them in terms of an advertising trope, the narrator elucidates that connection through emphasis on "gestures", "movements", "role" and "character", the defining movement that brings this into contact with the tropic turns of irony being "the way they turned around and walked in one direction while still talking in another", phrasing that is reminiscent of U.'s description of "back-peddalling" (5) down a hill in *Satin Island*. In fact, this experience of back-peddalling downhill is not just aesthetically similar to walking in one direction and talking in another (or if we want to link it clearly to the ironic turn, facing in one direction of meaning and talking in another), but it also shares a sense of "exhilaration" (*Satin Island* 5). This is the narrator's vision of the happy fake, the subject who has succumbed to the ironic temptation described by

de Man, the subject whose “linguistic” self is treated as a further amplification of the original self. This same view of others is reiterated in the opening chapter of *Satin Island*, when U. perceives the ostensibly affected comment of a man sitting beside him in the airport, directed at the banks of screens showing the oil spill: “[...] he opined that it was a tragedy. That was the word he used, of course: *tragedy* – like a TV pundit” (10). Like the narrator of *Remainder*, the implication here is that this man is performing a role, enacting the movements, perspective and linguistic acts of a “pundit”, in a similar fashion to the passers-by who are enacting the forms of advertising.

For de Man, this linguistic self is exemplified in Fichte’s dialectic, which is constituted in three stages (the first two being simultaneous): self-creation, -destruction and -limitation. The first two stages are in essence one stage, the implicit positing of “I” and “not I” in language: “Language posits radically and absolutely the self, the subject, as such [...] From the moment language can thus posit the self, it can also, and it has to, posit the opposite, the negation of the self – which is not the result of a negation of, but which is itself an act of positing equivalent to, the act of the positing of the self” (*Aesthetic* 172-3). The final stage of this dialectic is described as when

[...] the two contradictory elements which have been posited engage each other, so to speak, come in contact with each other and delimit each other, by isolating in those entities which have been posited parts which Fichte will call “properties (*Merkmale*)” [...] Fichte says: “[...] *To limit, to determine*, is to suspend (*aufheben*, Hegel’s term) in part the reality (of the self and the non-self) by negation, but not entirely, but to some extent (*zum Teil*, to a degree)” [...] And the parts thus isolated in the self become properties of the self (*Merkmale*). (*Aesthetic* 173)

The third stage of Fichte’s dialectic therefore consists of the act of negation that follows from the positive positing of the “I” and the “not-I”, an act of constituting the self through the isolation of properties in it. From this point on it becomes possible for the self to “start making acts of judgement involving the self [...] to say things about entities [...] to start make comparisons between them and to start to emit acts of judgement” (*Aesthetic* 173). These judgements come in the form of synthetic (pointing out similarity), analytic (pointing out difference) and thetic judgement. However de Man points out that, like the double positing of “I” and “Not-I” in language, the first two forms of judgement always imply each other (*Aesthetic* 174), as well as contain the implications of a thetic judgement, “in which the entity relates to itself, a reflexive judgement” (*Aesthetic* 174-5). The way that the synthetic judgement implies difference while it points out sameness, the way that the analytic judgement points out difference and implies sameness, leads de Man to suggest that, “[...] the isolation and the circulation of properties, the way in which properties can be exchanged between entities when they are being compared to each other in an act of judgement – is the structure of metaphor, the structure of tropes. This very movement which is being

described here is the circulation of properties, the circulation of tropes, within a system of knowledge. This is the epistemology of tropes" (*Aesthetic* 174). Hence de Man is able to describe this dialectical perspective as a system of tropes, of tropic movement, the circulation of properties between self and not-self allowing for the collection of linguistically determined properties around the empirical self, like a kind of veil or screen. The thetic judgement, that which comes to define the thetic subject, is a purely self-reflexive one not based on a subject-object relation but rather on a relation between the subject and what de Man calls the "linguistic self".

The thetic aspect of judgement plays itself out for de Man as a negation of the implicit positing of the opposite that happens in synthetic and analytic judgement. In other words, while these latter two forms imply one another, the thetic is the posited negation of both that persists within both. De Man's example of a thetic judgement, which he borrows from Fichte, explains this negation in detail but also will also lead us to consider the potential for ethical discrimination and totalization in this linguistic context (the thetic, self-referential context). The example of a thetic judgement he uses is, "man is free":

If 'man is free' is considered a synthetic judgement [...] then this supposes that there must be men that are not free, which is impossible. And if it is considered an analytic judgement [...] then there must be another species that shares the property of freedom with man, and there is none. [...] in the thetic judgement 'man is free,' freedom is structured as an *asymptote* (as is, Fichte adds, aesthetic judgement). (*Aesthetic* 175)

In this linguistic act of thetic judgement, freedom as a property has been limited to the entity with a linguistic self, to the "I", in the last stage of the dialectic: it is neither similar to, nor different from, anything, and it is as such suspended, isolated from the realm of the "not-I". Though de Man is not clear on this point, it seems as though the concept of freedom is unreachable precisely because of this isolation away from the "not-I", the isolation as a property, but one which has been excised from the "not-I", hence ideally limiting its circulation and the possibility of accessing or judging it outside of the singular self. This is perhaps why Fichte calls it an asymptote, and why de Man suggests (in coordination with his analysis of Schlegel's irony) that, "Man's freedom can thus be stated as an infinite point toward which he is under way, as a kind of asymptote toward which he comes closer and closer, as a kind of infinite movement of ascent (or descent, it doesn't matter), toward which man is under way. As such, the notion of the infinite, which is essential in this whole problematic, is at play" (*Aesthetic* 175).

It is in this confrontation with the infinite that the ethical mode of irony begins to establish itself. The properties that are isolated in, and accrued around the self, the linguistic act of thetic judgement described by de Man, constitute the infinite elements of temptation that the ironic subject must always

confront, a process that the ironic condition must objectify and observe. The suspended position of these properties allows for the linguistic self to bridge the distance between itself and the property inasmuch as the capacity for judgement makes it, “[...] possible to talk about it in terms of an experience” (*Aesthetic* 175), where “it” refers to the property of freedom. The experience this engenders is precisely the experience of the endless detour: “With that necessary caveat, you can, to some extent, translate this into experiential categories, and you can think of this self as some kind of super-, transcendental self which man approaches, as something that’s infinitely agile, infinitely elastic [...], as a self that stands above any of its particular experiences and toward which any particular self is always under way” (*Aesthetic* 175).

In this context, the infinite does not represent the Levinasian ‘other’ that exceeds our idea of it, but rather, it establishes the space between the word and the actual as the space of an infinite number of tropic or ironic turns; the infinite as an endless path or processing of an ironic condition, effectively a void whose edges can never interrupt this turning movement. In other words, the ontological and epistemological promise of thetic properties sends the subject into an endless pursuit of their actualization, an endless detour around the truth of their groundless and primarily verbal existence. De Man’s analysis demonstrates a tacit poetics of this notion of irony that gets repeated and reiterated across McCarthy’s oeuvre, namely: the poetics of fall and ascent, of circulation and vertigo.

The Spatial Poetics of Ironic Temporality

It is important to note that U. as an anthropologist is always already inculcated into the ironic condition. In an example of the parabasis that Schlegel identifies as irony, U. directly addresses the reader when he asks: “What does an anthropologist working for a business actually *do*?” (*Satin Island* 20). What follows is in essence an extended thetic insight, an attempt at a self-reflexive judgement of the definitive property of late capitalist anthropology in the form of a poetic metaphor, one which first acknowledges the ‘fakeness’ of culture before quickly settling into what amounts to the definitive (and hence ideal, isolated, infinitely repeating) property of late capitalist corporate anthropology: the saleable product (information). In U.’s words:

We purvey cultural insight. What does that mean? It means that we unpick the fibre of a culture (ours), its weft and warp – the situations it throws up, the beliefs that underpin and nourish it – and let a client in on how they can best get traction on this fibre so that they can introduce into the weave their own fine, silken thread, strategically embroider or detail it with a mini-narrative (a convoluted way of saying: sell their product). (20-21)

The anthropologist unpicks, loosens the fibre, and the client/product sews it together again. Not only will the poetics of this quote come into contact with those of de Manian irony, but this description

seems to itself be a kind of turn away from what the reader will encounter through U.'s anthropological practice. When McCarthy states that "an awareness of one's own fakeness can have disastrous consequences" (*Tintin* 174), he is referring precisely to that consequence which is deferred by the assertion of the saleable product in the last instant. He proceeds from this line about consequences immediately into de Man's description of them: "As de Man writes: 'the moment the innocence or authenticity of our sense of being in the world is put into question, a far from harmless process gets underway. It may start as a casual bit of play with a stray loose end of the fabric, but before long the entire texture of the self is unravelled and comes apart'. The self-conscious laughter of the philosopher or artist, then, is the sound of their own disintegration" (de Man qtd. in *Tintin* 174-5). U., like the narrator of *Remainder*, never laughs. This is perhaps explained by the fact that the disintegration has already taken place, in the form of a movement reminiscent of Anton's jokes, or the narrator of *Remainder*'s sexual fantasies: of the turning of the anthropological gaze (like the classic comedic one) away from the horizon of the other and towards the absent center (stable ground) of one's own self or society. If the ironic perspective of the artist/philosopher, their knowledge of their fakeness and authenticity at once, causes "self-duplication, self-multiplication" (*Tintin* 174), then the turn of the anthropological gaze inwards accomplishes something similar. Rather than constituting an ethical gesture towards the 'unpresentable', the ironic structure of the text reveals the threat of persisting with this Lyotardian ethical responsibility (Gibson, *Ethics and the Novel* 70) by demonstrating the potential endlessness of such a gesture, the potential for the gesture itself to fall into the stultifying *mise en abyme* of cultural production.

Continuing with the textile metaphor of warp, weft and weave, U. illustrates the thetic nature of this inward gaze, thinking about the scientific object after the collapse of the discrimination between "home" and "field": "But when the object of your study is completely interwoven with your own life and its rhythms, this distinction [between home and field] vanishes [...]" (22). In effect, his informants become the suspended property internalized but held at bay by this thetic judgement, suspended in their "background and culture" which are, "at base no different from your own" (*Satin Island* 22-23). In other words, the collapse of distinction or comparison in the thetic judgement (it being neither similar nor different, merely suspended beyond the two) is similar to the collapse of the distinction between self and other, or home and field. For de Man, the consequence of this is the infinite pursuit of the property that is definitively, not like or unlike, the subject. For U., the consequence of this collapse meant a kind of methodological confusion that alludes to de Manian splitting without spelling it out explicitly. In other words, while U. gives no impression that he believes himself to be inauthentic or fake, he does seem to

suffer, as a result of this convergence of field and home, from an epistemologically confused need to perform:

Since the necessary act of approaching the familiar as a stranger, of behaving – even to yourself – as if you didn't understand the situations that in fact you do, is an obvious contrivance; and since, conversely, *pretending* to understand them, at a profound, unmediated level, to think and believe and desire certain premises, propositions, objects and outcomes, for the purpose of attaining better access to the subculture you're infiltrating, is equally contrived; or, to flip it back the other way again, to *actually* think and believe and desire these, but to be forced nonetheless, in your role as anthropologist, to *pretend* you're being and doing what you really *are* being and doing – in brief, since all this shit entails a constant shifting of identities, a blurring of positions and perspectives, you end up lost in a kaleidoscope of masquerades, roles, and general make-believe. (*Satin Island* 23).

This is an allegory of Fichte's dialectic, in that it traces from a choice between the assertion of a false (linguistic) difference, to a false sameness, and finally to the ironic position of the self pretending to be itself; we might describe this latter phase as the self reflecting itself (reducing the distance of representation the minimal possible) or reflecting *on* itself in the performance of an increasing self-consciousness. What plays out in the passage above is the distinctly ironic result of the seeker of cultural and hence self-understanding (the subject operating their screens) gaining understanding at the cost of losing their ontological grounding through confrontation with multiple iterations of themselves. This is where we might turn towards Baudrillard, in that this *state or condition* of multiple selves is a lived reality for the four billion or so internet and social media users, without necessarily being a conscious one (I would argue that we have largely succumbed to the temptation to believe that the digital linguistic self is an aid for the amplification and extension of the authentic self, even if that self must be searched for amidst more ruinous, circuitous and contradictory information). I believe the predominance of mass forms of communication in all four of the novels, in several articles by McCarthy and in contemporary society serves to disrupt, technologically and poetically, de Man's assertion that only the artist and the philosopher reach this ironic level of (self-perception). I suggest that McCarthy's novels poetically establish a state of total irony, the level of objectified madness described by de Man, and we all become impassive operators and performers of the technology of that endless circulation (both in reading the novel and in our daily use of mass communication devices). However, in Baudrillard's world language acts threaten to become the reality they represent, without the distance implied by the ironic perspective of the artist or philosopher, but with a different conception of this difference, one tied to the formalisms of technology.

The Technological Turn of Irony

The passage from *Satin Island* above describes the epistemological experience of combining sameness, difference, and finally ironic suspension, with a clear emphasis on the fictionality, the contrivance of it all. But, unlike the narrator of *Remainder*, who lacks a sense of position in the *present*, this is U.'s description of his *past* position. He no longer seems to need to do anything like this in his corporate aspect: there are really no informants of the type requiring a subtle or devious mode of entry or integration, or even subcultures in what unfolds in the novel as his employment. In terms of the Project and the Great Report, they are conceptually boundless, restricted only to U.'s analytic, synthetic, self-reflexive judgement and imagination, his pondering himself and his ambiguous and indifferent responsibilities. The prime example in *Satin Island* of this inward gaze combined with the temptation that confronts the ironic subject is the figure and mystery of the dead skydiver.

U. first learns about the death of a skydiver in a newspaper on the tube, on his way to Madison's flat. He learns that, "A parachutist had died jumping from a plane. His parachute had detached from him, and he'd plummeted to earth. Although just twenty-five, he'd been a seasoned parachutist, a core member of the club under whose auspices this fatal jump had taken place. Police were treating the death as suspicious" (17). When de Man was describing the basic movement of humanity pursuing connection to the concept of freedom, he describes it as, "a kind of infinite movement of ascent (or descent, it doesn't matter), toward which man is under way" (*Aesthetic* 175). The poetics of ascent and descent are equally important for McCarthy. The story of a sky dive is, of course, a story of ascent and descent, repeatable so long as predictability is in play. This particular parachutist constitutes precisely a kind of infinite mode of descent, as U. plays and replays not the impact of the body on the ground, but the moment of separation between human and apparatus, suspended in loops and iterations in U.'s mind throughout much of the novel.

It begins life here as the story of a possible crime, one which demonstrates the fatal consequences of unmitigated descent (or ascent) into a singular culture. This incident that U. reads about in the news paper is representative of an ethical allegory, the allegory of the fate of total containment, of totalized reality. This is an allegory of the disappearance of the dialectic: the dialectic of world and writer according to McCarthy in "The Death of Writing", of world and self in *Remainder*, of anthropology and its object in *Satin Island*, of humanity and machine in *C*, and of communism and capitalism in *Men in Space*. As becomes clear in U.'s desperate attempts to salvage the meaning of his anthropological work, he emphasizes that the dissolution of a dialectical relation does not equate to domination and elimination

necessarily, but perhaps to a kind of historical indifference based on the reduction of the distance of representation. Speaking of the Great Report (*it*), U. wonders if the freedom of method he has been given will translate into a kind of automation that will go on without him: “Anything went. What if . . .? What if, rather than *it* finding its shape, the age itself, in all its shape-shifting and multi-channeled incarnations, were to find and mould *it*? What if the age, the era, were to do this from so close up, and with such immediacy and force, that the *it* would all but vanish, leaving just world-shape, era-mould? I started to think thoughts like this. They excited me” (70).

Here we can see how the challenge presented by an apparatus that has taken control of describing itself can be thrilling, even to the subject that this self-operation displaces in terms of usefulness. He engages directly with the thetic stage of Fichte’s dialectic, the pure self-referentiality that de Man articulates in terms of an endless ironic pursuit of connection to, or absorption of, concepts like freedom. Sitting at a bar, he notes how several objects on the bar are linked by spilled beer foam, but rather than writing down his observations, “now I simply looked at them, blurring my vision till my own gaze became soggy and I lost myself among them” (71). From Bronislaw Malinowski’s compulsive note-taking to his own looking and being, U. is inspired by this mental passage between eras of anthropology,

[...] I felt a fragile, almost epiphanic tingling of *what-if-ness* come across me. What if . . .? What if just *coexisting* with these objects and this person, letting my own edges run among them, occupying this moment, or, more to the point, allowing *it* to occupy *me*, to blot and soak me up, rather than treating it as feed-data for a later stock-taking – what if all this, maybe, *was* part of the Great Report? What if the Report might somehow, in some way, be lived, be *be-d*, rather than written? (71)

What U. is excited by is precisely the capacity to watch his work unfold without him, to in effect witness this work from the perspective of the artfully disappeared. Hence, the ethical challenge posited by the dissolution of dialectical relations, or historical relations, is an ironic one, in the sense that to want the dialectical relation back is to want the return of political friction, conflict, violence and instability. Of course, all of these things continue to exist in a post-dialectical setting, however most of us are afforded the luxury of allowing that the denunciation of, or indifference towards, these negative historical phenomena amounts to our successful abdication of our historical responsibility. In other words, it is ethical to throw away the dialectic, because that way any violence that occurs is incidental and ‘natural’: a correctible aberration as opposed to a vital operation of the system. The dissolution of the dialectical relation produces the compulsion to participate in the ascent or descent into a singular reality, in this case, relating primarily to the reality of the object, down (or up) a path with as many turns as irony itself.

The language used to describe this accident infers a certain safety commonly assumed by the society, collective or group: the safety of an authoritative consensus and shared goal. The suspicion associated with the police in the quote arises precisely as a result of that assumption. When all of a groups' interests seem to align, unnatural death is always going to be treated as suspicious because it will be presumed to be correctible. The next time we hear about this incident, U. is once again in transit, reading a copy of the same free newspaper in which he had found the story originally:

It turned out that the police had been quite right to be suspicious: an examination of the dead man's gear had unearthed evidence of tampering. The rig, or harness, he'd had strapped onto his back contained two parachutes [...] and it had transpired that the cords attaching each of these [...] ultimately, to him had been deliberately severed. The severing had been carried out with expertise and cunning; all the chutes had been re-packed correctly afterwards, so that no outward sign of any interference would be visible. The deed could only have been done by an insider [...] It was now a murder story. (27-28)

The failure of the communal system to avoid this death is precisely what initially makes the death suspicious. Once the suspicious nature of the incident is confirmed, it becomes necessarily an inward-looking investigation: the parachutist could not have been killed by an 'other', but by one of his own tribe. This turn in the story of the parachutist replicates the move from a community organized around collective safety and identity to one organized around self-surveillance and suspicion that is achieved by Anton's two jokes. This turn, its potential implied in the previous illustration of the coming together of home and field, is reiterated once more three pages later as U. describes the transition from the aforementioned concern with informants and subcultures to the,

[...] MO I'd deploy in my work for the Company from then on in: feeding vanguard theory, almost always from the left side of the spectrum, back into the corporate machine. The machine could swallow everything, incorporate it seamlessly, like a giant loom that re-weaves all fabric, no matter how recalcitrant and jarring its raw form, into what my hero [Claude Lévi-Strauss] would have called a master-pattern – or, if not that, then maybe just the pattern of the master" (31).

Instead of dealing with the ironic double perspective, U. is trapped by the ironic condition: the poetics of fabric and weaving in this passage recall the warning laid out by de Man vis-à-vis an ironic reading of things by turning the processing of the fabric over to a machine that, far from unravelling, in fact serves to "re-weave" the threads loosened by the very "vanguard theory" being fed into the machine. Rather than being forced to confront an endless unravelling, U. is conditioned by a certain form of irony and by his role as anthropologist to defer the temptation described by de Man by handing that responsibility over to "the corporate machine".

All of this seems a straight-forward assertion of a project of total completion, were it not for the indecision introduced in the final line of the passage. This final bit of indecisiveness interrupts the singular flow of information into the machine, inasmuch as it posits two distinct possibilities. Despite the assertion that the machine can consume the ideologically incommensurable and “incorporate it seamlessly”, the possibility remains that the pattern revealed is not independent of our search for it, that it is not an isolated and independent pattern, but merely the trace of U.’s own contemporary anthropological mastery, which is to say, the trace of the Great Report that writes itself, that becomes objectively true by virtue of its lack of an author.

The crime in U.’s eyes at this point is precisely located in the failure of equipment to operate as expected, the failure of an expected safety mechanism. As U. mentally and linguistically tracks first the parachutists’ ascent and then descent, we can trace the spiral form of the endless ironic turn. The crime, as it were, is being seen at this point as an accident. Despite the tampering that the previous article had alerted its reader to, U. locates the crime not in the moment or agent of tampering, but in the moment of the physical failure of an ideally perceived system, a failure that caused death. This same brand of failure gets poetically elucidated in the pages that follow. For instance, in a chapter that largely serves to explain and quote U.’s boss Peyman, we get a glimpse of the idea of failure that underpins his Company: “The Company’s logo was a giant, crumbling tower. It was Babel [...] It embodied one of Peyman’s signature concepts. Babel’s tower, he’d say, is usually taken to be a symbol of man’s hubris. But the myth, he’d carry on, has been misunderstood. What actually matters isn’t the attempt to reach the heavens, or to speak God’s language. No: what matters is what’s left when that attempt has failed” (43).

Failure leaves a trace, and it is this trace that interests Peyman, much in the same way that Baudrillard describes appearances as producing a “trace of the nothing” persisting beyond the attempt at the “perfect crime” (*Perfect Crime* 1). In fact, the perfect crime as described by Baudrillard bears significant metaphorical resemblance to the totalizing “Great Report” of *Satin Island*, or the notion of Lévi-Strauss’ “master meaning”. Baudrillard prefaces this opening statement with what I would suggest serves as an illustration of the contemporaneity of the Fichtean dialectic described by de Man, which is to say, the fundamental linguistic irony of the late capitalist self: “*In the last analysis, object and subject are one. We can only grasp the essence of the world if we can grasp, in all its irony, the truth of this radical equivalence*” (*Perfect Crime* xii). For Peyman, this pursuit of ruination, this expectation of failure, may represent half the ironists’ perspective, but laughter is replaced in this formula by profit, while resolution or correction is replaced by the financial fecundity of perpetual circulation. Hence, Peyman’s perspective

combines the aesthetic ambiguity of Levinasian ethics with the desire for the concreteness of a map (modernist ethics), and this combination traces the outline of McCarthy's ethical structure. For U., on the other hand, this brand of expected systematic failure acquires a more personal (and less profitable) tone when it begins to dictate the fate of U.'s friend Petr.

Petr has been diagnosed with thyroid cancer and, unlike the corporate machine into which U. feeds ostensibly incommensurable leftist theory, the system he will come to depend upon to save his life reacts rather in the opposite fashion to traces of matter, imperfections, and the like. In other words, when it comes to language, the finite and the infinite engage in a brand of fateful reversibility (which will be explained further in the conclusion to this chapter). However, McCarthy maintains this distinction when describing Petr's cancer and his treatment, without the affective or emotionally charged language one might expect in a scene discussing the inevitable death of a friend. Using diction that reiterates the tone of *Remainder's* narrator as he explains the difference between picturing yourself grasping a carrot and grasping an actual carrot, Petr explains:

Well, he said, say one of these coins is degraded, or a little different, through some quirk of the mint – the way a machine-part was lying the day that it was pressed, a piece of grit that found its way into the mix, a hundred other permutation-causing factors we could mention: then the iodine can't recognize it, since these variations haven't been included in its recognition software. [...] It's a systems problem, Petr said. If we had a better database, then I'd be out of danger (52).

U.'s corporate machine consumes the incommensurable, whereas Petr's life-saving database has yet to consume enough of these imperfections to perfect itself. Baudrillard has often used the term "metastatic" to describe the mode of contemporary culture, alluding to a cancerous and hence fatal reproduction of the same. In the preface to *The Perfect Crime*, he establishes a poetics of perfection that alludes to its criminal nature. For Baudrillard, as for Petr's cancer cells, "[...] *perfection is always punished: the punishment for perfection is reproduction*" (xi). Petr says something similar about the perfectly intractable differences of each of his cancer cells, their elusive imperfections (the fact they are imperfect copies, or representations) guaranteeing their "perfection" in a Baudrillardian sense. Still using the metaphor of a coin-mint, Petr explains that the planned treatment will locate and eliminate perfect copies of his cancer cells, but miss the imperfect ones: "So the coin, the cancer-cell, not only stays in circulation; it sets up its own mint and prints new copies of itself, each one corrupt, unrecognizable as well" (52). Perfection in this sense ironically smuggles in the property of imperfection; what is perfect and hence punished with reproduction reverses in the context of killing cancer, in that it is the perfection of the imperfect copy (of representation) which eludes the grasp of the cancer-cell database and leads to Petr's death. The same

might be said of the parachutist. Perfection as such retains its original, denotative meaning, while the structure of its deployment acquires the trace of irony.

Having been experienced in his field, we might argue that the jump in which he died was precisely the ironically reproduced product of a system that seemed to be 'perfectly safe', that was perceived safe by virtue of the repeated success of the safety features, and hence doomed to reproduction unto death (to enact a very human temporality). U. effectively suggests as much when he compares the parachuting incident to the oil spill, both of which are completely "generic" (59), explaining afterwards that, "[t]he parachutist story, in the stark, predictable simplicity of the circumstance that it presented, in the boldness of its second-handness, was refreshing: in its unashamed lack of originality, it was original" (60). This connection between perfection, repetition and sky-diving is expressed later on by U. when, while compiling a dossier on dead skydivers of the past fifty years, the contemporary moment intrudes:

[...] in the very period during which I was compiling these cases – a period of no more than two and a half months – no fewer than three more stories hit the news involving parachutists slamming into the ground chuteless. [...] The replication, or near-replication, of these situations started buzzers ringing all over my head – and made the case of my own parachutist [...] all the more gripping: an originally un-original event becoming even more un-original, and hence even more fascinating (60).

What this represents is the poetic structure of irony or the trope, a circling, circulating movement between sameness and difference, expanding ever outwards and with that outward expansion generating the appeal of fascination and discovery of the trace of something that exists beyond or beneath the surface. What generates this fascination is precisely the potential for this interrogative perspective to be a bridge to that which lies definitively beyond this perspective: the hidden skeletal structure of lived (and linguistic) reality that shows through the skin of repetition.

The irony of the repetition of perfection is not just in the fascination U. expresses towards the unoriginal, it is also contained in the juxtaposition of a cultural ritual that inspired him to become an anthropologist with that ritual repetition of the parachutist. In chapter eight the parachute appears on its own, physically but not visually disconnected from the falling man in U.'s equally detached narrative eye: "Considering the picture, I found my focus, my point of identification within it and my attendant sympathy shifting from the diminutive man to his expanded, if detached, paraphernalia. I felt quite happy for the latter, for its liberation into carefreeness" (77). Between the floating freedom of the apparatus and the rapid descent of the man, U. sympathizes and identifies with the former over the latter, inasmuch as the latter represents the negativity of ironic pursuit and the former the ideal mechanism for both resolving and experiencing that infinite structure of human perception. Sympathy here, in its usual understanding,

suffers an ironic turn. Sympathy is normally expressed as a double of feeling or emotion, often shown toward negative expressions of feeling or emotion in others. In this case, sympathy is exclusively positive, in that it is reserved for the liberated, the carefree, rather than the terrified or obviously vulnerable. Sympathy in this instance has turned away from itself towards identification, towards a thetic concept of freedom that identifies U. with the apparatus rather than the victim of the dependence and faith that apparatus engenders. Hence, U. maintains in his narrative a vague sense, a poetics, of ironic double vision, one which illustrates the perpetual turn as an act of perpetual resolution or re-weaving; illustrates, in a sense, the ambiguity of irony as trope and irony as figure⁵⁰. He is already, as corporate anthropologist, integrated into to a world which succumbs to the ironic temptation to turn away from the ironic perspective towards the simulation of perfection in repetition. U.'s perspective on the parachute illustrates an ethics of perfection via dehumanisation, of ideal liberation being liberation from the body and the "dense load of all its troubles, that conglomeration of anxiety and nerves that he, and the human form in general, represented" (77), out into what U. describes through the aesthetics of the parachute as, "[...] a freedom that was permanent and real. Its existence would have been a good and full one from this moment onwards" (78). What follows this allusion to an ethics that is perfected by the discarding of the body as source of disruption, is an expression of an ironic movement of this ascent/descent trope across ostensibly cultural and temporal lines, demonstrating the fatalism behind Baudrillard's relation between perfection and the perfect crime.

U. next finds an article, in an "old-style broadsheet", that notes that skydivers have the "feeling of being *part of a tribe*" (78). First, the incident is perceived as an accident, then a crime, then as a generic repetition (anthropologically thrilling as such), and finally, in a kind of allegorical and anthropological reaching backwards, through a dying (but not disappearing) news medium into the framework of a tribe. This leads U. back to his childhood and to the very thing that made him want to be an anthropologist: to his fascination with and desire to reproduce the actions of Vanuatuan tower-jumpers. His description of the perfect execution of one of these tower-dives establishes the trope of ascent followed by calculated and mediated descent, not in the strict terms of endless irony, but in a kind of materialization of the de Manian temptation to turn away from the ironic perspective itself, and towards the safety apparatus that allows you to taste the stillness of death/ending, while at the same time allowing you to return, to ascend

⁵⁰ For example, if I am shopping in a mall, my movements (between shops, and those necessary for exchange) indicate tropic semantic shifts being enacted: each purchase implies movement of matter and of meaning, the latter in terms of a newly formed relation between object and subject. The mall as structure, *as figure*, conditions the possibility of these movements, without necessarily conveying a particular meaning on them.

again so that you might fall again. This is not an ironic perspective; U. represents instead our fascination with the apparatus that allows for our (epistemologically ethical) escape from that perspective into objectified, neutralized madness (the art of disappearance). U. describes the perfect jump as follows:

[...] the jumps deemed the best, the ones that won the diver most acclaim, were those in which the cords sprang into action *as* he hit the ground, plucking him back from the very jaws of death into which they'd tantalizingly allowed him, for a fraction of a second, to descend. On such perfectly realized jumps, the diver's shoulders would flick leaves and brushwood as they jerked back upwards, as though impudently scrawling the man's signature across the forest floor. The movement was extremely pleasing to observe. It was this act of scrawling, this graffiti-gesture, I now realized, that, above all other aspects of the ritual, had back then made me want to be a tower-plunger, or anthropologist, or both. (78)

Hence, the perfect jump in this context occurs when safety mechanism and deadly impact arrive on the scene at once, leaving behind only a trace of the individual in the form of their signature, the trace of their brief encounter with death marked as a disturbance of the detritus on the forest floor. This same simultaneity is then viewed by the young U. in the form of the dialectical confusion and collusion of tower-plunger and anthropologist, object and subject, viewed and viewer. His desire to be an anthropologist is confounded with his desire to be *the object* of anthropology, to be liberated from the methodological apparatus like the parachutist liberated from his parachute, and thus able to watch it operate independently of his own twitching mass and corrosive subjectivity. Sky-diving represents the Western, ethically appropriate (for being, presumably, more technically secure) reproduction of that perfection, the systematization of the thrill of freefalling descent, of experiencing fatal detachment, only for the system to suspend and extend that experience through the application of technology (an allusion to the interim-time of modernity). For the tower-plungers, their brush with death represents a brief temporality, the time it takes for the subtle signature of a life to be recorded in the tangential movements it has caused in the objects that surround its brief negotiation between continuity and death. The tower-plunger, in other words, reveals a context, a moment, when death and life are seemingly sharing the same space (a moment captured by the techno-anthropological gaze of the camera). The skydiver, on the other hand, faithfully and repetitively negates death. Instead of seeking that perfect point in between life and death, a point that can only be sustained for an instant, the skydiver stretches that perfect instant into what feels like an infinity of instants, where death is flattened out and extended into the meandering, suspended, but adrenaline-filled temporality of the parachute. Where de Man engages with irony as an intellectual linguistic form, McCarthy, and I will demonstrate, Baudrillard, depict it as a kind of structure of faith. Faith, in this context, is the mass form of knowledge, of double-vision, that is attributed to the writer and philosopher as described by de Man.

For instance, the same article that describes the skydiver as a member of a tribe, also describes what the author of the article considers to be the fundamental faith of the skydiver:

They must believe in their instructors; in the equipment [...] It could be argued, wrote the author, that this belief had nothing of the devotional or metaphysical about it, since each of the things to be believed in had a solid evidential underpinning: the mechanics of a ripcord, say, or a spring-loaded riser – or, of course, on a larger scale, the overall infallibility of physics, its laws of resistance, drag and so on. Yet, he claimed, these things could only carry one so far towards a gaping hole in a plane's side [...] That final spur, the one that carried skydivers across the threshold, out into the abyss, was faith [...] For this man, though, the victim, that system, its whole fabric, had unravelled. That, and not his death, was the catastrophe that had befallen him. (79)

Hence, the ironic perspective for U. is the perspective embodied by, projected onto, the falling parachutist. It is described as the experience of a de Manian catastrophe, of the world that fixed him in place, that allowed for his suspended, meandering experience of death-as-life, “unravelling” like the fabric of authentic self-hood unravelled by the ironic perspective of the writer/philosopher, without any corporate machine to re-weave it. In doing so, however, it also undermines the notion that this double-perspective is a subjective, rather than conditional one. Faith in the continued operation of the system is precisely the disembodied mass-form of de Man’s intellectual ironic distance, a mass perspective that is able to simultaneously know and ignore the nature of the human relation to the world: that a loud faith in knowledge constitutes a silent knowledge of faith. All of Western scientific knowledge is invested into an effectively ‘mad’ but largely controlled, reified, objectified endeavour: the safe and profitable repetition of falling from a plane. The parachute itself, with its physical manifestation of the accumulation of Western scientific knowledge, constitutes an allegory for the accumulated knowledge of the enlightenment. This figurative movement of ascent and descent is at play, in variation, in each of the novels: in *Remainder*, if we can read the accident and its “bits” as parts of a falling plane, then the story seems to create a looping structure that establishes in the ending the conditions for the emergence of the beginning; in *C, Serge*, upon landing, finds that the experience of flying is “just right” (156). For Serge, this experience is eventually translated into an extended, but at the same time slightly emptier, more superficial, “We went up; we saw stuff; it was good” (180). In *Men in Space*, this movement is figured by the cosmonaut, with the added motion of orbit, of the cyclical pull of gravity that, according to McCarthy, “[...] is also a fall towards the grave. Gravity, like repetition, opens up the dimension of time, by testifying to ‘the temporal reality of death’” (*Tintin* 171). Poetically speaking, the infinite loop of ascent and descent represents both the infinite turn of irony and language but also a criminal kind of perfection, one punished by the necessity of its repetition, forced to enact its perfection to a fault, to the point of exposing a fault line and a pre-existent proximity to and dependence upon death. The infinite in this context becomes a

mode of repetitive stasis that draws out the disruptive potential of death, and along with it a degree of seduction and fascination in the subject. As such, the ironic condition continues to demonstrate the unity of two supposedly opposed ideas of ethics, linking each through the subject caught in an endless stream of iterations of the two.

U. seems to know what this detachment would feel like for the parachutist, almost as if the experience existed as a promise inside him, as if he had experienced its like once before and repressed it, in the way that Madison has such a detached recollection of her disciplining in Genoa. In U.'s description of that moment we can perceive a certain way of positioning or understanding the world which, I argue, alludes to the possibility that the de Manian irony at play in the poetics of descent and ascent smuggles with it what Baudrillard calls "The Irony of Technology". A reversal, or perhaps ironic turn, occurs as U. juxtaposes the horror of the skydiver with the thrill of the tower-plunger: "But for the faith, the blind, absolute faith into whose arms he had entrusted his existence, from whose mouth he'd sought a whispered affirmation of its very possibility – for that to suddenly be plucked away: that must have been atrocious" (79). In other words, it appears as though there is, in this passage, a subtly coded sense of a reversal, where faith is articulated as external to the self. Baudrillard gives this reversal a poetic treatment that links it to technology and irony, when he suggests that: "At the peak of our technological performance, the irresistible impression remains that something eludes us – not because we seem to have lost it (the real?), but because we are no longer in a position to see it: that, in effect, it is not we who are winning out over the world, but the world which is winning out over us. It is no longer we who think the object, but the object which thinks us" (*Perfect Crime* 73). In Madison's recollection of her disciplining and programming she mentions, "[...] some kind of relation between me, the angles of my limbs and torso, and the machine, the rhythms of its crackles, beeps and oscillations. When these fell into alignment, when we got it *right* – well, then he'd moan more deeply, with real pleasure" (153), a motif poetically reiterated in *C* when Sophie animates the corpse of Spitalfield the cat (Sophie's giggles that accompany the spasming of the cat's limbs replacing the moans of the man). The machine is the source of the postures, the movements, the timing of Madison's programming; it is the machine's will being expressed, she is merely the processing of a machine thought into actuality, but it is the other human who experiences the *pleasure* of viewing and the experience of presiding over this attempted synchronicity. A similar kind of pleasurable detachedness is expressed by U. when discussing buffering, in a way that re-iterates the meaning of the lines described above: "*Datum est*: it is given. It was this gift, I told myself, this bottomless and inexhaustible torrent of giving, that made the circle spin: the data itself, its pure, unfiltered content as it rushed into my system, which, in turn, whirred into streamlined action as it started to reorganize into

legible form. The thought was almost sublimely reassuring" (68). The sonorous output of the beeping machine in Madison's recollection evokes the "data" being described here as it penetrates into her and U.'s "system" and in doing so makes, in particular Madison, into a "legible" form of subject. That U. finds this so usual and beneficent speaks to the fact that U. is, rather precisely as anthropologist, the ossified thought of an ironic (increasingly self-conscious) system or structure.

The true catastrophe, as U. explains, is not the man's death, as there is nothing in death's "ineluctability that undermines the structure of our being" (78). That death presents no problem to U.'s structure of being indicates an ethical indifference to both discrimination (knowing death) and the infinite (death as nothingness), which then translates into the notion of a necessary faith, faith that U. has demonstrated in his identification with the parachute rather than the man. The preservation of faith in the functioning of a system-apparatus is given priority over the preservation of life. It is this kind of faith that traps the parachute in an endless cycle of repetition that can only be broken by that which it serves to defer in the form of death; the death of the skydiver constitutes a disruption of this cycle, threatening to reveal the face of death in its continued relationship with repetition. If this faith was shared by the parachutist, then it seems as though it may be more accurate to suggest that the parachute lost faith in him, and it is only once it released him that *his* faith was shattered (because it was no longer reflected in the object of the parachute). The subject and object reverse positions in this scheme, and its poetics suggest a connection to Baudrillard's notion that,

[...] the irony of the world, for its part, has passed into things. It seems that technology has taken into itself all the illusion it has caused us to lose, and that what we have in return for the loss of illusion is the emergence of an objective irony of this world. Irony as universal form of disillusionment, but also as the universal form of the stratagem by which the world hides behind the radical illusion of technology, and by which the mystery (of the continuation of the Nothing) conceals itself beneath the universal banality of information. (*Perfect Crime* 74)

What we can see being admired in technology in U.'s vision is precisely the thetic notion of freedom that de Man uses as his example; the death of the skydiver becomes an act of thetic judgement on the part of the machine; the machine's act of self-definition does not include the burden of the human experience, but rather a sense of freedom from the burden. Technology becomes the site of the third step of Fichte's dialectic, where it reflexively posits its own freedom, where its focus becomes self-definition that does not require the negative counter-balance that it began with (the skydiver in this case). Irony maintains its capacity to act as a tool of "disillusionment", which is to say, it still represents the unbearable truth of the linguistic perspective in the form of a doubly-undermining vision of things. However, in its objectified form

(as structure), the endless ironic turn constitutes the tempting mode of obfuscating the negative, of absorbing and recirculating the negative into often positive banality of information.

The Vanuatuan tower plunger's encounter with death can be framed as just such a loss of faith, albeit condensed into the briefest of instants, made thrilling for the trace it leaves behind in the form of his name, and the speed of its turn back to life. The authenticity of life is revealed in the ritual's production of contact with (or proximity to) death. The sky-dive therefore is an example of a neutralized version of this, a version for whom truly material contact with death would be an obstacle to repetition, and hence must be relegated to absolutely 'beyond' the horizon of the system and hence into the eye and adrenal gland of the diver: the very thing the system wants to keep on the outside finds refuge in the safe experience of the inside. By acting as the liaison between sky and ground, the plunger is presented as the trace of their mutual existence, stamped into the earth with a "whispered affirmation of [his] very possibility" (*Satin Island* 79). For the plunger, the earth itself speaks to his existence and its possibility, but it also speaks to his death; for the skydiver, the earth has been replaced by the parachute, the technological safety apparatus whose capacity for keeping the earth and death at bay constitutes the capacity for the subject to confirm its own existence (with the parachute, the sky becomes as safe and valid as the ground). The parachute is the objectified madness of the digital screen and the ironic temporality of information, with its inevitable unfolding and replicating. This is an ethics of collusion, ambiguity and reversibility that is not sought after or promoted by McCarthy's writing, but rather defines the condition of the challenge that companies like Google pose to the traditional modern understanding of the writer. This is a *condition* that is depicted as inescapable, rather than a literary mode that might place the author on one side of an ethical divide or the other. The sky-dive, with its dual promise of safety and inevitable failure (both of which are contained in the mechanisms of its repeatability) constitutes the performance, the dynamic aesthetics, of this kind of ethical condition. This is a condition in which the negative must be sought through the positive, where the distinct 'narrative levels' that are used to understand the rhetorical device of metalepsis are always already merged, confused, erased, etc. If the ironic perspective is always tempted by its own potential for generating absolutes, by its understanding the turn towards the linguistic self as one of positive and clarifying extension, Jean Baudrillard takes this ironic motion and smuggles it into an understanding of technology I believe speaks to the ethics of McCarthy's writing.

We can trace the ironic temptation towards the concrete ends of positivity or negativity in de Man's work directly into what Baudrillard calls the "subjective illusion of technology": "We very much

labour under the illusion that the aim of technology is to be an extension of man and his power" (*Perfect Crime* 73). Where de Man describes the temptation to see the linguistic expression of being as an extension or amplification of authentic being, Baudrillard effectively conflates language with technology in his description, without abandoning de Man's basic premise of the temptation of extension. This "unbridled virtuality" (*Perfect Crime* 73) is effectively represented in the brand of faith that emerges from the subject's complete dependence upon the apparatus (not just for safety, but for legible, recognizable being). Baudrillard seems to be building a metaphor of de Man's analysis of tropes. De Man, for instance, aligns tropes with the elusiveness of pinning quicksilver to a display case like flora and insects (*Aesthetic* 39). Baudrillard approaches the object of science in similar fashion, suggesting that, "Through the most refined procedures we deploy to pin it down, is it not the object which dupes us and mocks our pretensions to analyse it? [...] Can one advance the hypothesis that beyond the objective and critical phase there is an ironic phase of science, an ironic phase of technology?" (*Perfect Crime* 74). It seems safe to suggest that the position in which U. finds himself could justifiably be called the ironic phase of anthropology, in that anthropology in the novel is confronted ultimately by two immense and perhaps incommensurable visions of itself: that of the endless elusiveness of the anthropological object (like de Man's 'freedom'), and that of the world that writes itself. We might be able to identify an ironic phase by noting its propensity for self-reflection, inasmuch as de Man's ironic perspective (structure) can only respond to its self-consciousness with more statements of self-consciousness (*Blindness* 222).

Irony, therefore, or the ironic phase as such, demands the repetition of statements and acts of self-consciousness as both the extension of and the solution (corrective) to itself. This is effectively de Man's understanding of the irony of irony, and hence the irony of all forms of involuted, self-referential, tautological, or thetic knowledge. On the level of the page, the novel protagonist, or the joke, the irony of irony can be an amusing intellectual or theoretical detour to go down: it represents an entertaining or even humorous extension of itself, as if, in Bergson's terms, the ironic was the comedic subject encrusted *with itself*. When it is identified in the history of the West, as U. does when he speaks of anthropological "cataclysm", the irony of irony loses its playful tone. As it ascends to the heights of the society or civilization, this irony demands an ethical, discriminatory analysis which performs the passage from amusing extension or double to potential ethical resolution or discrimination. However, the text, like Baudrillard's and de Man's analyses of irony, refuses to be drawn into a resolution in the form of an ethical discrimination as a result of this discussion of cataclysm. U., like Serge in *C* and the narrator of *Remainder*, seems to prefer a technical-rhetorical suspension between absolutes, a position that keeps the promise of both in sight while it denies the actualization of either. As Serge exclaims the perfection of the

observer's position in his airplane, U. reveals a similar notion in a meeting he has with a minister for the purposes of the Project. U. spends the lion's share of this meeting observing the minister attempting to unbuckle her left shoe with her right foot. As mundane as this sounds, this tract is poetically loaded in its descriptions of this process, creating the aesthetic of the infinite ironic loop:

This didn't, as I mentioned, happen all at once: it took an hour of tiny upward nudges, and of tiny corresponding downward smoothings of the shoe's surrounding surface, for the strap to travel all the way up through the frame's lower side; then, continuing its upward movement even though there was no further *up* it could go, it snaked back over on itself in such a way that *up* turned into *down* with no perceptible change of direction – and, in performing this manoeuvre, cleared the central bar with all the grace of a pole-vaulter, the prong falling away beneath its belly as it did so. Free of all encumbrances, the strap then slipped with rapid ease through the frame's upper side; and *presto!* The operation was completed. (*Satin Island* 66-67)

The first aesthetic that emerges here is that of the dialectic. The first stage is upward nudges, and if we relate this to U.'s mental interrogations of the skydiver's death, as well as his notion that the sky was "the crime's location" (55), it seems safe to suggest that this is the realm of ideas. Those ideas are then smoothed out, in a downward gesture implying a materialist treatment of the ideal, the stage of 'the trip', where matter catches onto and accommodates the ideal within a material framework. The next step constitutes a return to the upward nudge but is confronted by the horizon of its own success: "there was no further *up* it could go". I suggest that this constitutes the allegorization of the limit of de Man's asymptotic self-consciousness, or Baudrillard's understanding of the consequence of the epistemological imperialism often described in terms of 'simulation'. This allegorical dialectic seems to have reached the limit of its ideation or imagination (of 'up' as a direction), and as such experiences the reversal of its trajectory as a kind of liberation, the same kind of liberation that U. attributes to the parachute freed of its human burden. When 'up' reaches its limit in the tract above, it simply reverses into down; it detours around its limit by the performance of an ironic turn away from that limit. Though U. is fascinated and impressed by this liberational movement, it is in its reversal that we get a clear sense of his relation to this scene:

[...] the Minister then proceeded, using the outside edge of her right shoe's toe once more, to re-do the sequence in reverse. It took the best part of another hour; but she managed it as well. As soon as she'd returned the buckle to its starting position, its original state, she called the meeting to a close. I found the whole experience of observing this small episode, this drama that (due to the shape of the table, its supporting legs, the layout of our chairs and similar factors) I alone could see, deeply satisfying. How do you think it went? Peyman asked me after we had left. Oh, I answered: excellently. (67)

This episode, like those of Serge in the observer's seat, or the narrator of *Remainder* in Paris with Catherine, offer the protagonist the purest experience of his self-conscious understanding of himself: he

is most anthropologist here, according to his own explanation of what an anthropologist is. Hence, this witnessing of a pattern of looping that speaks to completion in terms of both liberation from, and return to, an original state, which illustrates in effect the temporal structure of irony, is precisely what constitutes the proper ethical experience of the contemporary (inward looking, thetic) anthropologist. The fascinated observations of a universal pattern playing itself almost literally under the surface of a banal meeting between business and political interests, and only for the eyes of the anthropologist constitutes for U. an instance of overlapping idea and experience. This looping structure may retain a sense of progression through the lens of a Hegelian interpretation (which is engaged with below), but it forces the Hegelian reading into a very Baudrillardian corner through the poetics of the endings of the novels. Rather than promising a final systematic resolution of the Idea, or in U.'s terms "era", this structure promises only that this systematization has already occurred, or that it will never occur.

That the object has replaced the subject in his anthropological perspective becomes increasingly clear as the novel progresses. We can see one example of this reversal in the language U. uses to describe his vision of the parachute as a visual metaphor for the Project:

[...] there are all these strands, and they converge; and there's an overarching roof – or, let's say, membrane, skin – above them. And, I continued, warming to my theme, what powers the whole thing isn't some internal engine, since it doesn't have one, but rather the way its structure, due to the way it's, you know, structured, generates kinetic energy as everything around it – in this case, the air – passes through it. [...] The main thing is, I told him, that (unlike a windmill) a parachute functions not in a fixed location but rather *in transit* from point A (the aeroplane) to a point B (the assigned landing spot on the ground); although these two points are in fact anathema – or, at least, exterior – to its own operation as a parachute: once the ground-target is attained, the parachute stops playing its role, just as, prior to the jump, it remains undeployed. Well, I continued, same thing with the Project: it has to be conceived of as in a perpetual state of passage, not arrival – not *at*, but *between*. Tapio nodded sagely as I made all this up. Was I lying to him? As I spoke, I didn't even know. (81)

The true state of the parachute, the Project, and the human endeavour is precisely in the unfixed position of a passage between two inaccessible points; described here by U., who finds himself at the same time caught between two inaccessible points: truth or fiction? This is a true metaphor, but one whose self-consciousness only leads to an ultimately confusing statement reiterating this self-consciousness that threatens to ironically undo all the (perhaps) productive self-consciousness that preceded it. It is an ironically true metaphor, in that it tries to demonstrate the fundamental irony of the human condition, and in doing so makes it so true, causes it to come so close to the object it seeks to represent, that it appears in the undecidable form of truth/fiction.

In other words, all his analysis and synthesis of the Project and the figure of the parachute leads only to the statement of a subjective and epistemological indeterminacy that mirrors the indeterminacy he identifies in terms of multiplying selves. What this illustration equally demonstrates is the temporality of irony described by de Man, as an ideally suspended temporality of the object, one whose distance from death ironically threatens to usher death back onto the scene by making the subject free to detour around or ignore it.

Conclusion: Irony as Ethics

The presence of de Man's irony in McCarthy's novels has been articulated here as an alternation between ethical poles of discrimination and the infinite, which is in turn the linguistic pathway down which the thetic subject (the Romantic genius, or hyper-expressive smart-phone user) travels. The temptation that eventually arises for the analyst is twofold: to return and somehow convert ambiguity back into discrimination, or to justify ambiguity itself in ethical terms. I suggest that McCarthy's novels do neither. Instead I have tried to demonstrate that the tropic movements of irony, those relating to meaning, are encased in McCarthy's work by the *figural* irony that I also speak of in terms of a cultural condition. This is why, though there may be a comedic structure to some of the scenes in the novels, there is no real laughter.

McCarthy's novels pay heed to realism, but the worlds they develop are hardly to be considered obvious and ordinary. Irony is the central *figure* of McCarthy's narratives as much as it is a consistent trope. As figure, it effectively denies the linguistic expression of the ethical in any sense by allowing it in all senses; all language caught in its structure is treated effectively as trope, as a sea of shifting meaning. Within the figure of irony, it is the movement of meaning as trope that hides the meaning of the figure (equates to its absence), like the absent referent in Baudrillard's simulation, behind the self-referential force of the *sign of passage*. Irony acquires the status of figure in a context where the sign is deployed to obfuscate disruption and doubt, which is to say, when language acquires an almost real-time temporality through the use of technology. The figure of irony draws language to all levels, total positivity and total negativity, and as such poses a challenge to the traditional reading of ethics in terms of totality/infinity by accelerating both to their ends and merging them in a sea of tropic movement. Hence, irony as a figure stands as the structure that contains the free movement of meaning without having to sacrifice the rigidity of denotative communication, a structure of equivalence that challenges the writer and the reader to

move beyond it. It negates the ground of correction, laughter and progress by appealing to the ethic of suspension and circulation, and in doing so insists upon the primacy of (particularly personal or social) meaning over condition.

In one sense, the form of constant passage being identified in the novels as an expression of an ironic condition might be understood in terms of Gérard Genette's conception of metalepsis as a rhetorical figure. Metalepsis is, "any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse [...]" (Genette 234-35). A variety of descriptions are derived from Genette's original expression:

[...] metalepsis has been characterized as 'undermining the separation between narration and story' (Rimmon-Kenan [1983] 2002: 93), as a 'strange loop' (Hofstadter 1979) in the structure of narrative levels or a 'short circuit' between the 'fictional world and the ontological level occupied by the author' (McHale 1987: 119, 213), as a 'narrative short circuit' causing 'a sudden collapse of the narrative system' (Wolf 1993: 356-58), as producing a 'disruptive effect on the fabric of narrative' (Malina 2002: 1), etc. Unlike factual narrative, moreover, fictional narrative betrays 'at least the potential for narrative metalepsis' (Nelles 1997: 152)." (Pier para 3)

However, my reading of metalepsis comes closer to that of Marie-Laure Ryan, for whom it, "opens a small window that allows a quick glance across levels, but the window closes after a few sentences, and the operation ends up reasserting the existence of the boundaries" (Ryan 207). The lengthy quotation from *Satin Island* above denotes something of the metaleptic; U. as narrator merges with U. as character narrated, where it is practically a real moment of metalepsis (U. being confused as to his own narrative position: is he actually lying, is he actually telling a tale? Is the confusion that of the narrative perspective or of the lived experience being narrated?). We might say, along the lines of the ironic, that this metalepsis gives us a momentary glimpse of U.'s doubling (though U. is lacking the language that might live up to the theoretical experience of the ironic perspective); like irony, it threatens to assume the posture of a condition, or in structuralist terms, a figure (Harlos 212). Hence Harlos' suggestion that Genette, despite using the term 'figure' to refer to both figures and tropes, was in fact more concerned (like Locke in de Man's analysis) with the movement of meaning, of tropes, than with the structure of the figure. It is my suggestion here that the ironic condition spoken of in a subjective sense is mirrored in the *figure* of irony in a linguistic, structural sense. Metalepsis as a figure seems to aesthetically participate in the movement of irony, revealing narrative levels in the act of dissolving them. This sentiment is effectively shared by Genette, according to Harlos, who closes his discussion of Genette's system of rhetoric with the following summary: "[...] one is left with the conclusion that rhetoric is a semiotic system distinct from other semiotic systems because of the non-arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified in the creation

of the sign. In this system, rhetorical figures have a dual purpose; (1) *as signifiers* they refer to a *second*, connoted signified, and (2) *as signs* they communicate the presence of ‘a poetic state of discourse,’ which implies at least the potential for deviation from denotative meaning” (218). Rhetorical figures like *metalepsis*, for Genette, are not really ‘figures’ at all, but *signs*. As such, in a similar sense to Ryan, *metalepsis* can be thought of as revealing a ‘poetic state of discourse,’ at the same time as the non-arbitrary (cultural, historical, etc.) meaning of the words speaks to an unavoidable reality; disruption and stability are combined in the non-arbitrary meaning of rhetorical figures. Finally, Genette can be set beside some of the other thinkers being discussed here in terms of an ultimate valorization of system and order, and hence of discrimination as the heart of the ethical, when he states that, “Thus rhetoric concerns itself very little with the originality or novelty of figures, which are qualities of individual speech (*parole*) and which, as such, do not concern it. What does concern rhetoric is the clarity and universality of the poetic signs; its task is to rediscover at the secondary level of this system—literature— the transparency and rigor that already characterizes the first—language (*langue*).” (Genette qtd in Harlos 215). In other words, rhetorical figures are detoured around by rhetorical signs, which in turn generate the positivity of poetic discourse by denying it its disruptive capacity. Real language (what Genette considers the language of the poet) is tacitly treated as a form of potential, and yet one that demands or requires a form of epistemological control. In essence, real language is given in Genette’s treatment the potential to reverse into the form against which it is initially compared and defined. This creates an ironic moment in terms of describing what is happening in Genette’s theory. In effect, in an attempt to know the system of rhetoric (as replacing that of the denotative) he wants to apply the form of primary language (simple, denotative) to rhetoric, and thus to eliminate the play of meaning in order to systematize aesthetics. In effect, Genette is enacting a Hegelian passage through language which, while alternating between impossible poles, is expected to lead to complete systematization (or at least its appearance).

Hegel’s critique of Fichte and Romantic irony might also serve to distinguish the meaning of irony as it is being deployed in this chapter. Firstly, Hegel reduces Fichte’s dialectic into the concept of de Man’s thetic subject: “first, it is, as stated above, based on the ego as an abstract and formal principle. Second, all particular, objective content of the ego’s world is negated by the fact that it has existence only through the ego, and therefore nothing exists in and for itself but only as produced by the ego’s subjectivity (A I, 120)” (Egginton 1044). It is from this perspective that Hegel is led to suggest, very akin to Baudrillard’s notion of disappearance, that the Romantic genius freed by irony, “is not bound by reciprocal relations, but rather looks down on them from the heights of his creative genius, knowing that he is at any time as free to destroy them as he was to create them.” (Egginton 1044). Irony is effectively the extended moment

of metalepsis, giving a sense of power to the linguistic architect, while at the same time denying that power a finite temporality, which is to say a condition of resolution beyond its own repeated expression in language or image. The notion of boundless linguistic creativity is one that the contemporary subject and its pocket-internet-connection can conceive of rather easily; in fact, perhaps even more than the Romantic writers and philosophers of Hegel's age, the average Western smart-phone user is the archetype of this Romantic mentality: the raising of language to the level of ethics and epistemology which ironically reduces ethics and epistemology to the level of language (of trapping quicksilver like butterflies). Hegel characterizes this perspective as "jumping off the train too soon", where the train is his dialectical motion, "in which the Idea negates the infinite and universal so as to become finite and particular, and then again negates finitude and particularity in order to re-establish infinity and universality in the finite and particular" (Egginton 1044-45). In McCarthy's novels, as has been illustrated here, this back and forth motion is effectively ceaseless, and it is the cessation of this motion that constitutes the "beyond" of the texts (the moment of dialectical resolution that is either before or after the protagonist's experience), always drawing the thetic characters towards their figures/signs, but at the same time always allowing those figures/signs to be drawn back out on the tide and beyond the grasp of their vision. McCarthy's novels convert the positivity of the poetic into the secular religion of the ethos of reality production: for these novels, irony as figure presents a challenge to an ethics based on linguistic representation with its constant shifting sands of reference. For Gibson, this implacable narrative ground can be compared to the delirium of Céline's *Journey to the End of the Night*, in which the refusal, "to authenticate or underwrite a self-standing reality as and in itself – is what serves as testimony to the ethical impulse" (*Ethics and the Novel* 81). However, under the auspices of the ironic condition, Bardamu's vocal "mourning" (*Ethics and the Novel* 79) of reason and sanity does not change the meaning of reason to the meaning of 'reality'; the absence of the former does not indicate the absence of the latter. Instead, their meanings are made vulnerable to transference without being transferred by the figure of the text, as exemplified by Gibson's own reading, which allows for the transference of the meaning of 'reality' to the terms 'sanity' and 'reason' in order to establish the value of his negative ethics.

What McCarthy's work demonstrates is the final impossibility of this ethical promise that is invested into linguistic tropes. In a moment where Genette's secondary (rhetorical) language has become primary (denotative) and almost an essential element of participation in Western society (in the form of continuous digital expression), ethics cannot be reduced to language or representation any more than the meaning of tropes/words can be pinned down like butterflies. The ethics of McCarthy's novels are,

instead, forged in a form of confrontation, not between the ethical and unethical, but rather between the experience of personal expression and the expression of the world (its Baudrillardian spirit of irony).

It is for this reason that Serge identifies the tar-slicked sun in ancient religious terms (C 201), that the narrator of *Remainder* identifies himself and his crew with a “religion not yet founded” (*Remainder* 259), that U. is always turning back to the framework of tribal practices (*Satin Island*), and the icon in *Men in Space* combines the imagery of mass communication technology and an ancient orthodox religion: “Irony is the only spiritual form in the modern world, which has annihilated all others” (*Perfect Crime* 75). However, unlike Bardamu, who knows that in his metaphor there is a reality (the delirium of military hierarchy), in Serge’s poetic perspective this delirium raises him (like the Romantic genius) to the source of his delirium-*as-reality*: not the sun as a general ordering him to slaughter, but as “a relic of an old order” (C 201), that of the hierarchy in Bardamu’s experience. Serge’s sun is not some over-stuffed uniform, but is instead, “intoxicated, spewing gas and sulphur, black with cordite smoke and tar” (C 201), lifting him to the aerial perspective of his favourite Romantic genius, Hölderlin. Finally, Serge reiterates the difference between himself and Bardamu, in that he represents the *unironic* Romantic genius, the fall of the military hierarchy conceding the stage to Serge himself, in a thetic movement of raising himself up in the place of Bardamu’s general, to a new center of gravity that ironically reiterates the gravitational pull of the Romantic genius and the ethical nature of his/her judgement: “In these moments, he feels better than he’s ever felt before – as though his rising were commensurate with the sun’s sinking. As space runs out backwards like a strip of film from his tail, the world seems to anoint him, through its very presence, as the gate, bulb, aperture and general projection point that’s brought it about: a new, tar-coated orb around which all things turn” (C 201). Becoming proximate with death comes to represent both a contact with the infinite and with the ultimate, base-line discrimination necessary for a totalizing ethics. The ethical poetics of the novels, as well as the protagonists, all seem to bounce between momentary connection to both the infinite and the total. What this results in is precisely a rejection of either as ethical as a result of the denial of the other, and instead posits the creativity of the Romantic genius alongside the irony noted by Hegel. The ironic figure rejects the ethical as a mode of expression, and instead forces it into a mode of challenge. Irony in the way that Baudrillard understands it leads precisely to the challenge of a dual perspective, one whose figure is reminiscent of irony (a logic that follows from de Man’s idea of irresistible continuity of self-consciousness).

The only conclusion to an analysis of irony is in its conclusion; the ends of the novels, and the end of *The Perfect Crime* all lead the reader back to the points between which the subject is suspended.

Remainder ends by leaving the reader two possibilities in the wake of the narrator's murderous final escapade: "Eventually the sun would set forever [...] and the universe would run down like Fisher Price toy whose spring has unwound to the very end. [...] Or maybe, before that, we'd just run out of fuel" (284). Either he flies in circles until the sun dies (infinite ironic turns of the symbolic universe) or, until the fuel runs out (the linear hypothesis). *C* ends with what is possibly, or even probably, Serge's death, yet it remains undecidable thanks to the nature of the narration. With no first-person expression like in *Remainder*, the narrative voice that concludes *C* keeps the certainty of Serge's death in reserve, as it poetically alludes to the problematic of Schrödinger's cat in the final lines: "The moon's gone: only the ship's electric glow illuminates the wake, two white lines running backwards into darkness. When the stretch in which the scraps are bobbing fades from view, the steward turns away towards the staircase. The wake itself remains, etched out across the water's surface; then it fades as well, although no one is there to see it go" (388).

Without anyone to witness Serge's death, the end of *C* enacts the dual poetics of allegory and irony, the two parallel lines "running backwards" into the "darkness" of the past (even as they trace the passage forward). In turn, the temporal quality of these two concepts is reiterated insofar as the lines also represent Serge's life, moving away 'backwards' from the moment of his impending death, tracing the life he lived back into an opaque, impenetrable originality. *Men in Space* concludes, immediately following the scene where Nick is suspended on top of a building, anxiously hoping for liberation but really just waiting for death, with the perspective of the officer. His final observation, and that which concludes the novel, is regarding the two jokers he finds under a "lost" work glove: "[...] the jokers, by contrast, numbering 2 [two], had been deliberately discarded with a view to facilitating the smooth passage of a game in which jokers are redundant [...]" (*Men in Space* 278). The final mystery pondered by the officer is whether or not the jokers were discarded on purpose; which is to say, whether their discarding is the product of a linear *human* development (the leaving behind of the redundant in the name of discrimination and totality), or an automatic and unavoidable ironic temporality (the unpredictable consequence of infinite ironic turns). Finally, *Satin Island* ends with U. meandering through the point of connection between himself and what has become his own personal symbol of both totality and death: Staten Island. After he arrives at this ferry terminal, from which he can see the outline of his destination, he rationalizes his decision to pull back in the end:

At some point, in that final stretch, I'd made my mind up not to take the ferry after all. To go to State Island – *actually* go there – would have been profoundly meaningless. What would it, in reality, have solved, or resolved? Nothing. What tangible nesting space would I have

discovered there, and for what concrete purpose? None. Not to go there was, of course, profoundly meaningless as well. And so I found myself, as I waded back through the relentless stream of people, struggling just to stay in the same place, suspended between two type of meaninglessness. (170)

Rather than touch the face of the beyond like the tower jumper and realize the reversibility of life and death, U. discovers his own brand of reversibility in a kind of endemic nihilism.

In the end, for U., both putting his life (and hence death) into play, and refusing to do so, are “profoundly meaningless” actions. As such, the poetics of the scene that he turns to, away from the potential for contact with Staten Island, is indicative of the tempting irony of the totally positive (light) and the totally negative (dark): “The dazzle on the water was now all-consuming, over-exposed, blinding: the departed ferry, Staten Island, all the other landmarks and most of the sky had disappeared in a great holocaust of light, whose retinal after-effects, in turn, made the terminal’s interior too dark when I turned back to it” (172-3). It is my suggestion that the persistent theme of the endings of the novels relates to an equally persistent theme in the work of both Paul de Man and Jean Baudrillard in particular: the undecidable possibility. In the context of the irony of technology being discussed here, Baudrillard concludes his analysis with the following:

We are faced, ultimately, with two irreconcilable hypotheses: that of the extermination of all the world’s illusion by technology and the virtual, or that of an ironic destiny of all science and all knowledge in which the world – and the illusion of the world – would survive. The hypothesis of a ‘transcendental’ irony of technology being by definition unverifiable, we have to hold these two irreconcilable and simultaneously ‘true’ perspectives. There is nothing which allows us to decide between them. (*Perfect Crime* 76)

Hence, the ethics of an ironic condition seem equally split along traditional lines, almost as if the infinite and the total constitute the spirit and the body (respectively) of a secular faith, and as such work together to establish the parameters of a singular religious experience. Irony as the liberation of meaning is the spirit that unites the disparate moments and motifs of McCarthy’s oeuvre, it is the secular faith that underpins the often difficult to parse devotion of the protagonists. The operation of the technical object equates to its veneration, or to the veneration of the vessel of the spirit of irony that might disrupt the continuity of the system (of itself), and hence bring us into contact with the everything or the nothing.

The meaning of this veneration is itself uncertain, given how often the operation of a machine today equates to the act of linguistic or aesthetic communication. Irony as a technical figure or spirit conforms to a prevalent sentiment in the novels, which Baudrillard summarizes as follows: “At the heart of our universe of signs there is an evil genius of advertising, a trickster who has absorbed the drollery of the commodity and its *mise en scène*. A scriptwriter of genius (capital itself?) has dragged the world into

a phantasmagoria of which we are all the fascinated victims" (*Perfect Crime* 75). My final suggestion regarding irony, therefore, must relate to the effects of its positing as a condition or figure. As figure, irony relies upon the fascinating, perpetual shifting of meaning as an alibi for what Baudrillard describes as its escape into technology, but what can be equally understood as its becoming a figure or condition. Its concern is not with life as it is experienced at all, not with ethics, but with the perpetuation of a circular kind of movement that retains all the aesthetic trappings of meaning without conveying any of its gravity: it articulates, in this sense, a world watched by us, but one without any sense of the language we use to describe it.

In place of ethics (the negative form of which are eliminated along with the positive, in the sense alluded to by the example of Bardamu above), we have the objectified madness of irony, woven and re-woven into a stabilized delirium, one which has abandoned reality as a referent in favour of reality as a sign (the structure of this delirium). In this Baudrillardian context, language is deified; irony defies its own being as trope by assuming the posture of 'spirit', serving as the technological frame within which tropic movements are used to generate the image of a reality beyond all human structures (like ethics). The secular religion lifts language to the level of enlightened dictator in an effort to escape the material truth of the veil. This position of language, this elevation, demands the coordination of literary, ideological and cultural critique. And yet, what kind of critique is possible without the grounding made permanently unstable, and fertile, by the figure of irony? One possible mode would be to abandon critique and the ground it requires in favour of the ethic of challenge. Groundlessness can be interpreted in postmodern terms as much as mythical terms; the absence of stable meaning/language, of tools, of civilization is precisely the ground on which trickster myths play out. Even when the narrative object of a civilization, the trickster always acts as if it were beyond that realm, an ignorant and committed idealism (thetic subjectivity beyond the bounds of civilization) expressed as if it were nothing but a system of auto-expressing language. The following chapter will therefore turn from the ironic condition that denies the traditional ethical dichotomy, towards the form of the challenge of the trickster, a challenge traditionally capable of toppling Gods and founding (and confounding) civilization. The trickster operates in the zone both before and after human power over nature, and as such, when considered as a literary figure like irony, seems suited to a moment of human disempowerment, whether this moment is the result of petulant gods, a lack of technology, an overbearing sense of civility, or an excess of technology that alienates the human from creative power as suggested in McCarthy's article, "The Death of Writing".

Chapter 9: The Trickster Figure and the Ethics of Simulation

It would be reasonable at this point to suggest that McCarthy's novels all speak to a particular human dilemma, a singular problem which has, like the trope (the transmutation of meaning absent a particular or associated structure), smuggled itself beyond the system of language from which it emerged into the myriad products of the technical network of money and information that has served to spread and sustain a particular Western form of social cohesion and relation. I would argue that the novels speak to a fundamental dilemma that spawns an infinite number of deceptively different iterations of itself, confounding in turn both the modern and poststructuralist sense of literary ethics by demonstrating their fundamental reversibility. This is the same dilemma presented to the reader of *Remainder* and noted by Byatt (257): is the end of the novel the end, or has the stage simply been set for another (or the same) beginning, and is there a difference? The dilemma the novels confront is the contemporary dilemma of the novel form itself, the dilemma McCarthy specifically connects with the role of the contemporary writer in the article "The Death of Writing" but made general across historical and cultural lines: the dilemma of the human struggle to express or represent 'reality' through techniques which cannot shake the persistent trace of illusion or technical and literary formalism. In the race to understand and reveal everything, the ironic perspective of the machine far outstrips the banal positivity of the human. In de Man's treatment of Locke, this dilemma is articulated in terms of the problem with rhetorical language and is resolved ironically by a philosophically motivated turn away from itself. Once again, we might call this an example of the philosophical detour (or, put in an ideologically positive light, *rigour*) that grounded enlightenment epistemology. As Enlightenment society and thinking attempted to move beyond this fundamental problem, the turn away from the fundamental dilemma of rhetoric and illusion is now an inescapable and incessant performance by the systematic machinery of information and money. Instead of simply looking away (a strategy that depends completely on the self-control of the rational impulse that cannot escape the temptation to seek its reflection, a temptation made productive in contemporary terms), the aesthetics, economy and ethics of the machine demand a redoubled presence for the ethical dilemma of illusion, not an ironic double-vision but in Baudrillard's parlance, a clone, a perfect copy, deploying the seductive concept of reality as the universal, objective, mode of equivalence. The resolution of this dilemma in the abandoning of irony to the machine (ideological positivity equated with a lack of subjective

self-consciousness), leads to the resurgence, from the trace of the concept of dialectic or conflict that persists in the system, to the re-animation, or repeated simulation, of a long dead ethical tension. The mythical trickster figure is turned to (or returned to) in the novels in the dual form of culture hero/buffoon (Carroll 305), as *the* contemporary mode of bourgeois subjectivity, shown through the novels' relation to Baudrillard's theory of obesity and the obscene (the latter being understood as the absence of distance between audience and stage) to be an allegorical expression of a mythical/pre-cultural imperative capable of challenging the aesthetic conditions of late capitalism: a figure whose behaviour aligns significantly with that of the characters in McCarthy's novels, as well as the *mass* mode of resistance described by Baudrillard.

McCarthy illustrates the banality of the everyday in each of his novels, but in such a way as to confound the contemporary literary ethical framework of total (modern) vs infinite (post-structuralist). In the previous chapter we noted the centrality of the concept of suspension between precisely these two poles as being in essence the ethical position of the characters in the novels (tied to both poles, and hence to neither). In place of this epistemological-ethical dialectic there is an ethics of labour at play, in the sense that in McCarthy's oeuvre the ethical is derived not from language (which is its condition of continuous emergence), but from a set of pre-existing and inescapable social conditions: conditions which must therefore be paradoxically encouraged and ignored through performance in order to be resisted (getting out on good behaviour or escaping into one's own mind, in prison terms). These conditions aesthetically present a determined structure (temporal and spatial) of the subject's life ahead of time, and as such the ethical is present without having to be enunciated or engaged with; subject or object, one's very being is ethically determined ahead of time, through a tangled mechanics of both the aesthetic and material, the infinite and the discriminatory. A silent ethics, one which relies neither on mimesis nor on language as an 'opening up' of a concept, persists in each novel, in the form of the silence of action. Tangential topics are discussed, like violence, death, etc., resulting from the 'everyday' practice of anthropology for instance, but the question of what is an ethical mode of being seems to remain silent and implicit. Though death and violence are ostensibly exterior to the 'good' in the novels, this exteriority takes the place of the otherness that has been diminished to the point of disappearance by the total aesthetics of simulation. In other words, death fascinates the protagonist, or excites him, as in the examples of U. investigating the skydiver (or the oil spill or thinking about Petr's cancer) and Serge's experience of sexual arousal at the funeral or over the battlefield. When life and death are split into opposing camps, death becomes the object of liminal and taboo *desires*, our identification of it devolves into a processing together of the unattainable consumer object and the instant gratification of all desires in a pre-cultural state.

If we consider once again the specific way in which Gibson illustrates the ethical division between the total and the infinite, we get a sense that what is precisely left out of these novels, what remains almost completely silent, but, as the last chapter illustrates, what is almost constantly gestured towards, is precisely the absence of an ethical mindset. McCarthy establishes an ethical condition in the endless processing away of the division (between total and infinite) that constitutes the literary-ethical matrix being engaged with here; language and novel become not paths to one or the other competing ethical perspectives, but merely the bourgeois territory in which the subject bounces indifferently between the two, encouraging both like the trickster figure through an unconscious indifference to the ethical nature of their own behaviour. Gibson considers openness to be ethical, when that openness results from the deconstruction of, for instance, rigidly defined gender identity. Where we begin to question this theory of ethics is not by *returning* to the terrain of the total via an epistemological detour, but rather by asking what comes next. Even as Levinas himself notes that the draw of the 'other' is perpetual, we must also posit the contrasting draw of solidity and the pleasure of civilization, of boundary distinction (making up the other half of the trickster dilemma: the desire for both the boundaries of civilization and the openness that is a fact of the isolated subjective existence, the otherness that makes you inaccessible). The trickster figure embodies these competing imperatives: the destruction and the erection of social boundaries. Both imperatives are ethically meaningless in isolation, in that in isolation both stand simply for a certain conception of dealing with 'reality': the totally objective (controlled) or the totally open-ended (uncontrolled). Outside of the context of reversibility or symbolic exchange, 'reality' absorbs the ethical into the banality of the inescapable.

If a literary ethics depends upon the opposition of mimesis and a kind of avant-garde postmodern withholding (tending the empty center), then the everyday life of protagonists in McCarthy's novels (and the narration that accompanies them) establishes an ethical mode that combines the expression and experience of both of these ethical modes, a combination that speaks to McCarthy's own opinion of the division between avant-garde and realist or middle-brow fiction: "But at the same time I think [*avant-garde*] gets used as catch-all term now for something that isn't retrograde, anything that's not a kind of nostalgic, kitsch version of the 19th-century novel, which is what much of middlebrow fiction right now is" (Evers). As such, this premise presumes that what we will find in the novels is not the intentional reproduction of one of two modes of literary ethics, but the literary representation of the ethical framework into which subjects of late capitalism (including what they say and what they write) are always already invested into: money and information.

Money and information constitute an ethical framework that requires the engagement with both the infinite and discriminate in the pleasurable form of a purely thetic choice: what is best *to you*? Money and information form a binary orbit around an absent ethical center of gravity, each growing themselves as they help to expand and animate the other. This is an ethic of 'more is better', except where nothing or absence is concerned. As Alfred Sohn-Rethel notes in his analysis of the act of commodity exchange, this mode of exchange socializes everyone as a stranger, an isolated individual expressing itself (42-43). This isolation (the Marxist structure of Bataille's fundamental human discontinuity) is both a precondition for exchange, and doubled in the act of exchange, made essential to a particular mode of societization. The ethics of the individual (the individual as thetic identity, or passage of being, not quantity) are necessarily different, but similar, to that of the group. To live a good life the individual must first be able to perform the acts necessary to live. It must secure its capacity to perform these acts in the presence of other individuals without their willing interference or disruption. What becomes 'good' or ethical in the sense that it facilitates the collective functioning of these individuals, is the act of signalling intent (ideally good intent) from this position of isolation; intent that is comprehensible to other individuals and that will allow them to identify with this 'good' intent by reproducing it in themselves (though whether they share more *good* than mere *intent* is a question worth considering).

One example of this isolated position can be seen when the narrator of *Remainder* is waiting for Catherine in the arrivals area of the airport:

I leant against a rail and watched passengers emerge from these doors. It was interesting. Some of the arriving passengers scanned the waiting faces for relatives, but most weren't being met. These ones came out carrying some kind of regard to show to the assembled crowd, some facial disposition they'd struck up just before the doors slid open for them. They might be trying to look hurried [...] Or they might look carefree, innocent and happy, as though unaware that fifty or sixty pairs of eyes were focused on them, just on them, if only for two seconds. Which of course they weren't – unaware, I mean. How could you be? The strip between the railings and the doors was like a fashion catwalk, with models acting out different roles, different identities. [...] one character after another, all so self-conscious, stylized, false. Other people really were like me; they just didn't know they were. And they didn't have eight and a half million pounds. (27)

As is evident in the extract above, the narrator does not divide the aspects of passengers in ethical terms, in terms of what they say or suggest (negative ethics) or who they are (discriminatory ethics), but rather focuses on the sameness of their playing on difference, how their inauthenticity was universal, and shared by the narrator. Though he shares their inauthenticity, his money acts as a trace of what they have all left behind: the potential of infinity and the power of difference. Money and information become a kind of automated ethics in late capitalism, as opposed to spoken or written language; automated in the sense

that money and information inescapably extend the trace of these ethics beyond their disappearance into the signs of money and information. This platform is also the stage upon which the subject of late capitalism remains fascinatedly transfixed by the art of disappearance. Though attuned to the mimetic impulse of realism and modernist ethics, the protagonist for whom language is not the vessel of ethics but the terrain of reality lexically meanders like the roller-bladers in *Satin Island* through a mixture of the mimetic and the poetic language of the narration. If money and information have become the pre-determined terrain of the ethical subject or act, it is because neither can conjure an opposite nor sustain a relation with nothingness: they produce an ecstatically *positive* ethics. The subject who desires to resist this ethical platforming must first accept that he/she cannot oppose it, cannot become its opposite without accomplishing a form of their own disappearance or death.

If there is an ethical component or product of this mixture, it can be found in the ambiguity of the mythical trickster figure and its more modern iterations, and in the inconclusive but finite strategy of Baudrillard's art of disappearance. The trickster figure will be deployed here as the ancient sign of irresolvable ambiguity, or ungraspable causality: this figure represents the ambiguity of an historical moment that defies the oppositional meanings of pre- and post-. As we will see, the nature of the trickster's actions (as buffoon and culture hero) always imply both pre- and post-societal moments, in that they are always challenging authority and social convention through ignorance, stupidity or a general lack of self-awareness (and hence operate in a post-society moment), or, they are challenging the state of nature or the control of the gods by bringing the tools of society to humanity. Hence, while a turn to the trickster might be considered a 'return' to an ancient literary mode, we might also consider the deification of digital information and language as itself a return to the historical moment of the trickster, where the very notion of 'society' seems to be teetering on the edge between total positivity and total negativity, between both an excess and absence of civilization, exemplified by Serge in *C* as he helps erect radio transmission towers on top of a millennium's worth of civilizational rubble.

The return to the beginning does not have to be a conservative one. By returning to the fundamental dilemmas of human civilization, we return (particularly because we are in the age of the digital, where reality is genuinely a product to be produced and manipulated through capital, technology and power) to a pre-civilizational mode of the trickster, who wants to both tear down and build up at once (the same could be said for money and information): an irrational duality of imperatives made *rational* by the temporal confusion of the ironic figure, the impossibility of deciding on the difference between pre- and post- civilizational moments through language. This figure bears no stable intentions, but manages to

confront and defeat Gods, to out-smart, out-inebriate and out-fornicate all others, all the activities that disrupt society's stability and need to be repressed (Carroll); he manages to disrupt the very essence of labour relations (by ignoring or misinterpreting instructions or definition); he tricks others into doing his work for him; he steals and ruins the relations of property (Kononenko 9). Social rules seem to find the trickster and not the other way around; where foolishness equates to a lack of intention, it seems as though rules present themselves to the trickster to break, in order to demonstrate their breaking and in doing so demonstrate the violence of the intention at the heart of human social structures.

In my reading of the novels the duelling imperatives of the trickster figure take the shape of a circle, or cycle. The main contradiction being addressed by this cyclical form is that between breaking social boundaries and establishing them, two major imperatives of the trickster figure, which, if linked in time, seem to endlessly feed into each other. I contend that these duelling imperatives can be understood equally in the ironic terms of the duelling imperatives of accumulating self-consciousness and systematic knowledge; each creates demand for the other, each presents a challenge to the other that must be met. The ethics of challenge are encompassed inside another cyclical structure, which Baudrillard calls *symbolic exchange*. The ethics of symbolic exchange in Baudrillard's bourgeois perspective are simple: the power of the gift must be met by reciprocity, "prodigality and the squandering of things, but must never stop [...] it must always increase in intensity, possibly continuing until death" (*Passwords* 16). But the trickster figure on occasion, and McCarthy explicitly in his article "The Death of Writing" (as well as through the character of U. in *Satin Island*), illustrate the seemingly Sisyphean trial of reciprocating a gift from the gods, or the digital interface and its ceaseless streaming of information in the case of U. and *Satin Island*. In its relation to literary ethics, the trickster figure stands as an ancient (perhaps original) example of ethical reversibility: of how bad/good intentions (the rebel and freedom fighter) or no intentions (the masses) can lead to a human social structure or (technical) autonomy from the gods. What the trickster figure adds to the literary ethical dichotomy is precisely what these philosophical premises lack: an original or authentic, unambiguously meaningful, ethical *act*. In my reading, this act is originally the breaking of boundaries or structures.

As such, one of the most common acts for the trickster figure to engage in is extreme consumption: of other animals, of plants, of alcohol and drugs, of women, men, children, sometimes even of family members (Carroll 306; Koepping 198, 212). As a figure of consumption, the trickster demonstrates an appetite almost equal to the gods, which is to say, his appetites can be understood as mindless attempts to confront the gods with a like-for-like exchange, where tales of godly powers and

exploits are parodied in animal or human form. To willfully and freely ignore the rules that you or your society has laid out can be compared to the conduct of spirits and gods who freely transgress the boundaries of social structure (through deception, consumption, murder, sex, and especially relevant to C, incest). These acts do not, for me, stand out as challenges to the gods; instead, they exist as negative examples of the ethics of challenge, where reciprocity has failed to exceed the first gift and resulted instead merely in reproducing the pain, violence and humanity of these events, reinforcing the notion of human society and the taboo it entails by demonstrating the breaking of these taboos in causal relation to stupidity, mindlessness, laziness, and callous indifference to social life itself. In these mythic instances this consumption is often understood as revolting against the taboos of human society (Koepping 198). In certain examples, trickster figures eating or consuming flesh demonstrate an expression of will (Carroll 305-06), thereby ignoring the needs of the society as a whole in favour of catering to the will of the individual. In others, eating and the consumption of cooked flesh in particular is associated with the founding of civilization or culture (Koepping 206). As regards this 'foolish' half of the trickster figure I would suggest the following: that the self-destructive and self-interested acts of extreme consumption and sensation have become the allegorical model of a specifically bourgeois ethics of challenge, which will be explained further below in terms of escape and escapade. In acting the fool, the trickster is able to unknowingly, or mindlessly, escape the responsibility inherent in his participation in a social group, or even in the natural structure of, for example, predator-prey relations. In other words, the 'fool' aspect of the trickster reveals the absence of these structures in our own contemporary global society: over consumption is not only *not taboo*, it is sought after and celebrated in the forms of money and information. One need only peruse Instagram for a few minutes before coming to a similar conclusion: excessive meaningless wealth, and its excessive meaningless acquisition in image, language and video, is not only accepted, it is the ideal towards which all digital 'influencers' and 'content producers' naturally aspire. These are 'positions' quite literally paid to be, and appear in photos and videos as, accumulators. They are, in effect, the absolutely positivized version of Madison's conditioning (with the digital itself, its disembodied voice, taking the place of the old man and his cattle prod), or the people the narrator of *Remainder* judges on the street to be mere copies of advertisements. To be excessive to the point of mindless and utterly self-obsessed consumption is not only no longer viewed as an example of foolishness, the unethical or the taboo but is in fact its own form of labour lacking any element of alienation; hence not intellectual or manual, but a third category (simulated labour?) that dissolves both behind the effortless pleasure of consumption.

Under the late capitalist paradigm, the 'foolish' trickster figure is almost banal, merely enjoying the freedom that an objective reality provides (the freedom from a linguistic structure of ethics described here). This banality is not just metaphorical but can be identified in money and information. In a certain sense, the trickster figure is the icon of modern Western civilization. Alfred Sohn-Rethel argues that the technology of money plays a similar role, establishing an ideological split between "head and hand" (intellectual and manual labour) which serves in a variety of ways to form the intellectual and ideological basis of a capitalist society. According to Sohn-Rethel, the act of exchange establishes a mode of thinking and social being that depends not only upon the division of head and hand, or exchange value and use value, but also a certain state (exchange) where the deleterious effects of time and space on commodities are consensually ignored in order to facilitate an act of societization. Money becomes the trickster object *par excellence* in the nascent stage of Western civilization: it is in money that the subject can view the dual or ironic aspect of the trickster, in terms of its shared and co-dependent properties of reality and consensual fiction, and it is through money (the quest to acquire properties) that this dual vision dissolves into the thetic tunnel-vision of the ecstatic and desperate consumer (the banalized version of the ecstatic and desperate consumption of the trickster).

While money may be a material trickster at the historical base of modern Western civilization, the trickster figure arrives also at the *end* (which, according to the paradigm of postmodernity being used here, is also the beginning), in the form of information, to clear away the self-delusions of exchange, to challenge the gods presiding over capitalist society by silently sliding negativity behind the veil of their images and screens and reconstituting, with the mark of a general absence of reality beyond these veils, a pre-civilizational challenge to their divine hubris and order. Or so the story goes. Information could just as well serve to reduce itself to the ideal of mindless, unconditioned consumption which once constituted the taboo "beyond" of society or civilization (the strange fictions of the 'foolish' trickster), but now constitutes its mass appeal (or ideal) and its primary mode of resistance and disappearance: the insurmountable obstacle to its own ethical ideals.

Money and information are the mythical trickster figures at the center of secular capitalist dogma, and yet, they represent only the 'foolish' half of this ancient archetype. They are both the Gods and the tricksters of late capitalist society, whose ignorance of their own authority constitutes a seductive mode of resistance for the bourgeois subject. They are either an absence demanding to be challenged, or a presence (property) challenging you to absorb, acquire and transmit it. Money and information in the novels are, together, a slowly unfolding tale of late capitalist ethics, with no beginning or end in sight, but

one that must nonetheless be confronted by, and confront, the subject. These combined ethical technologies represent a push towards the beginning and end at once: the reversible perspectival ethics of the masses (objects) and the bourgeois (subjects), each contained and conditioned by the same allegorical figures of money and information. Money and information are literally intertwined in the narrator of *Remainder's* recovery: his settlement is invested into "Telecommunications and technology" (46). They constitute the foundation of Serge's bourgeois life in *C*, in the production of silk as a commodity and wireless technology. They also inform the crime central to *Men in Space* through the icon that is both replete with visual information and very valuable, as well as marking the nature of U.'s perception of his boss Peyman. In the dedication and operationalization of both, the masses and the bourgeois, or in literary terms their class perspectives, dissolve into the ethical imperatives of the trickster: the pursuit of money and information valorizes the feedback loop of over-consumption and culture production. Under the figure of the trickster, the appearance of total conformity becomes a trick in itself, an epistemologically and ontologically seductive gesture exemplified for Baudrillard by both the late capitalist subject and object. In what follows I engage with the potential and ethics of challenge that arise out of the indifference of these merged perspectives and the persistence of a symbolic form of exchange, through the development of the idea of the trickster as spirit or figure of the ethical in late postmodernity.

The Structure of Challenge in Late Capitalism

Baudrillard describes a reversible mode of challenge: that of the subject and the object. The former is a strategy of bourgeois escapade, and the latter a strategy of objective desperation. For instance, Serge's time in battle in *C* might, in other literary contexts, be the consequence and be expressive of patriotic fervour, a masculine identity, or a romantic conception of battle. However, it might just as easily be read as a bourgeois challenge to the world to resolve the imperative to express and to reveal, by finally bringing Serge into contact with death in a mode of pleasurable escapade. Paradoxically, this challenge is initially expressed and experienced by Serge as the pursuit and experience of a sense of 'rightness' in flight above the battlefields, which eventually acquires the character of drug-accented delirium and the orgasmic. Flying has allowed Serge access to everything "[...] just how things should be" (156), its heights giving rise to his understanding of memories and thoughts as merely "battery chemicals" (162), a process of reducing rightness and human experience to mechanical and chemical functions. This process of reduction eventually turns on narrative itself: after returning to base, Serge is asked for a "flight narrative" of his mission. Despite the poetic twists and turns of the narrative descriptions of the mission that precedes this

question, Serge summarizes the mission narrative as follows: “We went up; we saw stuff; it was good” (180). The rightness and reductive truths Serge experiences in flight not only acquire a banality that must be enhanced by drug use, but this experience ironically leads Serge further away from experiencing or revealing death.⁵¹ When someone suggests to Serge that he should to use cocaine during missions because it, “works wonders on your vision: sharpens it to no end” (197), he begins to exhibit the libidinal inhibitions of the trickster figure on his next mission:

Scorch-marks and crater contours on the ground look powdery; it seems that if he swooped above them low enough he could breathe them up as well, snort the whole landscape into his head. [...] As they dip low to strafe the trenches on the way back, he feels the blood rush to his groin. He whips his belt off, leaps bolt upright and has barely got his trousers down before the seed shoots from him, arcs over the machine’s tail and falls in a fine thread towards the slit earth down below. (198)

Serge represents the bourgeois escapade, borne aloft on the wings of the aeroplane: his vision is extended over the world, but this extension seems to lead only to further and further reduction of experience, until the entire experience can be summed up literally as an affectively neutralized metaphor of the subjective heights of romantic idealism: raised to these romantic heights, Serge sees things, and this is good. However, as he turns to drugs to amplify his experience, he demonstrates that an excess of this ‘good’ can in fact reverse into an unconscious seeking of dissolution or death. Serge’s escapade here clearly demonstrates the duality of subjective ecstasy and objective desperation, and their cooperation in an ethics of resistance. As will be demonstrated below, Serge stands as a figure of late capitalist resistance in his dual guise as subject and object. Serge’s ecstasy and the indifference it generates to the violence that surrounds him places him in the position of subject and object at once: the former *prefers* an ethics of resistance through an excess of conformity and delirious consumption, the latter on the other hand is *forced* into that same ethics of resistance through excess conformity. Serge as subject becomes addicted to the drugs (cocaine and heroin, or up and down) that enliven his experience, as much as he is addicted to the experience of giving life to the world through signals. Serge as object, however, seeks to seduce death and nothingness through this excess and ecstasy, through the dangerous indifference it creates in him, though of course he fails, in the end getting captured and having to suffer through the briefest promises of his death by firing squad before his would-be killers declare that the war has ended, to Serge’s shouts of “Hey! [...] You can’t do that. Wait!” (238). Serge in war poses a challenge to both the ecstatic heights of bourgeois idealism (whose initial experience through flight is almost immediately reduced to

⁵¹ This is explored in more detail below, through Serge’s identification of his mission (to direct artillery fire) with an act of giving life.

the use of narcotics like cocaine and heroine and the operation of a communication machine) and to the possibility of including a true relationship with death inside of the bourgeois ethics of life (the desperate tactic of the object).

Each mode of challenge turns on the hegemony of negotiated otherness, where negotiation negates both positive (discriminatory) and negative ethics by combining them into an unending operation of exchange and circulation that banalizes violence and exploitation on the premise of difference. Negotiated otherness can be understood as the consequence of the West's universalizing imperative: in order to be universal, late capitalist Western culture rejects the "hard" otherness of "race, of madness, of poverty" (Baudrillard, *Transparency* 141) and in its place asserts the unity of 'difference': "Once we get beyond the mirror of alienation (beyond the mirror stage that was the joy of our childhood), structural differences multiply *ad infinitum* – in fashion, in mores, in culture. [...] Otherness, like everything else, has fallen under the law of the market, the law of supply and demand" (*Transparency* 141). Difference constitutes in this sense a mode of *understanding* the "other" that denies him/her the withholding, seductive aspects of otherness in favour of analytical and commercial value judgement: different first, but same for the purposes of capital circulation. For Baudrillard, the temptation to fetishize difference is at the center of all structuralist systems (*Transparency* 147), and for these systems, "The radical Other is intolerable: he cannot be exterminated, but he cannot be accepted either, so the negotiable other, the other of difference, has to be promoted" (*Transparency* 152). Difference therefore opposes the incomprehensibility, the excess of otherness, and does so through the ostensibly positive connotation of "understanding" in our world of ethical reality production; the trickster figure represents the ugly truth of this ideologically positive version of difference, in that it represents the mechanical ethics of consumption that are fundamental to this ethics of production. Baudrillard suggests that this positive ethos of understanding (the social cohesion of exchange) and information in fact conceals a "profound contempt" for its object: "For 'We respect the fact that you are different' read: 'You people who are underdeveloped would do well to hang on to this distinction because it is all you have left'" (*Transparency* 150). Difference becomes the well trodden path between these human 'objects' of Western ideology and participation in its system, difference ironically turned into the universal equivalence of money and information (the celebration of difference equating to its marketing and consumption).

No open-endedness (because there is no end to be open), no final articulation or resolution of value or meaning either; only the trackless meandering of negotiated sign-value absorbed into the subjective reality of the linguistic self. The subject knows this as a mode of escape from historical

responsibility and existence, in Baudrillard's words, as an "art of disappearance": the ideologically positivized experience of the disappearance of class perspective.⁵² The object under the aegis of systemic and violent oppression or repression (women, children, the working class, animals, dead matter, ethnic, racial, and religious minorities) implicitly understands the unbalanced (*actually* conflictual) premise of this Western brand of negotiation and attempts to undermine it by giving the gift of total conformity in reciprocity for the infantilizing control-rhetoric deployed by the Western subject. As a negotiation partner, the object agrees so readily as to put into question the very reality or possibility of negotiation. The objects' challenge to the subject is to feign the same indifference (to its life and being) shown in the actions and rhetoric of the bourgeois subject; to allow the space between the subject and object, the space of representation, to be bridged not by language or positive representation, but the brute and imminent reality of information (the very mode of difference). The space between subject and object dissolves and becomes vulnerable to reversibility; all of a sudden (practically at the concept's inception), the Western bourgeois white male subject is confronted with the temptation of what appears to be an objective existence, with the chance to absolve themselves of the burdens of subjectivity while retaining exclusive rights over its ecstasies. Though it may be hard to tell, however, what it might mean for a society of subjects to suddenly occupy the position of the object, the ironic condition would suggest that this kind of reversibility is banal and hence difficult to isolate from our experience in general.⁵³

The ethic of challenge is not a totalizing or nihilistic one: it is a co-mingling of the signs of ecstasy and desperation, a useful pair of properties when facing the prospect of challenging the rule of the gods or a unified society. Like the trickster figure, the ethical stance of challenge rests on the undecidable outcome of a gamble (an unethical act if we presume that only other lives, or the quality of other lives, are at stake). The trickster figure in its foolish guise represents the ecstatic consumption of society today (in the form of an ancient set of transgressions which now define the heights of success, talent, even intelligence). The trickster's relation to helping humanity found civilization relates to a very contemporary desperation: only the most oblivious, foolish, self-centered, arrogant, objectively detached character could think about confronting the gods or death or nature and *succeeding* as an individual. And yet, this

⁵² Which is what middle-brow fiction is now, especially according to McCarthy: not decentered but *self*-centered. McCarthy's novels are certainly *self*-centered as well, but what rises to the surface of that sea of ego is precisely the tale of the bourgeois escapade of turning self-care and involution into a social ethics.

⁵³ There exists today the unsettling possibility that this is exactly what we are in the process of viewing: the judgement of 'objects' is seduced by the subject, by the subject whose actions demand to be called misogynist, racist, imperialist, and powerful and who will take every opportunity to allow these perspectives to be reduced to their aesthetic quality, confounding their very reality, all the better to both enact and denounce them without historical responsibility or consequence.

is essentially the path trodden by the mythic trickster figure in its guise as “culture hero”, whether through ignorance, stupidity, indifference or cunning calculation. The novels are poetically marked by a structure of reversible ecstasy and desperation, which we might also understand as the coordinated duel of subjective escapade and objective feint inherent in the trickster figure.

The best illustration of the pregnant potential of this duelling relation can be found in the final pages of *Satin Island*, as U. arrives at the ferry terminal that might convey him to the island that has been haunting his dreams. U. arrives in New York at the ostensible height of his career at the Company, and yet,

Despite the Project’s evident, or apparent, success; despite my own “pivotal” role in the Company’s contribution to this monumental undertaking, all the plaudits it was winning me (there’d doubtless be a raise, an elevated status in the Company, perhaps even a high-up, or at least above-ground, office [...]) none of this meant anything to me. Nothing meant anything to me [...]. And yet the rich and vivid island-dream had stayed with me, cached itself somewhere deep inside, and was now growing, pulsing as it rose back to the surface, radiating with a prospect, with an overwhelming promise, of significance. Something, I told myself with an assurance that I can’t explain, nor could I then, but which all the same, perhaps for that very reason, seemed completely watertight – something would happen if I went to Staten Island. I didn’t know what; but something would [...]. Like a shipwrecked sailor clinging to a piece of driftwood, or a gambler down to his last chip reaching for the dice to take one final roll, I’d gravitated down here, to the bottom of Manhattan [...]. Would I come back on it again? Perhaps; perhaps not. Anything seemed possible. (163)

U. is describing the unconsciousness of resistance and reversibility in the late capitalist context. Like Serge, who acquires a sense of rightness in the airplane before reducing this experience to a simple narrative structure (up-saw-good) and mechanical and chemical function, U. has at this stage acquired the romantic heights soared through by Serge, and the professional recognition he sought when fantasizing about his conference talk. However, upon the realization of these heights U. expresses a perhaps more extreme reduction of this experience than Serge. For U., these heights have reduced the meaning of everything he was fascinated with before, “Present-Tense Anthropology™? The Parachutist Mystery? Trashed, pulverized, dissolved back into the whimsy-froth from which they’d bubbled up” (162-3). All the objects of his fascination are reduced in this final scene to the figure of Staten Island, which is described as if animated by the promise of ‘something’, which we might easily equate to the one thing that the text notes is explicitly lacking within its pages: “[...] *events!* If you want those, you’d best stop reading now [...].” (13). U. perceives the potential for an event in the seductive aspects of Staten Island as object, which is to say, he perceives the potential for something that his story (and the novel) seems to be definitively missing in the subterranean, sub-dermal poetics of the island of refuse and trash. What he locates there is precisely the poetics of challenge, a refusal of ethics in the form of an activation of undecidability or a resolution of

his dream-image of the island. However, as U. makes his way towards the terminal, he notices the “three-dimensional letters mounted above the entrance, boldly announcing STATEN ISLAND FERRY” (164), and in a mode reminiscent of the narrator of *Remainder* and Serge in *C* but with the positive connotation of detached subjective play, is intrigued by the way intervening objects are able to form these letters into new words:

[...] so the sign read SATE I LAND, then, a few seconds later, STATE IS ERR. This intrigued me; I started moving back and forth erratically to tease new couplings out by eliding some letters, restoring others [...] The letters were like Scrabble pieces re-arranging themselves in an attempt to form a legitimate word; or like the numbers on a combination lock, revolving singularly and in series through their permutations, each *click* bringing with it the chance that the correct sequence, the *true* number, will eventually reveal itself, crack open whatever safe it's protecting, spill its contents. (164)

The closer he is getting to the ferry and to the island, the more the poetics of challenge merge into the poetics of ideological positivity. In fact, this is a clear illustration of the reversible ethics of challenge in late capitalist society: from his initial non-ethical valuation of ‘something’, the reader is presented with the positive ethics of resolution. Through his perspectival manipulation of the sign (walking through space in order to intentionally insert objects between himself and the sign), U. is able to access the ideological positivity of what he previously described in terms of the desperation of the shipwrecked, or the gambler left with one last chance to win back what he has lost to the game. Still in this dual guise of desperation (shipwrecked sailor) and ecstasy (game player), he is nonetheless able to see in his self-interested and fascinated spatial manipulations the ethical idealism of bourgeois escapade. In this extract he and other bourgeois subjects are the numbers on the lock, whose repeated daily performance ideally amounts to a collective ethical process of decoding and unlocking the “true number”. In this unlocking process the spinning of the numbers, the daily circulation and ethical performance of individuals, is meant to seduce the will of the object to “reveal itself”, and as such we can see that the objective and subjective modes of challenge are reversible: by causing the object to reveal itself (or simply establishing the aesthetics of such a mechanism), the subject enacts its own mode of resistance by refusing the subjective responsibility of naming or describing objects.

The closer the ferry sails to the terminal, the more excited U. gets at the prospect of his object (Staten Island) and himself coming together:

As this boat, my boat, loomed nearer, I experienced a vertiginous excitement at the prospect of this happening: a space meeting its inverse, negative and positive coming together, merging into one; and at the prospect of finding myself standing at the very point where this great fusion was occurring. It was more than just a prospect: as the ferry hove still closer, a transformation that was physical seemed to take place; it felt as though not just the ferry but the terminal as

well were moving, carrying me with it, bearing me onto the verge of something rich, strange and miraculous. (167-8)

There is something of the classic anthropologist waiting at the jetty for his river-boat to this image, and it bears similarity to the final scene of *C*, which depicts the white frothy wake of a river-boat making its way down the Nile. However, it is important to note that the ferry and the terminal are more than complementary in function but are in fact similar in shape and appearance: “It struck me that it would have been designed like that, deliberately: a kind of mirror-double of the boats that came to dock at it” (*Satin Island* 167). U. at this point is seduced by the object, in particular in its duality of negative and positive and in its simultaneous rejection of difference (both negative and positive, or male and female parts of the docking mechanism, look the same). The object in its dual form wants, and is demanding from U., the potential resolution he sees inside the clicking mechanism of the lock: his boarding the ferry and arriving on Staten Island thus constitutes precisely such a throw of the dice, a subjective move that produces a non-ethical potential.

In the end, however, U. resists the lure of the object, despite the pressure of the crowds surrounding him in the terminal: “I didn’t let myself be carried through the doors, though: at the last instant, I held back. This wasn’t easy: bodies were wedging me in on all sides” (169). While this “holding back” can be related directly to the writerly form of the interim noted by McCarthy, in the end, U. tells us, the choice between going to Staten Island and not going is “profoundly meaningless” (170), alluding once more to McCarthy’s reduction of the writer forced to confront the power of Google. This is mentioned, however, immediately after he has refused to board the ferry. The hopeful positivity that his merging with Staten Island would bring about “something rich, strange and miraculous” (168), born of his manipulation of space and play with letters, reverts into meaninglessness here. If subject and object are caught in a duel (the symbolic exchange of linguistic properties), it is one that the subject enjoys a little too much and the object is simply desperate to end, by ending its opposition prematurely, before a blow is recognized as struck (a co-mingling exemplified by the attitude of *Remainder*’s narrator vis-à-vis his own authenticity). In doing so, the object (the masses) challenges the subject with the seductive aesthetic of complete resolution. The ethics of challenge *requires* no tension, it responds instead to the trackless temporality of fascination and indifference: to an excess or absence of structure.

Information in the form of mass communication, like money, provides the shifting ground of this trackless ethics of challenge. According to Baudrillard writing in the late 1980s, mass media opposes communication by offering in its stead the ecstatic flow that U. identifies in the buffering circle and that

Serge connects with through the wireless. Media rejects Baudrillard's definition of communication by enacting instead, along lines laid out by McCarthy, the mere relay and reception of *information*:

What characterizes the mass media is that they are opposed to mediation [...] that they fabricate noncommunication - if one accepts the definition of communication as an exchange, as the reciprocal space of speech and response, and thus of *responsibility*. In other words, if one defines it as anything else than the simple emission/reception of information. Now the whole present architecture of the media is founded on this last definition: they are what finally forbids response, what renders impossible any process of exchange (except in the shape of a simulation of a response, which is itself integrated into the process of emission, and that changes nothing in the unilaterality of communication). That is their true abstraction. And it is in this abstraction that is founded the system of social control and power. To understand properly the term response, one must appreciate it in a meaning at once strong, symbolic, and primitive: power belongs to him who gives and to whom no return can be made. ("The Masses: The Implosion of the Social in the Media" 577-78)

Without this *responsibility* that is extracted by or given freely over to the sign and machine as figures of reality (of irony), ethics are both celebrated and abandoned in their newfound ontological automaticity. Under the auspices of media, we are responsible only for the relay and reception of information: this is not just the "good" life, but the actual, the *real* life, being endlessly recreated and relayed through its own mindless imperative. When ethics are not a question to be directly confronted, but instead abandoned to the forms of technical language, information and money to determine, they seem to emerge automatically, like death, silently from behind the sleek surfaces our simulations, whether we want them to or not. This deification of language represents a mass-level turn towards the ironic temptation of total positivity and its energy as sign. These ethical tides might be capable of *moving us* (like tropes move meaning) between the deceptively distant horizon and the solidity of the shore, but we always end up back where we have already been (even if we cannot recognize the trace of our previous passage). They, following the example of Baudrillard's media, offer an inescapable gift in the form of an ethical aesthetic, a gift that cannot be reciprocated in act; except, according to Baudrillard, along the lines of the challenge.

What gift then, could possible reciprocate the extremity and breadth of the gift of information given by the media in 1985, or broadly speaking the internet in 2018? In order to address this question, Baudrillard clearly stakes out the historical distinction between Marxist and McLuhanite ("The Implosion of the Social" 578) understandings of the relation between the masses and technology (in terms of negative alienation and positive extension respectively), and what he considers a more contemporary ideological imperative, which, to readers of McCarthy, will stand out as very similar to the speech-positive sales pitch given by Simeon Carrefax in C:

To a system whose argument is oppression and repression, the strategic resistance is to demand the liberating rights of the subject. But this seems rather to reflect an earlier phase of the system, and even if we are still confronted with it, it is no longer a strategic territory: the present argument of the system is to maximize speech, to maximize the production of meaning, of participation. And so the strategic resistance is that of the refusal of meaning and the refusal of speech - or of the hyperconformist simulation of the very mechanisms of the system, which is another form of refusal by over acceptance. It is the actual strategy of the masses. This strategy does not exclude the other, but it is the winning one today, because it is the most adapted to the present phase of the system. ("The Implosion of the Social" 588)

We might understand Baudrillard's description in terms of his previous assertion of the past-tense of Debord's spectacle: in essence, the systemic and ethical imperative of language *maximization* is another example of reversibility put into play on behalf of the system, in that it represents the obverse of Situationist *détournement*, a maximisation of expression *without* the alienation of the spectacle, or even of representation. Baudrillard's reading of the contemporary context of 1985 seeks to move beyond the scope of class oppression, repression and the accompanying alienation, the kind of rhetorical move that has caused Baudrillard's theory to be identified variously as nihilistic, an ethics of hopelessness, amoral, in bad faith or, in Gilman-Opalsky's opinion, "a mirror of bourgeois intellectualism" (38). The point however is not to dematerialise the concepts of oppression or repression (this is what is accomplished by the system of the sign), but on the contrary to admit that, real or not, this is no longer the terrain of a successful mode of resistance. I would contextualize this sentiment with the example of the contemporary issue of public gun ownership. One argument on behalf of gun owners has been that these weapons give the citizen the capacity to resist government corruption or oppression. There is a tone of the desperate and ecstatic character of the trickster to this argument, especially when the government in question is a late capitalist, technologically advanced global power. It is in a sense a diffuse but microscopic performance of the reversibility of symbolic exchange: the Western subject assumes the aesthetic posture of the terrorist, pretends and threatens to put their life at stake, ironically in defense of rights they associate with the Western culture they wish to defend themselves from. Not only that, but it demonstrates the confusion of time, the confusion between different historical aspects of the system generated by the system, which keeps people grinding away their negative energy inside a nostalgic, anachronistic relation to power. Resistance against this state of suspension, against the intractable grip of information and self-consciousness, of ecstasy and desperation, consists for Baudrillard, "of an involuntary challenge to everything which was demanded of the subject by philosophy—that is to say, to all rationality of choice and to all exercise of will, of knowledge, and of liberty" ("The Implosion of the Social" 585). It is in this sense that the late capitalist mode of resistance being described is both reversible, and reversibility, exemplified by the figure of the trickster; both the bourgeois subject and its historical object

see in the absence of will a state to be sought after, and that subjective state is that of the trickster, itself a *figure* of a pre-cultural state of human society.

The trickster figure, Baudrillard's theory of late capitalist challenge, and the narrative perspective of McCarthy's novels each speak to the inevitability of the negative when confronting the *imperatives* of total vistas: to know both self and world on the same plane (and hence make *both* real on the *same* ontological level; to make reality universal). Resisting totality (whether of language, gods, civilisation, or reality) necessitates a negative *self*-approach, inasmuch as the self is the most imminent and intimately real product of these total-seeming conditions, expressed in the myths as the embodied imperatives of violent consumption and a vague awareness of its causal relation to foolishness, and in the novels and theory as the passive and indirect bourgeois violence of indifference. The self in these conditions is, as in the case of the Romantic genius, the measure of the real. In the novel form as in Baudrillard's work, this negativity is absorbed and re-expressed in the ideologically positive relation between the "I" and the object world of formalisms: the self is ecstatically and desperately negotiated by the veil of linguistic properties that objects (money and information for example) seduce from the subject. The negative approach of Baudrillard's subject is an ironic one, in that it is negative only through its excess of positivity, the positivity of money and information invested into, and embodied by, the digital linguistic self. The merging of the mythic and contemporary in the novels may indicate a modernist exercise in style (or an example of Situationist *détournement*), but here it appears as the late capitalist context of challenge in the form of what Baudrillard calls "symbolic exchange" that persists both beyond, and deep within, the horizon of the late capitalist economic structure.

The Reversibility of Symbolic Exchange

In U.'s fascinated but remote investigation of the skydiver's death, he eventually discovers that the police had arrested almost everyone they knew in connection with the victim, without any charges being laid, and had once again begun to suspect suicide. The mystery begins at this stage to look like Baudrillard's perfect crime, were it not for the incontrovertible trace of a victim. U., while maintaining his enthusiasm for the topic by turning to the recent cases he located in Canada, Poland and New Zealand, is eventually able to bridge the gap between murder and suicide by the attribution of a factor that characterizes, for Baudrillard, Western anthropological domination: playing the *game* of difference. His new theory explaining the death of the skydiver (contemporary Western subject) emerges once more from the juxtaposition of a Vanuatuan ritual with the sped up, crystallized, detached and repeatable practice of the Western skydiver:

On New Year's Day, the men ride out on horses or just run about a stretch of pasture firing arrows up into the air: straight up, more or less vertically. The arrows, naturally, fall back down, with pretty much the same velocity as that with which they flew up in the first place. The men ride and run around until an arrow lands on one of them and kills him. Then they stop: the ritual demands that one man must be taken every year. Hungover, jaded, generally uninvigorated by the world, I found myself, in reverie, wishing – just as I had as a child when jumping from my sisters' bed – that I could be one of these Vanuatuan warriors, galloping about the fields, new-year's wind biting at my cheeks, death whistling all around me, whistling me to life . . . (118)

In this extract is contained the specific relation to death that is being repeatedly elaborated in this novel and in the others as well, namely that proximity or connection to death equates to the 'authentic' experience of life, an almost 'veil-less' experience of what it is to be alive (in that death is what hides behind the veil). This sentiment expressed by U. is clearly shared by Serge in his enjoyment of the danger and carnage of WWI, and by the narrator of *Remainder* whose re-enactments throughout the novel increasingly incorporate simulated violence, death and disruption. What U. is definitively missing, as the subject still suspended from the parachute, is precisely this proximity to, this contact with and experience of, *authentic* death (as opposed to an interminable and detached aesthetics of death represented in the novel by the oil spill, the terrorist bombing, black matter and its intimacy with sexuality, etc.).

This ritual of New Year's human sacrifice is paired in the text with U.'s "reverie", leading directly back to the mystery of the skydiver: "At the same time, I thought about my parachutist once again – with the result that the scenarios, the Vanuatuan new-year arrow-shooting and the fatal sky diving escapade, merged into one" (118-119). Not so much a comparison now as a merging of the two, it still maintains the trace of difference, of a fundamental difference allegorically relating back to a point where 'home' and 'field' were distinct. It does this through the deployment of the terms "ritual" and "escapade". The former term maintains an explicit relation between act and death, inasmuch as its intent is to bring the reversibility of life and death into actuality or experience. The etymology of the latter, on the other hand, leads directly to the notion of the "game" of difference that Baudrillard identifies at the base of the Western project, as U. locates death at the base of the mystery. "Escapade", as an English term, seems to perform a similar allegorical or tropic movement both backwards in time and horizontally across borders and cultures. Its contemporary definition in English is, "a. An act of escaping from confinement or restraint; a runaway excursion. B. *fig.* A breaking loose from restraint or rules; a flighty piece of conduct" (OED Online).

In U.'s own language, he identifies the sky dive as basically an escape-trick, or a trick-escape; the death-ritual of the Vanuatans may be interpreted as *game-like*, but its necessary end moves it beyond the

realm of play into the stakes of life and death. The difference that persists here is that the Vanuatans are *aware* of their 'end', they know it ahead of time and the ritual is the intentional framework that brings their knowledge and experience of death into play in life. The skydiver, on the other hand, is possessed of the opposite perspective: his ritual is the intentional framework essential to eternally detour around death and float aimlessly in the playing fields of difference. U. identifies in himself a desire to become proximate with death, even to put his life at stake. The same inclination can be extended to the skydiver, but, because the act of sky-diving is patently opposed to death, U. necessarily has to come up with a new theory that bridges the apparent trace of difference (death and not death) that persists in the merging of these two times, cultures, images, and rituals:

And suddenly, as though out of the sky itself, with all the speed and penetration of an arrow hurtling to earth, a major revelation came to me. In that instant, I saw the truth behind the parachutist case with total clarity: it was a Russian Roulette pact! [...] No longer satisfied with the adrenaline-hit they got from simply jumping from a plane, they'd up the stakes, the ante, upped them to the biggest one imaginable, by secretly agreeing to sabotage a single parachute and throw it back into the general pile of packs. [...] They'd never know: that's why they did it, just like Russian Roulette players. I was certain of this. I was more certain of it than of anything before or since. (119)

It appears due to the structure of the text that U.'s identification with the Vanuatuan warriors, his desire to participate in their ritual, leads into this theory about the skydiver's death. In other words, it appears as if the ritual itself gave U. a clue as to how to solve the mystery, by smuggling the fascination with the experience of death across cultural and historical lines. Even if out of desperation instead of ecstasy, in the novel's perspective the skydiver is enacting the same symbolic framework, the same ethic, only within the restrictive boundaries of Western culture. Death becomes, for the novels as for Baudrillard, a liminal concept for the Western subject in contrast to the Western 'object': "[t]here is an irreversible evolution from savage societies to our own: little by little, the dead cease to exist. They are thrown out of the group's symbolic circulation. They are no longer beings with a full role to play, worthy partners in exchange [...]. [T]oday it is not normal to be dead, and this is new. [...] Death is a delinquency, and an incurable deviancy" (Baudrillard, qtd in Butterfield 70).

In the Vanuatuan ritual, desire is absent from the performance; we might say that the Vanuatuan culture cannot apply desire to its own ritual in the way that U. or the anthropologist does, because they do not maintain the structure of difference that engenders the economic fascination with exoticism or otherness brought, according to Baudrillard, by European colonization or conquest. Not only does U. identify and sympathize with such a symbolic and reversible structure, he believes with his Russian Roulette theory that he has perhaps struck upon a chord of the 'master-meaning' of things:

[...] the Canadian case, the Polish and New Zealand ones – these, I was certain, were Russian Roulette pacts as well. It was a cult, dispersed, like my own covert anthropologists, around the globe! The realization was enormous – almost as visceral as the ritual it unmasked. It made the blood rush suddenly to my head as I shouted *Fuck! Fuck!* – not in anger but in awe [...] the same reaction I'd had when I watched the Twin Towers falling down on live TV. (119)

Not only does this Russian Roulette pact incorporate the life and death stakes of the arrow ritual and symbolic exchange, but the sublime violence of something like the live event of 9/11: it constitutes the real time witnessing of a fall, a collapse, an ancient sacrificial ritual, with a direct link to the culture and historicity of the contemporary moment. This Russian Roulette pact is, in effect, the thetic Western reversal of the terrorist suicide attack. It is precisely an attempt to theorize how the Western subject might put their death into play in the same way that the terrorists of 9/11 or the warriors of the ritual do, however in an entirely *self-centered* manner, as if the aesthetics of the scene were secondary to the personal pleasure of the thrill. It also serves as a structural metaphor for Baudrillard's mode of challenge: a product of the desire for excitement and desperation for escape at once. It only takes two pages (or a week in the novel's time) before U.'s absolute certainty, absolute positivity, takes an ironic turn towards its opposite. U. finds out that his theory is a failure, "It was bogus; full of shit. The basic logistics of packing and storage, the security measures put in place to prevent tampering, and so forth – all this rendered it impossible" (122). He then declares that a depression is coming on, and we never hear about the skydiver or parachutes again (122).

On the surface of things U. seems depressed simply because he was proven to be wrong. I would suggest that it is not that he is wrong, but rather that he is trapped between the two guises of the trickster: the foolishness of risking his life for the sake of ecstasy, and the ecstasy of heroically surviving (or not) a brush with death to found a new beginning. Butterfield describes symbolic exchange as a mode of resistance in similar terms, stating that the concept of simulation (leaving the playing field of oppression and repression), "must become the starting point for any future ethics. Instead of returning to the metaphysics of the code, wherein all negative terms are merely the alibis of their positive counterparts, Baudrillard's notion of symbolic exchange aims to turn the system against itself and thereby to establish the grounds for a yet unknown mode of experience." (69)

The ironic condition demands that U. approach this mystery like the Romantic genius, seducing the world with language, drawing it ever closer to a personal truth, before operationality and function intervene to humiliate U. and his romantic attempts at discovering truth or reality through textual interpretation, intuition and research. What he learns with the failure of his theory is that the Western escapade is much more *play* than *escape* (alluding therefore to the French and Spanish etymology of the

term that indicates a closer relation to play⁵⁴). It demonstrates, allegorically, the impossibility of the western subject putting his/her life at stake in the way of the symbolic culture, and hence a certain distinction is being made between the two in the text, even if in other sections of the novel U.'s own narrative would suggest that they have merged. The concept and context of this difference is explained by Baudrillard in terms of "symbolic exchange", an idea that depends upon the ironic structure, the same structure given over to machines in our culture:

It is symbolic exchange as anthropology understands it. Whereas value always has a unidirectional sense, whereas it passes from one point to another according to a system of equivalence, in symbolic exchange the terms are reversible. [...] In the symbolic universe, life and death are exchanged. And, since there are no separate terms but, rather, reversibility, the idea of value is cast into question, requiring as it does distinctly opposed terms between which a dialectic can then be established. Now, there is no dialectic in the symbolic. Where death and life are concerned, there is in our system of values no reversibility: what is positive is on the side of life, what is negative is on the side of death; death is the end of life, its opposite, whereas in the symbolic universe the terms are, strictly speaking, exchanged. (*Passwords* 15-16)

We see this symbolic exchange of life and death longed for by U., when he wishes he could participate in the New Year's arrow ritual. Hence, U. might be thought to be exhibiting a melancholic desire for a lost object or ideal. However, Baudrillard completes his explanation of symbolic exchange in *Passwords* with a turn away from the very notion of difference he posits to begin with, only to forcefully reassert that difference again in the final lines:

We may choose to regard this symbolic exchange as something we have lost, to interest ourselves in potlatch in primitive societies and treat it anthropologically, taking the view that, so far as we are concerned, we are totally in market societies, in societies governed by value . . . But is this so certain? [...] So we might be said to still be living in a sacrificial mode, without wishing to acknowledge it. [...] There is no point being nostalgic for it: we have established another form of organization that has created an irreversible, linear system where there was previously a circular form, a circuit, reversibility. We live, then we die, and that is truly the end. (*Passwords* 17-18)

In essence, the difference that is ultimately (though ambiguously) upheld by Baudrillard is a difference to do with irony and the ironic perspective: it results from a state of undecidability, indicating the reversibility of these two ostensible opposites. Like U., Baudrillard's idealized realm of symbolic exchange is interrupted inevitably by the linearity of the system designed to protect life and absorb death. U.'s seduction by and fascination with the buffering circle exemplifies the reversibility of the linear and circular, inasmuch as he recognizes both forms in the aesthetics of buffering: the circular movement of

⁵⁴ "from French *escapade* (16c.) "a prank or trick," from Spanish *escapada* "a prank, flight, an escape," (Harper).

the digital buffering icon and the linearity of “[...] that line, that bar that slowly fills itself in – twice: once in bold red and [...] running ahead of that, in fainter grey” (*Satin Island* 68). Ultimately both converge in an endless stream which for U. seems to end with him: “[...] I pictured a giant *über*-server, housed somewhere in Finland or Nevada or Uzbekistan: stacks of memory banks, satellite dishes sprouting all around them, pumping out information non-stop, more of it than any single person would need in their lifetime, pumping it all my way in an endless, unconditional and grace-conferring act of generosity” (68).

In this scene U. positions himself as the object in terms of Baudrillard’s resistance, which is to say he is placing himself inside a ritual acceptance of the gift, an acceptance so total as to confound the notion of power that depends upon the opposition of or tension between gift-giver and gift-receiver. By positivizing the position of the object, U. paradoxically enacts the challenge of the subject. In this paradox linearity and circularity combine in the ethics of simulation, and the passive acceptance of the object comes to resemble the escapade, the trick used by the subject to detour around the inescapable reversibility and exchangeability of life and death. McCarthy’s novels demonstrate just such a process of exchange, however dominated poetically by the compulsion to objectify the ‘madness’ of just such a condition (the coming together of the symbol and the formalism, linguistic and original, subject and object). Hence, while the temptation of total negativity or positivity persists in the Western subject (the trace of totality and infinity), what remains truly seductive or fascinating is what seems beyond that false dichotomy of temptation: their reversibility. In effect, language is that symbolic mode of exchange that is smuggled forwards in linear time by the very forms meant to absorb and positivize it, the forms that use it as an alibi for their own failures: money and information. Language is what challenges the linear system, and it does so at least partially by offering linearity the gifts of stable meaning and control, the gift of its perfect clone; in its dependence upon these concepts, the linear remains in close proximity to the symbolic (and the difficult to trace movement of tropes). In the late capitalist context, the challenge of the trickster does not *oppose* anything, neither gods nor taboos, but instead animates everything, encourages speech, circulates information, and in the ecstasy of playing out all his excessive desire, is secretly engaged in a desperate search for a mode of escape from this will and desire that undoes civilized life.

The Contemporary Challenge of the Trickster Figure

Chapter five of *Satin Island* constitutes an extended consideration of the “Company” that U. works for, particularly through the center-piece individual of this Company and its operations: U.’s boss Peyman. It

begins by unambiguously demonstrating the continued confusion of symbolic and linear modes in the narrative perspective of the protagonist:

Forget family, or ethnic and religious groupings: corporations have supplanted all these as the primary structure of the modern tribe. My use of the word *tribe* here isn't fanciful; it's *modern* that's the dubious term. The logic underlying the corporation is completely primitive. The corporation has its gods, its fetishes, its high priests and its outcasts (Madison was right about that part – just wrong in thinking this makes it exotic). It has its rituals, beliefs and superstitions, its pools of homespun expertise and craft and, conversely, its Unknowns or Unspokens. Peyman understood this. (38)

In the context of the corporation described above, we might expect from the text that follows an identification of all of these concepts; Peyman as God, his assistant Tapio as high priest, and perhaps U. as outcast in his basement office. Instead, the rest of the chapter consists of an illustration of Peyman and his activities in the Company, as well as how he was for the employees like U., “everything and nothing” (41). More than God then, or a god's representative on earth, Peyman stands in the novel as the figure of the text itself, the figure of the conditions of the world and the nature of the hold they have on U. To begin with, he is described as saying,

[...] a lot of things. That's what he did: put ideas out, put them in circulation [...] His ideas took the form of aphorisms: *Location is irrelevant: what matters is not where something is, but rather where it leads . . .* [...] Each of these nuggets was instantly memorable, eminently quotable. [...] These aphorisms were his currency; he traded in them, converting them, via the Company, into tangible undertakings that had measurable outcomes, which in turn helped spawn more concepts and more aphorisms, always at a profit. (40)

Like Simeon Carrefax (who makes veils, transmitters and compels the mute to speak), Peyman makes his money from language, and yet, that this language takes the form of aphorism means that he is not necessarily interested in the value of clear verbal communication in the same sense as Serge's father in *C*. In their ambiguity his ideas and utterances become like currency, like a universal medium of exchange, in this case exchanged for “tangible undertakings that had measurable outcomes [...] always at a profit”. The figure of the trickster looms over Peyman and his late capitalist mode of production, in the sense that the narrative perspective refuses to grant this mode of production any friction, any tension that might set in motion a linear mode of progress (replacing that tension with the material signs of measurable outcomes). Instead, U. describes the nature of his labour relations almost religiously. Speaking still of the aphorisms that were “all generated in-house and collectively” (40), a nod towards the rhetoric of organic positivity in the late capitalist marketplace, U. declares that,

Seeing these in print, observing them being cited, appropriated, sampled, cross-bred, both by others and by Peyman himself, was like encountering an amalgam of our own minds, our own thoughts, returning to us on a feedback loop. Without Peyman, though, without the general –

and generative – mechanism he had set in place and over which he presided, we would never have come up with these thoughts in the first place: they were quite beyond us. (41)

Very much in the style of Baudrillard's object (the subject's ideal position), U. sees Peyman as the true source of his own thoughts and labour, as a reflection brighter and clearer than the image which it reflects: the digital linguistic self. Specifically, U. and his fellow employees see Peyman as enacting a successful escapade, as achieving the escape they seek for themselves:

Thus Peyman, for us, was everything and nothing. Everything because he connected us [...] to a world of action and event, a world in which stuff might actually *happen*; connected us, that is, to our own age. [...] It sometimes seemed as though the very concept of "the age" wouldn't have been fully thinkable without Peyman; seemed that he invented, re-invented it with every passing utterance, or simply (with the overlay of continents and times and cultures stored up in his very genes, his mixed Persian, South American and European ancestry) by existing. (41)

Peyman is everything in the sense that he is at the center of 'the age' itself, the center of a web of "[...] scattered, half-formed notions and intuitions, fields of research which would otherwise have lain fallow, found no bite or purchase on the present moment" (41). We might view this position as that of the 'culture hero' putting together, or perhaps operating in a new mode, the technology of culture. We might, at the same time, view it from the alternative imperative of the trickster and see Peyman as an insatiable mouth devouring information and money (in the form of clients), passing it through the intestines of his bloated body (the Company) and excreting a combination of profit and measurable outcomes (money and information, bearers of the trace of the ethical in language). It serves at this point to take a closer look at Carroll's illustration of the dual aspects of the trickster figure:

The "selfish buffoon" label is appropriate because, in so many myths, the trickster practices enormous cruelties upon others in attempting (sometimes successfully, but very often unsuccessfully) to gratify his own desires. As Radin (1972:165) points out, and as is immediately clear to anyone who reads the actual myths, the trickster is someone who is obsessed with satisfying his almost constant hunger or his seemingly uncontrollable desire for sexual intercourse. [...] But in many other stories, the trickster appears as a type of culture-hero, specifically as a transformer who makes the world habitable for humans by ridding it of monsters or who provides those things (such as fire or various ways of capturing animals) that make human society possible. In short, to borrow a phrase often used by Lévi-Strauss, the trickster is associated in these stories with the origin of culture. (305)

In the setting established by U.'s description of Peyman, that of the shifting exchange of aphorism for money and information and back again, the dual role of the trickster cannot depend upon the ostensible oppositions between the will for taboo excess and social order, or between an absence of the tools of culture and their excessive presence. Whatever monsters the contemporary trickster-as-hero might defeat or Gods' will they might oppose, he/she is never in the process of making the world habitable; after all, the contemporary world is hardly lacking in the technologies of survival and culture.

Hence, the trickster figure also undergoes a reversal in late capitalism, having no discernible boundaries to transgress or gods to challenge, nor even natural conditions to combat with the gift of technology, the trickster is left facing a world that embodies the very symbolic values identified *with the trickster*, as if the world and the masses were intent on paying him back for this ancient gift of society and culture. As culture hero the contemporary trickster must necessarily defeat, not monsters or gods, but the indifferent god-like reflection of the trickster itself, in the guise of the dual *imperatives* of its infinite appetites and desire to enact or form oppositions in a state of ambiguity. In short, the trickster figure, if he is to enact his usual role in the contemporary moment, must first find a way to defeat the synonymy of his conditions and his archetypal imperatives; he must, in other words, erase his will from the conditions he seeks to oppose, in order that his character might acquire an oppositional stance once again.

Where Peyman's presence as everything is constituted for U. by his verbal and linguistic universality, the same characteristics serve to efface that presence: "[...] *That's a Peyman thing*. You'd find yourself saying this several times a week – that is, seeing tendencies Peyman had named or invented, Peymanic paradigms and inclinations, movements and precipitations, everywhere, till he appeared in everything; which is the same as disappearing" (42). Peyman in a sense becomes a shaman (Peymanic – Shamanic) linking U. to the world 'beyond' the tribal territory of the Company or U.'s fetish of *himself*, a sacralised reflection of the banality of universal imperatives, given that he has just explained that Peyman's aphorisms are the product of the collective labour of a variety of individuals. Both everywhere and nowhere at once, Peyman stands not only for the bourgeois mode of escape through money and information, but also the contemporary ethical condition of the trickster figure, inasmuch as he is confronted with the dilemma of a world that is always merely a reflection of himself and his imperatives (and hence one that seduces him into erasing himself). The reversibility of Peyman's position, and the ethical imperative he shares with U., culminates in his desire for U. to map out "The First and Last Word on our age" (56), in the form of the Great Report. This, the central imperative of the Great Report, constitutes the playing out of Peyman's fundamentally *subjective* desire to become an anthropological *object*, to have his will mapped and decided ahead of time, inasmuch as we know that for the executant of the Great Report, Peyman is *the age*, or at the very least fundamental to it. If the age is made up of the trace of Peyman's thoughts and travels, the trace of his conversion of collective labour and information into private gain, then the Great Report becomes the imperative to objectify Peyman himself: it becomes his mode of escape into objectivity, in the model of Baudrillard's art of disappearance, and the challenge of symbolic exchange (of subjectivity for objectivity). Like the trickster who must find a way to withdraw

his impact from conditions before he re-asserts the value of that impact, Peyman is seeking to abandon his responsibility in order that it might be reasserted with some of its original impact.

We may see connections between the selfish buffoon and certain of McCarthy's protagonists, but with a late capitalist caveat: their hunger and desire are expressed and experienced in a detached and meandering fashion, hardly reflective of the intensity of drive described above. There is, however, a consistency to the pace of the drive that animates the characters, a pulse that better reflects the spiralling temporality of irony than the narrow confines of structuralist oppositions, and yet could still be considered the source of a trace of that original comedic and vulgar intensity, like the trace of flatulence that signals so much (the intestinal 'beyond' contained by his romantic genius) to Serge in *C* (83). Sex and consumption are important themes in all of McCarthy's novels, but they have acquired the pace and aesthetics of late capitalism. We must depend on the mechanics of irony, however, to understand how his protagonists might be considered 'culture heroes', or those who somehow help originate culture. In simple terms, the origins of culture are sought after precisely through the ironic extension of the contemporary; the more the characters and the culture seek and perform extension and detachment, the closer they get to an absence of culture, and to the necessity of originating one again. This is effectively how McCarthy is enacting Baudrillard's version of ethics, which in turn demonstrates that Baudrillard and McCarthy's novels are both speaking with the voice of the bourgeois, the disappearing: by hanging on the hope that through unbounded expression, which is equally an expression of boundless inertia, the market-imperative of being the most themselves they can be, the truth of their ineptitude and that of their ideology might be revealed, thereby inviting someone else to displace them in their historical and social responsibility. Carroll presents in his article the idea developed by Lévi-Strauss⁵⁵ that the,

[...] logic of these myths openly expresses a dilemma [...] by establishing an association between immediate sexual gratification and the absence of culture. Yet, on the other hand, these same myths provide a conceptual model that allows the human mind to evade the perception of this dilemma by simultaneously establishing a second association between immediate sexual gratification and the origin, not the absence, of culture. (309-10)

Like the rhetorical detour, or the effect of Sohn-Rethel's exchange abstraction, this model of the myth and the trickster figure in particular presents the dilemma of unconstrained will and culture and the solution of that dilemma as a structural reversal of the terms. Reversibility, in other words, is essential to

⁵⁵ Lévi-Strauss is U.'s favourite ethnographer, and McCarthy mentions him as, in his current opinion "the most important French mid-20th century writer" (McCarthy, *The Death of Writing*). And yet, his work on a structuralist explanation of the trickster figure almost better represents, like the crumbled tower of the Company's logo, the failure of applied structuralism, or the hopelessness of the anthropological impulse. U.'s comment that Lévi-Strauss actually wanted to be a poet is an echo of what appears to have been a common critique of his work.

the aesthetics of the Lévi-Straussian trickster myth, to Peyman and to understand the broad shadow cast by the trickster figure over the novels and late capitalist society.

In its dual guise in the novels, the trickster figure of late capitalism continues to allegorically refer backwards to its original form, in the sense of the paradox of its competing desires (for unconditional will-expression and culture). Koepping illustrates this paradox along similar lines to Carroll, in terms of the guise of fool and culture hero at once, and yet, he attempts to establish this dual figure in terms that ring true to Gibson's notion of negative ethics rather than Lévi-Strauss's structural resolution. He articulates this in terms of the absurdity of the "ambivalence" of the hero to "the ritual murders and rapes of epics and sagas" (195) and the "[l]ess violent, but just as ambiguous [...] fool" (195). Ambiguity and ambivalence come to characterize this dual aspect of the trickster and its myths, which for Koepping leads to "two facets of the universal figure of anomaly and ambiguity, those of crooked thinking and of a grotesquely extended body, pointing to them as the possibly paradigmatic expression of the experience and perception of absurdity, in social arrangements and their governing values or in the logic of rule of language and symbolism" (196).

Crooked thinking is not focused on as much in the article, but the notion of a grotesquely extended body is key to the novels: key to Nick's death in *Men in Space* (caused by the failure of his arm while using a technical extension of his arms), key to Serge's feeling of 'correctness' and sex, key to the narrator of *Remainder's* re-enactments (inasmuch as he has a corporation of employees that execute and extend his will onto the world), and key to U.'s narrative perspective (his narrative eye is extended by the screen). Whether these extensions are to be considered grotesque depends upon this author's definition of the term, but also on the general societal posture towards specifically technological and economic extensions of the body: like the unconstrained consumption of the trickster, the notion of extension (whether physical or technological) as grotesque is increasingly losing ontological currency in the Western system of monetized difference and negotiated otherness. Koepping contrasts the in-built structuralist resolution of Lévi-Strauss (where a paradox is resolved by the application of a second set of terms that are resolvable with a third) with the aesthetic of an imperative of expression:

Besides, anomalies and ambiguities, the paradoxes of life within set boundaries of language and custom do not admit true resolution but rather need expression. Thus the trickster might in my opinion be not a figure of resolution of paradoxes but merely a signpost pointing out these paradoxes, bringing them to the conscious mind, which then is able - in the most favorable case - to laugh about them (resignedly or defiantly or both at the same time). (197)

Like Peyman, U. and Simeon Carrefax, the trickster here represents the need to express a cultural or social paradox or dilemma that is, for this author, fundamental and irresolvable. The problem with this reading is first that it engages with the trickster figure or fool in its own historical setting (for legitimate methodological reasons), and second that it tacitly participates in the fetishizing of the 'resolution' it opposes; this author is suspicious of the capacity for Lévi-Strauss's structuralism to actually resolve the dilemma, but this is never the point. The point is not whether resolution or totalization is 'actual', but rather passable, acceptable, consensual or aesthetically recognizable. The irresolution of the trickster dilemma is encompassed in the very liminality expressed by U. in the form of Peyman. Peyman is everything and nothing, present and absent at once. For U. this total ambiguity is the result of Peyman coming to be embodied in all the iterations of the ideas produced by the Company, and as such treads a similar path to that described by Koepping in terms of the trickster within conditions defined by the merging of the profane and the sacred (or the idealisms of linear and symbolic cultures respectively):

This permeation of the sacred with things and actions belonging to the sphere of the profane indicates the conquest of that which would otherwise threaten normal life, namely, insanity in its true form, not its ritual dramatization. I am therefore in full sympathy with the description of Handelman's that the ritual clown (*koyemci* of the Pueblos) is a 'dissolver of structure, indicative of its in-between or transitional state of being,' strengthening the earlier argument by Ortiz, who defines sacred clowns as 'permanently equivocal and liminal characters'. (198)

Koepping is speaking of the recognized tendency to include the profane in rituals and sacrifices, indicating the mutability or exchangeability (as opposed to opposition) of these terms and thus a connection to the mode of symbolic exchange. We might also state that McCarthy's narratives and protagonists (but more than anything the narrative and poetic structure of the texts) are equally in liminal positions, drifting sometimes imperceptibly (like in the scene in *Remainder* with the waiter/waitress), sometimes explicitly, into and out of fantasy, day dream, of vision, into and out of the cartography of the mental screen. The reversible (subject/object) figure of Peyman exemplifies this liminality in the form of a paradox which serves U. best to describe his boss: everything and nothing. In this form, however, as in Lévi-Strauss's trickster myth, Baudrillard and the text understand the primacy of positivity and hence resolution: Peyman is nothing because he is everything, and that is the only direction this mechanism can run in (if this relation is true, its logic is irreversible: one cannot be everything by first being nothing).

The social position of the protagonists seems equally liminal: all vaguely or explicitly bourgeois, aside from Serge in *C* (whose settings like Versoie, the Western front of WWI, or post-war London often reject, but whose narrative style alludes to a kind of splendid isolation), they are largely isolated, solitary individual perspectives, presenting the ecstatic creative isolation of the contemporary romantic bourgeois

perspective. Though historically and theoretically at the epicenter of power in capitalist society, the bourgeois narrative perspective of the novels all enact the metaphorically orbital vision of the cosmonaut in *Men in Space*: through screens, wireless transmissions, and the divinely connected heights of the romantic genius (the technology of the page, explicit in the form of *Satin Island*), the poetics of the novels establish this bourgeois perspective as one of fascinated indifference, tinged with the desperation to act in concert with (or be *in*) the images they find so fascinating. This is precisely analogous to the suspended position of the contemporary subject, suspended in the liminal state of perpetual information ritual, ritual with no end that sporadically expresses itself both in terms of rebellion and submission, in terms of a simulated end to the ritual. Where for Koepping this liminality speaks to the difference between (symbolic) rituals of revolt and the total spiritual revolutions promised by the prophets of the monotheistic religions, the main ethical point he derives is that this liminality is meant to embody the irresolvability of this dilemma, to act as 'sign-post' in a similar fashion to Gibson's negative ethics. However, in the example of Peyman it is precisely his liminality that makes him a central mechanism for this type of age-defining production; and it is the very semantic liminality of aphorism (its epistemological value and transmissibility) that has brought him to this undecidable subjective position (and to the desperate ethics of reversibility). Peyman stands as trickster figure: as ideal reflection of U.'s perpetually deferred self-image (fetish), and as 'figure' in the structuralist sense of coordinating the movements of language without ordering their meaning. He represents an icon (the deproblematized image) of the anthropological resistance army yearned for and idealized by U., a combination of anthropologist and terrorist who dreams of "[...] vandalizing everything, of using my insider status to wreak sabotage on the Project" (*Satin Island* 129) but who, through the destruction of use and meaning, *becomes* everything instead; the contemporary subject who sees naught but his or her own trace, his or her own effluvia (the reversibility of idealism or externalization of the realist subject), everywhere they turn.

Obesity, Extension and the Ethics of the Late Capitalist Trickster Figure

Koepping brings the trickster into contact with the infinite ethics of Levinas and Gibson by asserting that the paradoxical imperatives of this figure can be understood in terms of "Max Gluckman's [...] dialectic interplay of structure and antistructure, of hierarchy and *communitas*: though we know about the futility of successful revolution, we do not cease playing at ritual rebellion. Through seasons and life cycles, we revive the symbol of rebellion, in tales told, in plays staged, in ritual persons re-enacting the same sequences (or adding new ones)" (197). The temporality associated with these ritual expressions is basically absent in McCarthy's novels: for instance, there are no seasons or coherent life cycles in

Remainder, the temporality of the world the novel creates is structured around the staged “symbols of rebellion” constituted by the re-enactments, each of which is a futile but operational and energetic attempt to rebel against the constraints of the settlement and against the fundamental inauthenticity that he identifies with from the outset. The structured seasons in *C* dissolve into the economic rhythms of insect mating, staged sales meetings and dramatic productions, technological warfare and communication; the landscape (and the possibility of capturing it in paint) has been obstructed by the effluvia of war machines and the turning of the seasons has become an indifferent temporality of clicking gears. In *Satin Island* the life cycle and the rituals of rebellion are directly connected, not through a kind of intentional synchronization, but as a result of U’s contact with a life cycle interrupted: the death of his friend Petr from cancer, the archetypal mode (metastasis) of late capitalist society (Baudrillard, *Transparency* 7). Throughout the novel, the “ritual of rebellion” is playing itself out in U.’s eyes, and in the world, in practical perpetuity in the form of the oil spill and through his obsession with the dead skydiver. In other words, the temporality of the novels, even when they are staged prior to the contemporary heights of mass communication, constitutes the subjective temporality of information flow or a de-structured structure, incoherence made coherent through its apparent perpetuity, through its omnipresent banality, and through the orbital sense of indifference it establishes. This is a non-dialectical temporality, or, a temporality that does not respect the disruptive contact of “dialectic interplay”. The contemporary trickster figure has no opposition to rely on and therefore can turn only to itself, effectively finding other ways to indulge in their will without falling into the old habits of desiring to express extreme and indifferent violence, extreme physical consumption or sexual intercourse (their expression is no longer particular to the trickster). Like the example presented by Baudrillard above, when one’s will cannot be relied upon to produce acts of resistance, the trick is to locate ‘your’ will elsewhere. With nowhere else to locate its will, the contemporary trickster becomes a figure of cannibalistic self-consumption, a figure of a certain kind of obesity that once may have been grotesque (this was the symbolic value of the trickster’s obsession with excessive eating and sex), but now has reversed into a kind of celebrated universal expression of individual existence.

As Koepping puts it,

There is, though, an almost universal sameness in body imagery, for all must play on the same basic body and its same functions, and this sameness may be seen as a universal topos. Wherever it appears to counter the well-ordered classification of things, bodily imagery concerns the obscenity of sexual and excretory organs and their function and the play with such obscene connotations, for, as Bakhtin has clearly pointed out, ‘the body of the non-official speech is always a ... drinking, eliminating, sick body, a fertilizing-fertilized, swallowing-swallowed entity’. (200)

Hence part of a pattern of identification with the trickster figure would be identification with the universality of the body and its embarrassing functions and the added notion that their symbolic value is contained in their capacity to oppose a certain notion of social order. This is exemplified by the way the body is described in the opening section of *Remainder*, during the narrator's recovery and physiotherapy in hospital. In order to overcome the brain injury he suffered in his accident, the narrator is forced into what he calls "rerouting", the act of creating new channels for commands to run through in his brain: "To cut and lay the new circuits, what they do is make you visualize things" (19). The poetics of the description of this therapy that follows reverses the body-image of the trickster, by demonstrating the absence of the "eliminating" and "sick" body that stands in opposition to order for Koepping: "They make you understand how it all works: which tendon does what, how each joint rotates, how angles, upward force and gravity contend with and counterbalance one another. Understanding this, and picturing yourself lifting the carrot to your mouth, again and again and again, cuts circuits through your brain that will eventually allow you to perform the act itself. That's the idea." (*Remainder* 20)

Though here we have the execution of a motion *leading* to consumption, there is no mention of chewing, swallowing, or digesting the carrot. All of the bodily functions implied or mentioned in the quotation by Bakhtin above have been relegated from the scene, which is to say, from the control of the subject from the outset. The aesthetics of the grotesque comes in the form of the re-enactments. From the trash held by the old woman in the narrator's building and its excreta in the form of the "wet, sticky looking patch on the floor" (138), to the fat produced by the liver lady that "became quite a problem, as it goes" (145), the blue liquid that gushes onto him at the tyre shop (160), the bump in the carpet during his rehearsals for the bank robbery (238), and finally to the blood he comes into contact with in the final act of re-enactment (of that which has not yet occurred). Far from appearing grotesque or disturbing, the narrator describes this actual effluvium in ethically detached aesthetic terms: "The only thing that moved was a deep red flow coming from Four's chest. It emerged from his chest and advanced onto the carpet. 'Beautiful' I whispered" (269). Each of his re-enactments have seduced malfunction or failure from the systematic execution of the narrator's will, or in fact, centered on a certain reproduction of malfunction or failure *as* the will of the narrator (like that of the tyre shop or murder scene). In effect, he is seeking the will for disruption through his re-enactments by making disruption that which is enacted or that which is seduced. It is, in the end, the seduced violence of the bank robbery that serves to almost send the narrator into the delirium of the objective position. For the narrator, the experience of this position starts to grow as his re-enactors begin to shout about stopping the re-enactment, just prior to their realizing that this robbery was in fact real: "Stop what? This re-enactment was unstoppable. Even I couldn't have

stopped it. Not that I wanted to. Something miraculous was happening” (269). The narrator has succeeded in his attempts to construct an automated scene, one which (despite his systematic influence on it) would simply perform his will without his input (without even his own knowledge of it), would carry on without his responsibility or coordination: he has, by the logic of simulation, smuggled the performance of his will into the automated flow of reality that had seduced him from the outset of the novel. It is when the performative passes into reality in the text that the narrator begins to fully experience the weightlessness of the bourgeois escapade, the thrill of attending the strike of the falling Vanuatuan arrow:

One turned to me and, voice still quivering, whispered: “*It’s real!*”

The tingling really burst its banks now; it flowed outwards from my spine’s base and flowed all around my body. Once more I was weightless; once again the moment spread its edges out, became a still, clear pool swallowing everything else up in its contentedness. I let my head fall back; my arms started rising outwards from my sides, the palms of my hands turning upwards. I felt I was being elevated, that my body had become unbearably light and unbearably dense at the same time. (270)

Once his re-enactment becomes real, the narrator begins to acquire the posture of the saint of *Men in Space* or Peyman of *Satin Island*: elevated, liminal, but still the bearer of paradoxical (unreal) extremes (unbearable lightness and density). Hence, where the grotesque might in the trickster myth evoke the ethical negativity of the irresolvable, here it becomes a catalyst for the merging of the narrator’s romantic genius mentality and an irreducible reality. Before he leaves, the narrator approaches the prostrate form of the gunshot victim and “[...] poked [his] finger into the wound in his chest. The wound was raised, not sunk; parts of his flesh had broken through the skin and risen, like rising dough. The flesh was both firm and soft; it gave to the touch but kept its shape [...] ‘Yes, really like a sponge,’ I said” (271). Far from being alienated by the inner workings of the body, the narrator enacts a detached and even pornographic (meaning exposure-oriented) investigation of the wound, leading to a series of paradoxical pairings of properties, made unparadoxical by the pornographic angle of the narrative lens (it wants to take in all it can). He even comes to understand the body as a sponge, following the metaphor discussed by McCarthy in terms of Ponge’s treatment of the orange:

[...] his phrasing giving equal weight to two senses of ‘expression’: ‘representation’ and ‘squeezing’. Unlike a sponge, [...] which gathers its form back again, the orange loses its form when pressed. Its cells are crushed, its tissue ripped; there is spillage, but a husk remains and, on the squeezer’s part, a bitter sense of seeds ejaculated too soon. The orange’s realness imposes itself on the expressor, yet can’t be mastered or possessed by him. (*Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* 71)

In a sense then, this passage is a kind of self-reproach by McCarthy that may in fact deny the notion that he is trying to establish a new subject for contemporary literature (except by accident). In effect, the

narrator, who has been both confounded and seduced by matter, and who has consciously or unconsciously sought the experience of transcending materiality, understands in the body's sponginess the pressure exerted by both his subjective will and that exerted by the seduction of the object, and their duelling impacts. If the grotesque can be understood as an excess of physicality (hunch-backs, obesity, etc.), then McCarthy is suggesting that this, "smelly, pouting, wet-lipped, finger-smudging physicality would themselves constitute the real – an overwhelming realness" (*Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* 71), which is to say, an example of reality that does not avoid poetics or rhetoric, but rather through these things acquires the sense of their cooperation with the ethical ontology of the late capitalist context. This cooperation is exemplified by the poetic texture shared between blood and light in the lines that follow.

That the position of the iconic saint or cosmonaut of *Men in Space* (a perspectival indifference to both material and the immaterial) is what has been achieved through his seduction of the real by simulation is made explicit as he exits the bank:

Then I was walking from the bank. I walked quite calmly. No one tried to stop me. They all ran and screamed and bumped and fell – but I had a cylinder around me, an airlock [...] the people at the bus stops and the other windows full of their reflections – rotating around me. I was an astronaut suspended, slowly turning, among galaxies of coloured matter. I closed my eyes and felt the movement, the rotation – then opened them again and was overwhelmed by sunlight. It was streaming from the sun's chest, gushing out, cascading, splashing off cars' wheels, bonnets and windscreens and off shop fronts [...] It was spilling everywhere, overflowing, just too much, too much to absorb. (*Remainder* 272)

Matter and information, that which is hidden and that which exposes (blood and light), come to feel as if they are made of the same substance; blood and the physical touch of a wound do not serve to bring the narrator into some kind of relation with the unconscious drives they are meant to represent in trickster myths, but rather lead him directly to an experience of excessive light, information, or clarity. He eventually declares that "Light and blood" have the same texture (272). This unnamed texture (ostensibly liquid, given the nature of the description of light in the passage), serves to unite blood and light in a unity representative of material and ideal, a physical excess of information that degrades the ethical meaning of realist, modernist and post-structuralist aesthetics. I would suggest we read this anomalous texture not as a symbolic call for, or expression of, absurdity, but as an anomaly as Baudrillard understands it: "Anomaly no longer has the tragic side of abnormality, nor even the dangerous and deviant side of *anomie*. It is somehow harmless, harmless and inexplicable. It is on the order of a pure and simple apparition, the rising to the surface of a system (ours) something come from elsewhere. From another system? Anomaly has no critical incidence in the system. Its figure is rather that of a mutant" (*Fatal Strategies* 47).

Not only does this accurately describe the narrator's experience, it also speaks to the nature of the "beyond" persistently referred to in *C* (be it poetically envisioned in Serge's bowels or in the rolling landscape beyond his sight): the harmless and inexplicable rightness of things. However, without the opposition or tension between lived order (blood) and symbolic disorder (excess of light), the body imagery of the trickster blends into the banality of consumption and sex. Both Serge in *C* and the narrator of *Remainder*, for instance, do not seem to find their issues with comprehending or reading language an obstacle to their behaviour. There is a clear connection here to Serge in *C*, in terms of wireless transmission and flatulence, erection and revelation, and the female body in sexual congress as map of Western male ethos and desire. However, this connection exists only if we set aside the implicit relation of oppression at play in Bakhtin's quotation in the form of "official speech". Official speech in given short shrift in McCarthy's novels, whether we are considering the oafish character of Simeon Carrefax and his friend from the military hierarchy, Widsun, the simultaneously decentered and self-centered violent whim of *Remainder*'s narrator, the very notion of the voice of 'the party' or the intentional vagueness of the officer's superiors in *Men in Space*. U.'s worshipful stance towards Peyman seems to be the exception, were it not for the fact that Peyman's authority, his aphorisms, hardly enact the dichotomous order of "official speech". If they did, there would be no need for the Great Report; which is to say, his speech is no more *official* than anyone else's, even if it is monumentally more effective in its exchange for money and information. With the Great Report Peyman is effectively sharing, if not dissolving the power of official speech, as he hands responsibility over to U.

Serge is almost certainly the most physical of McCarthy's characters, and like U. and the trickster, at one point he ventures to disrupt certain delusions of his society, namely, the technological tricks at the center of the faux-spiritualism of the séance which became so popular after the mass-death of World War one. In doing so, the narrative reveals an automated ethics of obesity, of an inescapable weight that is both detoured around and confronted in the same manner. The logic of this obesity is expressed by Serge's girlfriend Audrey's medium, in the way she describes a dead man named Ralph (pronounced "Rafe") having a whole body and a house "built of bricks" (282) in the afterlife, and as she attempts to answer a sceptical question from the audience, "[...] then what are the bricks built of?":

"Emma-nations," Tilly finishes the word with difficulty. "Raifle says things rise up, atoms rising, and consol, consolidate when they get up here. We collect them, and make them solid again. There's always something rising from your plane; when it comes through the aether, other qualities gather round each atom, and our people manor-factor solid things from it."

A man to the hall's left stands up now:

"I have a question," he says. "If you need the atoms of living things to reconstitute them, why do these things not disappear from our world?"

"Oh, your world sheds bulk," Tilly responds. "You're losing weight right now, so that I and the others may borrow it in order to become present to you." (282)

Talking does not work to critique or disrupt, only a mechanism can do it, and only by repeating, on a scale unconcerned with the trick, the trick itself. The dead are in this case the escaped, and the living those who (by their own unconscious mode of escape) contribute to the physicality, materiality, objectivity of the dead in reality, in their actual experience. What the medium is expressing is effectively a Western mode of symbolic exchange, where the living sacrifice "bulk" in order to return the dead from their exile to the world of the living. These dead are the ideal subjects, gathering mass from the very passing of time, of the world around them, romantic geniuses into whose orbit is seduced the presence of the world and reality itself by virtue of the labour of social existence, the moving through time and space of the living. What the medium is describing is in essence the ideal subjectivity of Fichte, where the dead "I" gathers properties into itself from the living world it wants to express and experience without occupying.

In her fascination with the power of the séance to connect her with the spirit of her dead brother, Audrey represents Baudrillard's anomalous concept of weightless obesity that we can equally associate with the narrator of *Remainder* when he witnesses the bloody end of his heist simulation. While Baudrillard associates this obesity with mass and weight, he also suggests that, "This obesity too is spectral – in no way heavy, it floats in the good conscience of sociality. It incarnates the formless form, the amorphous morphology of the currently social: the ideal individual paradigm of reconciliation, of the closed and self-managed niche. These are no longer bodies, strictly speaking, but specimens of a certain cancerous inorganicity that now lie in wait for us everywhere" (*Fatal Strategies* 49). Audrey's hopeful relation to the séance represents just such a "good conscience" of the "currently social"; her positivity reflects a positivized trend in society, in the same way that the easy sociality of the people the narrator of *Remainder* sees on the street reflects their relation to advertising images, and in turn seems to draw the ire of the narrator (for the ignorance of inauthenticity it evokes). As such, this obesity can be understood as the bloating experienced by the linguistic self in the linguistically permeated space of late capitalist society; as the weightless mass (in the political sense) that ravenously and unthinkingly draws properties of all sorts into its orbit. Serge then demonstrates that though it is a technical mechanism that has helped make real, and hence popular, the illusion of the séance, the same mechanism can be reproduced in order to disrupt the weightless sociality of the scene. Western symbolic exchange (the illusion of the séance) is, in effect, disrupted by the very technology that made it possible. After he has ruined the illusion for the

crowd, all hopeful sociability dissolves in a storm of realist discontent. A riot erupts and Serge and his girlfriend return to his flat, where she breaks down and sobs:

Serge sits beside her for a long time, watching her back rise and fall. It seems bulkier, as though the weight lent by her body to the world of spirits, loaned out through the twin agencies of love and conviction, had been returned unclaimed. Her hair, too, looks heavier, greased by sadness. Her shirt and dress are crumpled. All of her is downward-sagging, solid, heavy. If mass and gravity had been added to her, something's been stripped away as well: despite her layers of clothes, she somehow looks more naked than she does even when undressed, as though a belief in which she's clothed herself till now, a faith in her connectedness to a larger current, to a whole light and vibrant field of radiant transformation through which Michael [her brother] might have resonated his way back to her, had been peeled off, returning her, denuded, to the world – this world, the only world, in which a table is just a table, paintings and photographs just images made of matter, kites on walls of play-rooms unremembered and the dead dead. (293-94)

In the destruction of illusion, a stark, objective understanding of reality is set into place. Like the trickster, Serge becomes a figure of obscenity; not obscenity in terms of discriminatory ethics, Levinasian otherness or Bakhtin's embarrassing bodily presence, but in terms of Baudrillard's obscenity of disillusionment. In effect, Baudrillard's obscenity is reflective of the reversal that can take place as a result of encountering these other versions of the obscene: from negative ethics to the ontological and ethical positivity of an obscene reality. In *Passwords*, Baudrillard summarizes the obscene rather succinctly in terms of the loss of the stage or scene, as in Situationist spectacle, that might establish the distance of "gaze [...] play and otherness" (27). Obscenity is the seemingly permanent absence of that distance, and obesity one of several "figures of the obscene" (*Fatal Strategies* 73). In this discussion of the obscene we come closest to the ethical dilemma at the heart of Baudrillard's work, and I would argue at the ethical heart of the novels: the paradoxical ethical dilemma of illusion. Baudrillard seems to side rather strongly with the ethics of illusion against the obscene, and through his description of this position we get a clearer picture of what kind of obscene figure Serge represents:

[...] against the obscenity of obviousness, against this unclean promiscuity with itself that we call resemblance, we must remake illusion, rediscover illusion, this power, at once immoral and maleficent, to tear the same away from the same, called seduction. Seduction against terror: these are the stakes. There are no others. [...] Illusion is not false, for it doesn't use false signs; it uses senseless signs, signs that point nowhere. This is why it deceives and disappoints our demand for meaning, but it does so enchantingly. (*Fatal Strategies* 75)

If there is an ethical aesthetics to be found in Baudrillard's work, they are connected to seduction, illusion, and a contemporary allegorical relation to symbolic exchange. As Peyman liberates things into uselessness, Baudrillard advocates on behalf of illusion by equating it with signs that point nowhere: not to totalizing discriminations, nor to the meaning of the infinite. Serge, in the example above, seems

instead to acquire the “fury” (288) of the obscene, a fury compelled by the mass-illusion being perpetrated by the séance. Serge’s wholly self-inspired (thetic) reading of the situation dissolves the distance between stage and audience, enacting “The erasure of all scene, of all power of illusion, the disappearance of distance, of that space maintained by ceremonial of the rules of the game – the triumph of promiscuity in every domain. Eroticization and sexualization are only the expression of this mix up, of this confusion of all roles” (*Fatal Strategies* 75). The technical obesity that haunts Serge does not express itself only in the destruction of illusion, but also, like the trickster, in the “triumph of promiscuity” that reverberates throughout the poetic language of *C* (exemplified by the funeral scene, by his first conscious sexual encounter, by the scenes of his orgasm and drug use over the battlefields of France).

This is the understanding of the denuded object, the subject incapable (or unaware) of representation. Serge has tacitly attempted to prove the truth of his narrative/individual perspective by dissolving the popular illusion of the séance, and in doing so both appeals to, and desperately seeks to escape from, his own form of obesity. His attempts at disruption are attempts to disrupt the very illusion, the inescapable weight, that he suffers from: the illusion of connection, of the ‘beyond’, provided by wireless communication technology. Audrey becomes more material as her delusion is shattered, and we know by this time that Serge sees the body in terms of chemicals and currents; through his disruption Serge has seduced others like Audrey into his materialist perspective, through the “fury” (288) he feels upon realizing that the entire thing was a technological sham. In the narrative perspective of the text we can see that Serge is always already a kind of romantic genius, however, in its contemporary guise as Baudrillard’s detached and ideal subject:

These obese people are fascinating for their total oblivion of seduction. Furthermore, they no longer worry about it; they have no complexes about how they live, insouciant, as if there was not even an ego ideal left for them. They are not ridiculous and they know it. They claim a sort of truth, and in fact they do display something of the system, of its empty inflation. They are its nihilist expression, that of the general incoherence of signs, morphologies, forms of alimentation and of the city – hypertrophied cellular tissue, proliferating in all directions. (*Fatal Strategies* 47-48)

Serge is indeed his own ego ideal (chemicals, currents, signals), and he bears no sign of recognizing for himself the nature of seduction in a world of production. The emptiness of McCarthy’s characters, their famed lack of grounding or history (Julavits 25) is precisely an expression of this kind of obesity, an obese perspective: filled with its own image, its linguistic self, and the objective properties they attract or seduce as if from all angles and objects. McCarthy’s narratives are weighted with perspective, but of a bodiless kind like the black mass that settles in Serge’s stomach: “A fetal obesity, primal and placental: as if they

were pregnant with their own bodies but could not be delivered of them. The body grows and grows without being able to deliver itself" (*Fatal Strategies* 48). The narratives are pregnant with various iterations of perspective itself (with the formalisms of screens, artistic re-enactments, wireless transmitters, surveillance devices), a burden we can equate to that of the thetic subject perpetually seeking the elusive property of freedom (to death).

The narrative perspective of *Men in Space* opens with just such body-centric imagery: a beautiful nude young woman urinating in fear. Not a comedic perspective from an ethical sense, in that it denotes an almost primal scene of vulnerability as merely an interesting anecdote: nude, intensely afraid, in the presence of men who have demonstrably no concern for social boundaries or taboos against violence, this character is herself in a liminal state of vulnerability (she is beyond the social relations that might keep her secure and yet, at the heart of a city with millions of inhabitants). However, the narrative perspective lends the story an air of charged anticipation: "[...] this girl walks out of the bedroom. And guess what?" His eyes beam across the table, pink flushed with excitement. "What?" ask Anton. "She's naked [...]" (*Men in Space* 4). Koulin goes on to explain how she "starts crying and screaming [...]" just cries and screams some more" (4), with no apparent concern for her experience or feelings then describes the moment that she urinates on the floor, perhaps attempting to get at some kind of comedic incongruity or grotesquery, without being able to exactly enunciate what the point of this story is: "Because she was naked there was nothing to interrupt its fall. And this girl, this beautiful naked girl just stood above it, screaming. I don't know if she even noticed what she'd just done . . ." (4). In a kind of structuralist resolution, this exchange then passes into Anton's recollection of his own first meeting with Koulin, pondering whether he tells a similar story to others about him. This interlude then returns to Koulin's story, where he concludes ambiguously: ". . . and then this second girl walks in," Koulin's saying, "though she's not naked, mores the pity. She tries to calm the first girl down. The parquetry's not varnished, so the piss has made a big dark patch across it . . ." (5). This is the last we hear from Koulin about this incident, but it serves to establish his ethical perspective. Firstly, he experiences and recreates the incident with the eyes of an operator: both his actions then and his expression now serve to establish a perspective of detached work-like professionalism that is based on the ethical distance between himself and the objects of his violent actions. This perspective is fully established in his intellectual and aesthetic focus, not on the experience or vulnerability of the woman, but on her body in its vulgarity, and on the trace of that taboo process that is absorbed into the very ground of the scene. In a sense, Koulin's perspective is a concentrated example of the narrative perspective McCarthy relies upon: a constant vision of human vulnerability through the hubristic distance provided by the screen and the imperative of operation, the

prestige accorded to those who can act and claim as if they were both inside and outside the catastrophe at once. This is to say, the late capitalist bourgeois perspective. The two factors of this perspective are illustrated in the passage of this anecdote from Koulin, to Anton's thoughts, back to Koulin who completes the tale, and then once again back to Anton who adds his own attempt at correction:

Anton, still orbiting the saucer with his finger, pictures the patch, its jagged edges, the frightened girl above it. In his mind he pauses the scene, steps in, tells the girl *It's OK, just keep calm, things will work themselves out*, then, standing among them, regulates the other figures' movement around the room: sends her friend to fetch a knee-length jumper for her, holds Koulin and Milachkov at bay beside the window while the Yugoslavian comes round, digs out some money, pays them . . . It works: the story ends without anyone else getting hurt. When he's finished telling it, Koulin slides an envelope across the table to him.

"Passports?"

"Passports." (5-6)

Anton's fantasy of correction constitutes the companion thought to Koulin's lurid enjoyment of and fascination with the vulgarity, vulnerability and violence of the scene. Anton enacts here the ethics of the liminal bourgeois subject, the suspended subject. He fantasizes a solution with ease, locating the key to correction in the 'pausing' of time (as in an act of exchange). However, the nature of his solution betrays the co-operation of his liminality with that of Koulin: his fantasy of correction comes at least partially out of guilt, the guilt that comes with the knowledge of one's own impotence. He not only enacts the paradoxical passivity of the liminal subject, but he preaches it to the nude woman as a mode of escaping the danger and fear she faces in her total vulnerability: "*things will work themselves out*". Impotence is deployed in a paradoxically productive fashion, as a solution to impotence (like gold, when sought out through its name alone, dissolves). Anton is, in effect, preaching Baudrillard's passive bourgeois ethics of resistance (seduction) by suggesting that non-action is the best path forward, the best path out of this violent and humiliating vulnerability; passivity seducing the positive playing out of events. Constantly present but definitively not connected, Anton presents the ultimate fantasy of the passive, liminal, subject to the reader: the hand of a beneficent entity (the bourgeois subject and its technology) pushing obstacles aside on your behalf, allowing you to experience transcendence and progress at a distance, safe from the grinding, violent and ironic nature of these processes for temporal beings. This fantasy of internal ethics, of desiring to be both omnipotent and beneficent to the vulnerable, is immediately shattered as Anton's passive connection to such violence is re-iterated in his duties as a member of the same criminal organization that caused this young woman such distress, and which, by its very nature (money above humanity) must see her not as an 'other' for which they are responsible, but merely an object of arousal and detached fascination randomly connected to the execution of a job (making money move). Both

Koulin and Anton represent aspects of the liminal subject, one visual (detachedly aroused and fascinated) the other a liminal simulation of the ethical (which ironically produces detachment again, to a different end, to the end of the retrospective erasure of the violence this passive liminal subject floats in). Anton moves through precisely such a setting immediately after this exchange with Koulin, in terms of the seas of people that narratively mark the passage from Cold War polarity into the postmodern mélange of a late capitalist society:

It's the usual crowd: journeyman artists hawking sketches [...] Solitary violinists playing Mozart [...] Quartets of musicians playing more Mozart. Minstrels dressed in pseudo-eighteenth-century frills and stockings singing Mozart arias a cappella. Always fucking Mozart. [...] There are organ grinders; dreadlocked jugglers; hair-wrappers, cross-legged on woven mats; masseurs; tarot readers; puppeteers; men with parrots and boa constrictors; women selling tacky jewellery. And tourists, endless tourists, wearing brightly coloured scarves and jackets, oozing and coagulating around maps and cameras like some dense, radioactive mass, a fluorescent toxic spill; coagulating around Anton too, hemming him in . . . (7)

The excreta of the trickster figure, of the woman in Koulin's story, is subjected to its own, tropic, passage here. The urine becomes the tourist, who is in turn described as a kind of mass arriving as if from nowhere, exactly like the oil spill or the roller-bladers in *Satin Island*. The uniformity that mass represents, in this imagery and in that of *Satin Island*, is the grating temporal and aesthetic uniformity implied in the statement, "Always fucking Mozart". Despite their newfound freedom from the Soviet censor, these artists and musicians are compelled, as if by some invisible trick performed by some invisible hand, to all produce the same product, but from different angles, with different tricks of aesthetics or method that create a scene of diversity which dances to the rhythm of a single artist, a single oeuvre (as in Baudrillard's assertion of a spirit of the capitalist trickster). This is effectively the trick pulled by the trickster figure, an attempt to seduce us into radical enjoyment that sets us eating away at the very foundations of that imperative: the trickster figure attempts its own escapade, escaping into the homogenized masses of individuals and their deluded attempts to resist the invisible hand by giving it exactly what it always wants (value and meaning). The people that jam his bridge are the effluvia of Western hegemony, the tourist who swarms around this artificial uniformity as much as they do around Anton, hemming in the function of the artist as much as his progress while at the same time representing the unbounded consumption of the American dream. The liminal subject sees the double without realizing its importance or what it reveals, because the liminal subject has never stood on the solid ground of ideology or reason, they are always already afloat on an ocean of empty signs and symbols, a living semiotic network desperate for the investment of weight, of meaning, that might anchor some of these signs and symbols in place (unaware of or unwilling to acknowledge the innate, even mythic, violence of these desires). It is at this

point that we can see the detachment expressed by Koulin turned into a positive thetic distinction being made by Anton: the apparent distance he projects between himself and the sea that determines and obstructs his path (despite being a foreigner himself). Anton becomes like a trickster figure in romantic guise: consuming the world around to his own ontological aggrandizement (obesity), his narrative perspective takes on the weight of the world around him, bloats like Serge's stomach with the presence of some "dense, radioactive mass" automatically distinguished from the lightness of his own being, able as it is to become remote from this mass through the flights of poetic fancy that mark all of McCarthy's primary characters. The world becomes a thetic function of a subject obsessed with the duelling desires for reality (stable cultural boundaries) and illusion (self-expression): even the scene of vulnerability shared by Koulin becomes an opportunity for Anton to inject himself into the narrative as a kind of spirit of the *obscene* hero; a hero without a stage, without anything to distinguish him from the crowds or the audience. He drifts into a worried recollection of his first encounter with Koulin, and then into the detached fantasy world where he has the power to stop the scene and smooth it all out, so that money gets to where it needs to be (still in the hands of violent criminals), and there is no violence or trace of violence in the experience of this exchange. The bourgeois escapade is able to poetically consume vulgarity, the grotesque, the pornographic, and violence and smooth them all into the detached and fascinated temporality of the real. Anton, in his desire to escape to America with his family, has materialized the bourgeois escapade and demonstrated the ethical imperative of those who share that idealist form of escape: all the passivity, all the power of inertia contained in the desperate conviction that "*things will work themselves out*" (*Men in Space* 6).

Conclusion: The Challenge of the Trickster

This ethics of simulation is crystalized by the active passivity of Madison in her post-conditioning state of mind: "[...] the explosion's taking place already – it's always been taking place. You just didn't notice . . ." (*Satin Island* 129). Having already seen her subjectivity reduced, and her objectivity enforced by her violent and erotic conditioning, Madison as object (as woman, as consumer, formerly as student protestor) tacitly understands her most effective form of resistance as the *challenge* to resistance and its *imperative* as represented by U. in his male romanticizing and self-aggrandizing discontent. Resistance, for Madison (forced from activism into the poses and performance of bourgeois escapade), is iconic: omnipresent but deproblematized, resistance involves the withdrawal of her will to resist, the withdrawal of what, in her protest days, would be exchanged for the public symbolic violence of authority and the performance of its continuity. In literary terms, this can be understood as the ethics of leaving a trace of

the absence of dialectical friction, leading allegorically back to when social actions were causal and political and arguably exchangeable for something more than violence and death. By performing themselves, by the imperative to express and create meaning endlessly, the temporality of dialectic and conflict is reanimated, like the body of Spitalfield the cat, or Madison in her conditioning. Reorganized, reinvested with weight and energy, but somehow still empty, still unable to settle into a solid grounding or structure; we, like the novels, can sense the trace, the allegory of politics and violence, not in the ground of our everyday lives but in the semantic and aesthetic ether of the ceaseless production of expressions and representations of violence. Neither Baudrillard's nor McCarthy's ethics valorize violence, but they do account for its potential as a result of the ethics of expression; as such, these ethics must be understood as negative, not in the sense of the negative as Gibson has it (mimetically or aesthetically), but rather in the *ideally* negative sense of pointing nowhere (and hence going both somewhere and nowhere at once, like the roller-bladers in *Satin Island*), towards nothing but unresolved potential or chance. If these are bourgeois ethics, then there is something to be said for making violence incidental, inasmuch as it ethically valorizes avoiding the intentional execution of violence by the subject. However, this ethics being one of escapade (ecstatically escaping the imperative of resistance by consuming the negative rather than opposing it), incidental violence is effectively violence not-controlled, as if by never intending violence (viewing oneself through the lens of ideological positivity⁵⁶) one might elude responsibility for it. It places the ethical act inside the mind of the subject, in terms of consciousness and unconsciousness of intention. Unconsciousness or detachedness is made an ethical virtue, in that it guarantees to a certain extent the freedom from responsibility for actions that fall under the aegis of the commonplace or banal. Serge, for instance, knows what happens when he spots an enemy artillery position and relays it back to his command structure: that position will be targeted and destroyed. Serge however simply does not see his role as one of causing death or violence, but instead, by collecting and relaying information: "[...] he doesn't think of what he's doing as a deadening. Quite the opposite: it's a quickening, a bringing to life. [...] it's an awakening, a setting into motion. In these moments Serge is like the Eiffel Tower, a pylon animating the whole world, calling the zero hour of a new age of metal and explosive, geometry and connectedness [...]" (C 200). Serge is precisely the bourgeois subject who, despite being at the center of a storm of deadly violence, thinks of what he does in exclusively positive terms, reversing death and consuming it as life born from the romantic heights of his communicational and expressive linguistic self.

⁵⁶ Arguably the ethical premise of contemporary, character- and identity-centric realist novels.

The ethics at play in McCarthy's work is defined by the paradox of imperative expression and political passivity or unconsciousness. To close down (discriminate) or open up (make infinite) only invites the return of the other, to continue a cycle that is productive of both money and information in contemporary society (and hence always able to be aligned with the positive in aesthetic, ideological and ethical terms). The circulation of money and information is the dominant mode of the 'good' in the novels and in contemporary society, exemplified by Serge's operation *by* this imperative to communicate in *C*: from benefitting from the profits from his father's day-school and the sale of silk as a child, drifting away on the wireless, to destroying enemy gun positions and erecting communication towers in Egypt, Serge's (generally unanalysed) life and livelihood has always been in inescapable relation to money, communication and expression. The same can be said of *U.*, whose entire life and livelihood has been organized around a particularly anthropological mode of expression. Not only are money and information banal, their banality is positive, inasmuch as they are the *sources* of ethical positivity. Money and information are technical, de-structured structures whose positivity and potential for positivity overcome their reversible nature. It is in their operation that the dice are rolled and the ethics of simulation either succeed or fail in human terms; in either case, information and money are exchanged for each other, and a kind of symbolic economy persists beyond these concerns of failure or success to produce a generally positive aesthetic or ethic.

The rejection of will, knowledge, and enlightenment conceptions of subjectivity becomes the mode of resistance to the hegemony of those ideas, a parallel to the self escape defined by the trickster figure in the contemporary moment. This is exemplified by the recent upsurge in successful populist demagogues and democratically elected dictators in Europe and North America. Hence, it is the mechanics of an ironic reversal that the contemporary ethics of resistance depends upon. If expression is the systematic imperative that deprives ethical aesthetics of their impact and particularity by making positivity always aesthetically available, like it does the disruptive nature of the trickster figure, it cannot elude the influence of trope and figure. Not only can mass-expression not elude trope and figure, it absolutely depends upon them if it hopes to retain a relation to anything other than the linguistic self of the individual doing the expressing. Where Baudrillard describes the rejection of enlightenment subjectivity as a mode of resistance to contemporary hegemony, the novels encode it as the positive association by the subject with codes, transmission, signals and the relay of information and money. The novels demonstrate the difficulty the novel form has with a subject more interested in codes and signals than in figures or tropes: the inevitable use of linguistic figures to enact a perspective that seeks to leave these things behind in favour of the linearity and virtuality (sign that points only to itself) of simulation.

The trickster figure permeates the novels through the alternation of disruption and consumption, of unbound will and the will for boundaries. In its nature as figure, the trickster can be found iterated throughout the novels in object and subject form, in Serge in his particular physicality and sexuality, in U. and his momentary desire to terrorize the structure he is caught in, in the physical traces of the re-enactments throughout *Remainder*, in the opening of *Men in Space*, and in the figure of Peyman. Peyman, like the contemporary figure of the trickster, seeks his dissolution by the very mechanisms of his ascent to influence and power; he in effect seeks through his extremely vague elaboration of the methodology of the Great Report, to clone himself in U., to indirectly escape his subjectivity and responsibility for the era by demanding U. map it out.

The power of Peyman and the trickster figure is in the paradox of a de-structured structure, of a system that operates on the premise of revealing and liberating its blind spots, tautologies and ugly truths into a circulatory system of money and information. There is no resolution to this ethical program in the novels other than death or disappearance into a contemporary literary romantic vision of death as immersion and connectedness (an ironic reversal of the ideal of bourgeois escape). As such, the novels reiterate the indecisiveness of Baudrillard's own ethical perspective, the tendency for oppositions like symbolic/linear to dissolve into undecidability when it comes to connecting them to ethics. This ethics of resistance in fact attempts to *depend upon* this undecidability rather than oppose it, it searches in undecidability for a favourable outcome, without any particular reason to believe in one (without deluding themselves as to the nature of social action). It is in its unconsciousness (the ignorance of outcome) that this ethic escapes measurement and even to a certain extent, engagement. That so much of this ethic depends upon the proper function of machines and objects denotes the source of its claim to being ethical: if enacted *consciously* this ethic demonstrates a callous disregard to human consequences in the form of an admitted ignorance as to their eventual nature. It has become ethical to *repeat* what we already know is 'good' in order to avoid even the possibility of evil or the negative arising from experimentation or creativity. Hence, the ethics of resistance to contemporary conditions must be located outside of the conscious subject (in the same way that the trickster must first elude its own defined character if it wants to have an impact on contemporary Western society). Repetition is this mode of unconsciousness, where the repetition itself denies the consciousness of alternatives. McCarthy's novels reveal the ethics of the linguistic self in the digital age, an indifferent yet fascinated romantic consciousness capable of acts of beautiful and grotesque expression which constitute the ethical yet passive and detached cycle of producing and consuming the self. They represent the banalized ecstasy and desperation of the self confronted only with itself, and as such, the undecidable ethical outcome of

the extreme levels of either negativity or positivity necessary at the nascent stage of any civilization or mythical origin story. This is an ethics of seduction that seeks to draw the negative from the positive, to reduce the contemporary age to the boundlessness and dream-like extremity of the trickster myth, to expose the violent indifference of a bourgeois ethics of expression. We might understand this as a kind of anti-ethics, not an attempt to valorize the unethical, but to valorize the *doubting* of the ethical as it has been described here in terms of totality and infinity and specifically in terms of the contemporary novel. In the contemporary McCarthyan *mélange* of the total and the infinite, what becomes ethical is the act of doubling down on the imperative of expression, at the expense of all other ethical considerations. McCarthy's novels demonstrate the reversibility and unethical nature of that imperative when it leaves behind all consideration of anything other than the detached experience of the narrator, protagonist or expressor.

The ethics of the novels are the ethics that might be derived from a contemporary bourgeois perspective; the novels demonstrate this ethics by poeticizing the reversibility of totality and infinity, by demonstrating that faith in either concept makes the other essential, and hence strings the subject between two absurdly idealist conditions in a kind of historical and political stasis. The novels demonstrate a dominant mode, a meta-ethics that dissolves the ideological positivity of both totality and infinity at once, leaving instead the yet-to-be-ethically determined outcome of the always-already-ethical non-intentionality of the bourgeois subject. Simply put, totality and infinity depend upon a binary opposition, which is to say that each, were it possible to achieve these aesthetic conditions, would at any point necessarily be in conflict with the other or have already removed it from play or ridiculed it from view. Hence, while each might serve as an 'end' for the ethical subject and writer, each only leads back to the essential nature of the other, a circular logic trapping the subject or character in something like a slow-motion revolution. Novels, therefore, that pay particular heed to this binary ethical theory are ironically demanding their undoing and reversal; like Peyman, they secretly want to undo their influence and experience an *objective* ethics of expression. By consistently demonstrating the reversibility of symbolic exchange, language, and ethics the novels illustrate what Baudrillard calls the "*criminal objectives*" of any "*bid to continue the Nothing*": "*It is for this reason that thought, which knows it will fail in any case, is duty-bound to set itself criminal objectives. An undertaking directed towards positive objectives cannot allow itself to fail. One which pursues criminal objectives is duty-bound to fail. Such is the well-tempered application of the principle of evil*" (*Perfect Crime* 151).

The ethics of the novels might therefore be called the ethics of evil, in that it demonstrates the seductive nature of ideological positivity, and its relation to failure. The characters' ethics are evil, in the sense that they are indifferent to suffering and loss of life, but also in the sense that the 'ends' their ethics are tacitly aligned to are undecidable. If they were 'real'-seeming characters, they could be understood as negative examples, but their aloofness combined with the nature of the aesthetic and poetic patterns of the texts conveys a kind of automated self-interest in self-expression, a concern more for the words or a sense of 'rightness' than for the objects or events they describe, in the mind of the describer. There is, in other words, a writerly positivity to the texts, but without its affective connotations. A caged positivity haunts the novels like a promise, whose potential non-resolution arouses bouts of depression or frustration or disharmony that fail to aesthetically or poetically differentiate themselves sufficiently from moments of more light-hearted observation or contemplation. These novels are a challenge to the English bourgeois novel reader by virtue of the expectations placed on the English novel: the challenge to do what you are expected to do with a novel and identify with the protagonist. By denying his characters much of what makes up a traditional protagonist in terms of depth and emotion, and by poetically focussing on the reversibility of circularity and linearity, McCarthy challenges the reader to identify with an absence, with characters that are definitively missing something. What this identification or failure of identification might lead to is anyone's guess; this is the whole point of these ethics, to fail at pointing out, or continuing, the trace of Nothing and in that failure to leave a trace of something else.

Conclusion: The Spirit of the Absent Subject

I identified initially that in the critical approach to the novels of Tom McCarthy there has been an emphasis placed on his relation to the artistic practices of modernism, for the most part through the self-professed interest of the author and analysis by the critic (Downing; Partington; Blacklock; Weaver; Eve), but also in a confrontation with postmodernism, specifically that of Jean Baudrillard's "simulation" (Groes; Vermeulen, *Contemporary Literature*). In turn, the next broadly accurate claim made by the critical literature (and explicitly by the author himself) is that McCarthy is not only not interested in the contemporary realist subject with its depth, experience, identity and history, but is in fact antagonistic towards it, labelling it as he does a "false consciousness" (Eburne, Hart and Jaffe 675). I have attempted an intervention into the discourse and the novels by presuming from the outset that the aesthetic relation that exists between McCarthy's work and the theory of Jean Baudrillard is more than simply a setting-up and knocking-down of postmodern theory in the name of a recuperated anti-realist literary modernism. If this were true, it would create what I consider a paradox or contradiction between McCarthy's critical reception and his own view of Baudrillard's simulation, which is to say, if McCarthy denounces Baudrillard for being unoriginal in his use of simulation, his own deployment of modernist aesthetics contra a realist-naturalist "false consciousness" equates to exactly the same manoeuvre: re-enacting a literary and theoretical move (modernism vs. realism). McCarthy's rejection of the realist protagonist enacts the framing of an absence in the texts, an absence that can be identified by the proliferation of what Gibson calls formalisms ("Speculative Realism" 235) in the eyes of the narration and characters, and what I have also called forms or figures (of irony and the trickster for example). McCarthy's poetics land on the side of neither modernism nor postmodernism, but rather bring the two together under the auspices of Baudrillard's conception of *modernity*: as a term signifying the slow-motion catastrophe of Western modernity that begins with its naming itself. McCarthy enacts and obscures the absence of the subject through a series of formalisms that perform the movement of space and time around the protagonist, a series of forms that metaphorically relate to the experience of a subject (symbolism, disappearance, irony, the duelling imperatives of the trickster figure) without needing to resort to the depth, emotion and history of the traditional modern subject of the novel.

Hence, McCarthy's relation to Baudrillard and simulation, a concept he effectively rejects in an interview as nothing new (Alizart), might be applied to his own attempts to counter contemporary realism with a return to a modernist literary aesthetics that emphasizes the failure of writing, the interim as a

literary space of fiction, violence and revolution, and death. He is in part re-staging the aesthetic strategy of Robbe-Grillet and the tradition of the *Nouveau Roman*; and yet, why is this gesture of historical re-enactment worthwhile while Baudrillard's creative re-enactment of Platonic concepts is to be brushed aside? I argue that through the preceding analysis we might attribute a certain sense of irony to McCarthy's novels vis-à-vis their relation to Baudrillard's theory. Rather than being dismissive of Baudrillard's theory, I argue here that, much like Google (or Foucault for Baudrillard⁵⁷), McCarthy's novels establish the theory of Baudrillard as a lived experience to be transcended, a mode of bourgeois capitalist experience that confronts the writer of modernism theoretically in the same way that Google confronts the writer of realism or mimesis. In turn, I would suggest that McCarthy's declarations about creativity and meaning run counter to the absence of lesson or resolution in the narratives he writes. In other words, even if he is a true believer in the aesthetics of modernism and is in the process of preferring this aesthetic to that of Baudrillardian postmodernism (to the point of rejecting the latter), this belief in the novels leads not to revolution or resolution or decisive violence (the native potential of McCarthy's interim) but simply to more of the same. As such, McCarthy's novels are understood here in the end to neither dwell in modern discrimination nor post-modern infinity, but instead enact an idealist ethics of universality, a dual ethics pointed at both resolution and death or the void filled with potential at once (merging the two into a singular imperative). McCarthy's novels refuse stable resolution and transcendence, and as such they raise these concepts to idealist heights, heights from which the narrators, protagonists and certain of their notions inevitably fall. I argue that McCarthy can be considered a Baudrillardian writer in both aesthetic and theoretical terms: through a shared aesthetic (and formalisms like the anthropological) and a shared conception of ethics in the post-modern condition they describe. This condition comes to a head in terms of the aesthetics of the ethics of challenge and the obstacle of the gift of information offered by the digital. McCarthy, in the end stakes the capacity for change and progress on creativity and expression, as a gamble on the art of disappearance and the potential contained in the subject who continually creates or expresses (in the form of language or data or both). And yet, like a panel of the *Tintin* comic strip that McCarthy analyses in his first work of theory (*Tintin and the Secret of Literature*), the moments of his protagonists' fascination and poetic relation to objects convert the passage of time into space, framed in McCarthy's case not by the blank white borders of the comic strip but by the absent formalisms (frames) of symbolism, a-signification, anthropology and the digital screen. I articulate this faith here in

⁵⁷ Baudrillard's famous text *Forget Foucault*, written at the height of Michel Foucault's theoretical popularity and importance, encourages the reader to confront the universality of Foucault's notion of power, not out of derision but out of theoretical necessity. Google serves a similar purpose for McCarthy: as a form of discourse so seductive, ubiquitous and universal that it must be confronted by the writer who still wishes to write.

Baudrillardian terms, as much a call for a challenge that the gift-giver cannot reciprocate, a challenge that is never identified or located in the novels in terms of resolution, as a call to repeat the rituals and gestures of the ethos of reality production. The ethics of challenge in the novels are bound up with the ethics of conformity and passivity; for the former to escape the latter it must confront the universality of simulation, of information and capital, and the detached-but-seductive safety this condition offers the subject: the chance to be identical to oneself and hence to withdraw responsibility behind that ideal unity. A true challenge is a disappearance (behind language, image, information) that leaves a trace, an insoluble trace with the potential to trip the system up, capable of creating doubt or perhaps even fault in the system by becoming its flawed reflection.

The Circular Reality of Interval Fiction

In this analysis, the subject of the novels and the contemporary era are caught inside what McCarthy calls the interim, or interval (*Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* 124). Through the theory of Baudrillard and de Man, I have attempted to connect this interval to modernity itself, and as such the term 'postmodern' acquires a spatial and temporal sense, one not divorced from the largely North American conception of a collection of French theory, but more concerned with the space and temporality of an idea that began dying at the moment of its enunciation: modernity. The space and time of the post-modern interval constricts around the subject as their signs and symbols continue to circulate and expand in their eyes, ears and screens. As the movement of the world around the subject acquires the property of independence, or automaticity through the screen, the subject is caught up in that independent reality, carried on the backs of automated processes of labour, semiotics, politics, exchange and socialization. At this point the destiny of the subject becomes bound up in, or invested into, the destiny of the art of disappearance into sign, symbol and object. In the space-time of the novel's post-modern interval, the subject invests itself (sees itself) inside an endless series of duelling polarities (the contents of language and meaning), objectively irresolvable due to the nature of the relation (metaphorical) but subjectively resolvable through the art of disappearance.

The time and space of the interval in the novels simulates the duality of appearance and disappearance through the endless production and recycling of modes, formalisms and signs. Circulation, or the potential to be circulated, is the producer of value in a mode where universality appears possible (despite the fact that Coca Cola is not precisely available everywhere on the planet, does that make it unreasonable to suggest that this brand is universal?) through the formalism of the digital mode of mass communication. Symbolism and the art of disappearance in the novels enact precisely this kind of

circularity that, for the characters, only serves to endlessly exchange hope for failure, ideal for material, and vice versa. This places the characters inside a state of post-melancholy, a melancholy of over-connection, once again understood as a kind of poetic stasis (the interim being the time ripe for fiction), but a stasis experienced as the fluidity of the metaphorical relation. Post-melancholy is the narrative of a melancholy without a subject: a melancholy register with no chance for self-recrimination, only the possibility of leaving a trace of the absence of the subject in the dualistic, deconstructive register of the novels that indicates a narrative perspective that repeats irresolvable dualisms or formalisms for want of a subjective gaze that might resolve them.

This denial of resolution is not illustrated through a continued relation to delirium, the perceived absence of reality, or outright confusion, but rather through a sustained poetic voice that delivers solidity and fluidity, stasis and movement at once. The level of contrast between opposed meanings is set lower in McCarthy's language, so as not to indicate a conflict in which a side is being chosen by the text. Instead, the texts demonstrate the constancy of these dualisms and poetic relations, an inescapable mode shown to contain the potential to comfort and unsettle. The ethics of the texts are caught in a similar trap. The modern linguistic ethics of discrimination versus the post-modern ethics of the infinite or indescribable (in this case 'post-modern' can be understood in both senses described above) dissolve into one another in McCarthy's repetitive, circular poetics. As such, a singular ethics emerges that is both ecstatic and poisonous to all involved, and paradoxically as such, ethical in the extreme. This singular ethics revolves around the practised repetition of secular modes of worship, the production of reality through signs, symbols and information. For the powerful, like Peyman in *Satin Island*, this means demanding their own 'fulguration', their own excision by light from the world beneath their feet; like modernity and the class struggle, Peyman wants the age he has helped create to be named and as such to begin to disappear beneath the network of information that will congeal around it.

Serge and Madison are examples of characters far enough from power to have themselves been 'fulgurated', without necessarily knowing it, or understanding it as such. Hence, they each represent the trace of movement that remains after the enactment of the ethos of reality production: the figure of irony that allows for movement beyond all resolution, or movement without progress. Madison in particular represents a subject that has been violently 'named' by authority, a subject who after torture and under threat assumes the guise of the generic suburban woman. However, in her talks with U. about revolution and resistance, Madison reveals the ironic twist produced by this conditioning: her refusal to resist. This refusal may constitute a loss for the subject, but it allows the subject to claim to both fear and anticipate

the moment that the nuclear plant decides itself to melt down, the moment that the system collapses under the weight of its own promises. Her rejection of U.'s fantasies is the result of her subject-less perspective, and it enacts the escapist ethics of Peyman in that it is a rejection of historical or political responsibility in favour of passive poetic expression. As object, Madison has in a sense become what Peyman wishes he could become: irrelevant, detached and indifferent to both beginnings and endings. This active, devouring indifference is radicalized in the work of Baudrillard, and in the last chapter through the figure of the trickster.

The trickster is treated here as an anthropological formalism representing the absent subjectivity of the novels, in particular in relation to their largely absent sense of will, ethics and desire. This formalism serves to illustrate the dualist form of ethics under simulation: an imperative to both *de-stabilize* and *found* cultural and civilizational boundaries. The contemporary subject of the novels (the one invested completely into the poetic relation of formalisms) enacts both of these imperatives through the singular mode of devouring imperative to contemporary Western ideology: consumption and re-circulation of value, meaning and information. These dual imperatives (to witness transcendence in terms of utopia or of death) make the absence of the subject into a node of creative potential, each iteration or repetition of creativity or expression is invested with the potential of this absence. The dual imperative of the trickster contains the potential for both continuity and discontinuity, like the endings of the novels. Every expression of creativity within the confines of this ethos is charged with the potential of the challenge, with the possibility that the system will be unable to reciprocate your offering; however, as in the novels, this dualism is not evenly matched. The system is designed (like its subject) to absorb all attempts at deconstruction, destabilization, or disruption; like U.'s plans to inject false information into the Project, the hope of the challenge is contained in the possibility that one's contribution might be destabilizing or overwhelming, that the system cannot turn your attempts at negativity to its own proliferating ends. However, if the novels serve as a guide to this principle of resistance, they note (as McCarthy does in "The Death of Writing") that the subject is already overwhelmed by what it must confront with its expressions or representations. As such, the ethics of the novels and the trickster figure are an ethics of desperation; the ethics of the subject drowning in information, swimming through the indifferent tides of positivity and negativity toward the uniform shores of a utopian reality.

McCarthy's detour around the bourgeois realist middle brow self leads the reader instead to identify with its absence, which is to say, to identify with that which floods into the absence left by this subject. What we find in its place in the novels is an endless series of formalisms and patterns that are

meant to reflect the absence back to itself, and in so doing obscure that absence with the presence of a vague but persistent unifying theme. What McCarthy's novels all do is to reveal the trace of *something* left by the failed attempt to illustrate an absence or *nothing* (the non-identity of Western identity). That trace congeals into the ideological formalisms and imperatives that I have tried to outline here, each of which in turn suffer from their own inbuilt obsolescence, a finite looping temporality obfuscated by the imperative of continuity and repetition that denies their complete resolution in the novels. McCarthy's bourgeois subject, shorn of its literary humanist markings and depths, of the transparency of those formalisms, reveals not an alternative or necessarily novel mode of literature, but rather the ethically indifferent repetition and monotony obscured by the ideologically positive surface of bourgeois literary humanism.

McCarthy's Interval and Return to Modernism

McCarthy's intervals, or broadly speaking, the great interval in which he and his novels subsist, may be the time of revolution and fiction, however the results of these literary intervals are only ever repetition and monotonous detachment; revolution is withheld, in the sense that it has occurred already (*Men in Space*), its youthful energy was consumed in mechanized warfare (*C*), pre-emptively systematically denied (*Satin Island*), or essentially absent (*Remainder*). As such, though the interval for McCarthy is full of the potential of fiction and political agency or energy, that potential is always seduced back into the cycle, the endless circulation of capital and information.

If these novels represent a preference for or return to literary modernism and its ideas, it is odd that the potential released or promised by these formal characteristics leads only to more of the same, with the resolution of potential forever held in abeyance by the worship of the repeatable form (the pleasure of a self-generating, unavoidable object relation). If the signs of this modernist affinity are there, they too are emptied of everything but this self-generating imperative. The self becomes, in McCarthy, the Proustian reading room, the shelter historically built up with and transcended by the book, language, and transmitted information. The self encased in, and read as, information denies melancholy by creating the potential for object relations generally in a single, almost always accessible, inalienable object (information). However, the reading room is still sheltered and detached, and at the same time denies a certain form of access by celebrating that which appears on its walls and screens.

McCarthy's return to modernism reflects the present re-doubling of modern fictions in the fields of social discourse and politics: distrust of ambiguity and authority (which amounts to a certainty

regarding one's own perspective), a simultaneously celebratory and conspiratorial interest in politics and political projects (again, reflective of a confidence built on distrust), an amplified social presence of identity caricature and performance, a veritable carnival of unquestionable political identity assignment. Modernity and its universalist drive, in Baudrillard's view, emerges out of necessity thanks to an innate and essential absence at the heart of the Western consciousness (what I have outlined here in terms of the linguistic self of the subject-object linguistic relation). The properties listed above are attempts to verbalise the duality of absence and presence in social life that McCarthy illustrates in his novels: a distrust of authority that holds authority above all else, a distrust of politics that makes everything political, a returning tide of political identity whose narratives threaten to become the perfect alibi for the very system of capitalist reality production that draws them into being as alibis of the absent subject. McCarthy's return to modernist aesthetics or reference is a literary response to the problem of the orgy as expressed by Baudrillard: "WHAT DO WE DO NOW THE ORGY IS OVER? Now all we can do is simulate the orgy, simulate liberation" (*Transparency* 3). McCarthy is, in the modernist reading, performing yet another liberation of contemporary literature from the clutches of bourgeois realism by the aesthetics of a certain avant-garde modernism; the very act he dismisses Baudrillard for committing (though in that instance it is the re-enactment of Platonic concepts). The reading that argues that McCarthy has performed a return to modernism (Downing; Partington; Blacklock; Weaver; Eve), one that *could* be read as against the grain of postmodernism (Groes), is a well-executed and compelling one. In a sense, it might even support the notion of McCarthy as a Baudrillardian writer, given that Baudrillard's analysis of postmodernity was hardly positive. I believe that I can agree with its conclusions while at the same time rejecting the notion that these conclusions indicate the separation or preference for the modern over the postmodern in these novels.

McCarthy explains the threat that Google represents to the modern conception of the writer ("The Death of Writing"). To liberate anything in this late digital stage of capitalism is always something of a *fait accompli*: its form, sign and value have already been liberated, into the circulation of the global marketplace. Consequently, liberation in late capitalism (in the theoretical sense of the term) encounters itself as its own horizon (its success as a form of entering into a mode of eternal failure). Liberation undergoes a reversal: to liberate from the freedom of the global market requires either an act of disappearance or death. The liberated voice of postmodernity and digital capitalism, liberated even from its own responsibility as writer, desperately returns to that mode of writing that tries to deny itself and its idealisms, in the vain hope that the digital monolith that writes the world might catch a glimpse and at

the same time the malady of doubt and undecidability that brought the digital into being in the first place (the superior objectivity of information).

Gibson and the aforementioned contributors to the conference proceedings in 2011 tend to describe the aesthetics of postmodernity as a trap, or a space of a certain mode of confinement. Gibson also identifies, as I have here, a lack of “event” in the novels, which I believe is one of the many marks of the absent subject in the same novels. This absence of event is a mark of interval as well, a mark of unfulfilled fecundity and potential buried within the monotony of late capitalism or postmodernity. Gibson points to this absence as a weakness following the assumption of McCarthy’s preference for modernity, and it might be, if not for McCarthy’s theoretical interest in the failure of writing.

This failure is important insofar as it delineates what Gibson calls a “formalism”, but of contemporary capitalist literature: an inescapable closeness to events through information, and the promise of the “event” always held at a distance as the goal of persisting through the stream of non-events. This does not represent a failed theory of postmodernity put to use (or to the sword) by McCarthy, but rather a theory of failure that might inform contemporary theory and literature. It is, in a sense, the second time the novel has put this particular foot in its grave: the first time with the *Nouveau Roman* and Robbe-Grillet’s rejection of literary formalisms and conventions, and the second time it is done under the purview of a far greater, accessible and more pleasing formalism than literary realism: the digital or information.

McCarthy refuses to solve the writer’s problem with contemporary reality production through positive idealism; his modernist connections, intertextuality, his work on and evident connection to Hergé, Blanchot, Mallarmé, Ballard, Joyce and Robbe-Grillet notwithstanding, this apparently transparent commitment (which in the discourse is often used to articulate his novels as pro-modern, anti-postmodern or both) to a particular set of influences contrasts with the lack of theory of event that Gibson noted. What is the selling point of this aesthetic, if not a neutral, but intellectual and creative, indifferent continuity of the same? I suggest this network of influences and connections serves as the mode of the theory of failure by demonstrating that no matter the literary formalism adhered to (or avoided), the force and repetition of expression is what opens up fissures, intervals in McCarthy’s temporal terms, moments or spaces ripe with the potential for fiction, revolution and violence. New expressions of formalisms bring new failures, and though McCarthy offers no *event*-formalism (the form of the ultimate event), it is because as a writer following this particular mode, he cannot. The refusal of the reifying power of language is the writer’s only mode of challenge to the utopian realism of the digital: a Baudrillardian act

of self-consumption in the face of the ultimate gift-giver. It is an attempt to dissolve the thing that receives the gift and the debt, the subject, inside its own technological realization or reconstitution. McCarthy is a Baudrillardian writer (or is at least haunted, like the current era, by the spectre of his work), inasmuch as McCarthy's writing is a self-effacing (self as a general term for the abstract individual) attempt to jam the digital gears, to whisper in the ear of the machine the secret of its own demise, that last bit of knowledge that would truly put an end to the project. Tom McCarthy denies the stability of formalism by multiplying it endlessly, diminishing its authority by a process of universalization that serves only to name and thus deny those forms their particular ends; the same mode as the non-subject represented in his novels. This failure, so the theory goes, is a key to *its* failure, the undermining of the digital Western hegemony.

I have approached this topic and the novels through a series of concepts that can be considered formalisms. Each one, however, succumbs to the conditions of its capitalist liberation (except perhaps the trickster figure); they are caught inside the conditions of the buffering circle, the monotony and repetition of a form of devotion to the "event" that ironically (or unconsciously) serves to delay its emergence. That event in McCarthy's novels is invariably either death or continuity (or in Serge's case, death as fantasy of continuity), replicating the fate of eternal, but productive and expressive, deferral.

What remains after this liberation of the subject from the novel (an attempt at disappearance) is precisely the anthropological formalism of the trickster figure. In *its* liberation it finds itself everywhere, part of a generalized capitalist imperative of reality production, and hence practically unable to enact its challenge to society or authority, due to a lack of both: it disappears behind its tacitly universal acceptance. It is an antagonistic formalism, and a largely unconscious one at that. The world that McCarthy's novels describe is a world of endless formalisms, and consciousness of these in the form of information (an invisible formalism, the ideal absent framework of information, or U.'s utopian anthropology) dominates the perspective, in the same kind of way that the Benjaminian photograph provides a narrow avenue of proper communal access to its contents. Poetic forms and formalisms in the novels serve as the reflections of an absent subjectivity; the words put into play serve to perform a kind of stunted, reduced, but liberated agency. Each of these aesthetic reflections of an absent subjectivity betray a trace of a desire for disappearance behind the automaticity and confidence of formal appearance. However, information still has its prominent place in the novels, and as such (exemplified by U.'s contemplation of the gift of the über-server delivered by the buffering circle), can be considered one formalism among many marked by the inevitable failure of the formalisms it conveys and contains.

The formalism of the trickster looms over all the novels: that of the unconscious violence of desire, of excess, of excreta, utter detachment and self interest, and reversal. This formalism has become an ethics in simulation whose singular execution enacts a mode, in my opinion a literary mode exemplified in McCarthy's novels, of simultaneous collaboration and revolt. This is the paradoxical ethics of the Western subject in the contemporary interval, the ethics of a subject with a steadily increasing awareness of its own duality and that of the world. Everywhere there is the aesthetics of inbuilt failure, of planned obsolescence, there is a crystallized view of the contemporary interval; its promises, pleasures and disappointments. This perspective, of the self-aware trickster (who sees himself in the mirror of information and society), the spirit of liberated consumption, is split between the ease and ecstasy of its formalist nature, and the dissolution of its presence that results. McCarthy's literary interval offers no event, no resolution, and in my opinion not much hope; it is not the revelation of a liberational mode of literature that concludes a reading of McCarthy's novels, but rather the dual potential that concludes so many of Baudrillard's analyses: either continuity of the same, or a kind of violence or death (resolution of the modern project).

Despite the ambiguity of the endings, McCarthy's novels retain a trace of a leftist aesthetic, particularly with U. and Madison in *Satin Island*, and the scenes of the dehumanized (technologized, formalized) violence of WWI. The novels carry with them in the paradox and irony of the ideology they illustrate the threat to the universality of the trickster form, formed of its own success: free to be itself without obstacle, it seeks obstacles once again that might reignite the *meaning* of its mindless pleasure and antagonism.

The antagonism, the unconscious drive of the trickster, now made definitively "outside" of it, by virtue of it being embedded in ourselves, by virtue of a lack of society or authority, finds the interval to be ripe for the return of the fiction of singular authority, the fiction of others as obstacles, of self-expression as reality production. Deliverance from the duality realized by the formalism of information, but rather in the form of a regressive credulity. Everything that was missing (authority, obstacle, enemy) returns in the explicit imminence of its digital denuding. The spirit of the trickster, through its anthropomorphic formalism, threatens to enact a reversal, to stand in for the absent authority or society in an increasingly bold and daring rejection of the society that so freely and accurately performs its character. Power threatens to return in a mode so obviously regressive, so transparently fictional and historically melodramatic, that it enforces a detour on the societal level: around the increasing duality and grotesque transparency of power and social imperative, and into pleasing and regressive fictions of its beneficence

and the ethical nature of its goals. McCarthy's novels cease to idealize the subject into the emotional and historical experiences of middle-brow realism, and instead establish the Western subject as simply part of a homogenous substance with the potential to connect ontologically, poetically and ethically with a wide spectrum of activities, investing into each outcome a certain brand of potential. Irving Goh offers what I consider an example of this reversal in the form of the "reject" who is able to control its touch to the extent of avoiding its potential for negative interpersonal consequences, however, I believe the spirit of the trickster as it is understood above is more prevalent in how Bernard E. Harcourt describes the "political disobedience" of the Occupy Wall Street movement. Harcourt describes the ethos of the Occupy movement as one of rejecting all normative political modes, including those of charisma and leadership (Political Disobedience 34). This strategy of active avoidance replicates the ignorance of the trickster figure in regards to cultural or social structures, and at the same time enacts the 'heroic' mode of the trickster in that this avoidance is accomplished not by pure negativity, but by the creative modes through which the negativity of the political might be avoided. Harcourt gives one such example in the form of the 'human mic': "[it] has the effect of undermining leadership. The human mic interrupts charisma. It's like live translation; the speaker can only utter five to eight words before having to shut up, while the assembled masses repeat. The effect is to defuse oratory momentum – or to render it numbingly repetitive" (Political Disobedience 40). This leaderlessness is expected to participate in the general goal of the movement described by Harcourt as to, "give birth to new spaces of occupation that open possibilities for new ideas, tactics, and forms of resistance; and to allow for occupations that generate possibilities without imposing ideologies" (Political Disobedience 35). Occupy, in other words, intends to be the ignorant disruption of power by the conscious side-stepping of the negativity inherent in democratic political structures. And yet, because this refusal seems not only possible but perhaps even enjoyable and inspirational (Political Disobedience 52), it enacts a mode of resistance not to obstacles (as the movement has no stated goals) but to the very ease of resistance. Occupy represents, in this positive and creative mode of refusal (the particular form of presence that is meant to represent the absence of normalized modes of politics), the trickster figure in the process of erasing boundaries that barely exist and founding societies that have been in place for centuries. They are, in effect, performing the ritual repetitions of capital, in an effort to summon into their presence the very thing they seek to erase and avoid: the comforting and violent presence of authority, which is precisely how the occupy story ends.

McCarthy's novels are undoubtedly about writing, but they do not speak simply about writing-as-writing but to the kind of writing Google (according to McCarthy) and the world (according to Baudrillard) are theoretically in the process of performing. These monolithic corporate and objective structures

confound not only literature, but writing in general, by both claiming and denying the capacity to resolve. There is no resolution to the novels (or novel form), as there is no resolution to academic or digital discourse, except in the disappearance of these forms, into different formalisms; the character of the novel and academic discourse, their flavours, tones, modes, perspectives, their tropes, are all now liberated from their particular material form (university, book, journal, thesis, etc.) into the ubiquitous and undecidable formalism of information. The lack of resolution, an academic and writerly conceit or property, reveals itself in information as a characteristic vital to the notion and imperative of reality. Continuity is a vital component of making reality real, and yet as the novels show, continuity can become a kind of stasis. As such, McCarthy's novels demonstrate the realism of fictional conceits, a realism that is identified in literature by McCarthy but can also be extended into a consideration of the contemporary political subject and dominant ideology of Western hegemony.

Under the hegemony of simulation, resolution acquires its aesthetic meaning (and elides its eschatological promise), as in the resolution of the screen. This kind of resolution (the copy of an ever-absent original) manifests itself as a slow-motion progression through the rituals of technical reproduction, the pleading and plodding progression of consumer products and planned obsolescence, of contemporary political incrementalism; resolutions' progress is timed by the whim of the market, paced to match the spin of the buffering circle. Resolution hides behind its many positive iterations, laying in wait like the spirit of the trickster, happy to match the capering of its multitude of iterations, to hide behind their ecstasy and allow the unconscious investment of their energy into its inevitable and violent return. If the trickster traditionally erases, confounds and perverts boundaries of social life and hierarchy, through its insidious presence in the novels it now threatens to manifest in the populist modes of international conservatism and liberalism, using the interval to perform new fictions and re-stage the violence of dead revolutions, to break the boundaries erected around liberated forms, to liberate them into new-old metanarratives of resolution and to 'finally' acquire the freedom to separate and isolate that has been taken up by all contemporary political angles, that practically constitutes the political reality of the interval.

The Literary-Political Mode of the Interval

The political and economic manipulation of reality is in the process of consuming itself in the novels, but this self-consumption only ever *threatens* to spill over into revolt or disruption; in the end of the novels, ending is held back. The question therefore remains: does this process of self-consumption have a limit? We might even say that our collective internment in, and dependence upon, (narrative) fiction demands

a price to be paid: that we owe it a debt. In Tom McCarthy's novels, this debt is one that eludes the terminus of reciprocity, it is the endless stream of information for which there is no response, only a persistent and fascinating fear of its disappearance, of its bringing itself to term, to its *own* end. This is the fear born of absence (because it is a conceptual blank slate, what the moment after the end will look like), and as such it runs parallel with a distinct fascination, a cultic sidelong glance held on the art of disappearance. This meta-perspective, an inescapable one at that, blends fear with the anticipation of possibility, as when a horror film is watched for the gore, a reality talent show for the humiliation and failure, or a novel read to catch a glimpse of the absence of a subject. Despite the mediating effect of imagination, the confining conditions of space (its boundlessness) in the world presented by both novels and theory imply the undecidable choice between forever increasing our debt to fiction (and thereby thinking we can escape the failure to repay and its consequences by waiting for its anticipated, and hence definitely fictional, death) or acknowledging the impossibility of doing so. McCarthy seems to be focussed on the interval, the suspension of writing that is an essential component of the act of writing, and as such his novels re-iterate the critique of writing as never leading to anything but more writing.

This literary interval constitutes a suspension between things, not poles necessarily (though they are still conceivable), more accurately the void of an endlessly circulated continuum, *the betweenness of constant motion*; as far as you are close to every object, by virtue of a permanent entombment in the mediation of motion, connected to but never in contact with anyone or anything. Insofar as, in other words, the subject is never in real contact with a beginning or an end.

McCarthy's narrative blind-spot, his literary-linguistic subject, wants to witness, to be in the presence of the sign that *gets away with it*, the person who can seduce the violence of the present historical interval out of hiding with only words and images, metaphors and tropes (like the novel). His subject wants to witness an act of true disappearance. Our contemporary absolute obsession with language and communication confirms and guarantees this: that deliverance from this obsession will come precisely in the form of violence seduced from language. The late capitalist blind-spot (the subject) promises to be an agent of reversal, the virtue of ignorance that is put into play as a character denies its capacity to express anything but the positive, the negative having been enshrouded from the outset, like the fundamental catastrophe at the heart of writing, in the form of non-identity. All future negativity is, as alluded to via "nothingness" by McCarthy and Baudrillard, only space that is immediately or already

filled. There is always a remainder⁵⁸, the crime is never perfect; and yet, there is always another angle from which the remainder might be obscured, another crime to solve, another that will be *potentially* 'perfect'. The denial of resolution is a writerly conceit that McCarthy enacts by illustrating the circularity of formalisms that propose to resolve (and perhaps also by refusing to clarify the level of Baudrillard's influence on his writing in his interviews or his works of theory). And thus, the remainder is swept to the corner and the broom held in abeyance, waiting for the next ugly trace to appear; or, perhaps it is collected and bagged as evidence to be used to discredit the next criminal attempt at perfection.

The remainder in the novels is just one part of an ugly totality (that of language or sign), a totality without the common decency of having a recognizable or appreciable ideology or system of belief, only a preference for the incestuous aesthetics of a universally compliant mode of equivalence, accumulation and exchange. The remainder is what makes the Baudrillardian simulation of totality inescapable and potentially endless: if nothingness is always present as a trace, is it possible that this is its only form, and thus constitutes solely the engine of an endless encounter? Or, is a reversal possible, can the trace of nothing become that which leaves *something* behind in its wake? The remainder does not prefer the infinite to the total in the novels, but it does settle each down in *its* terrain of choice: the dirt. It speaks to the potential of both, as does the interval: the potential for violence and conflict to be introduced and become the 'event' that is both called for and denied by this bourgeois writerly ethic. Our interval, and that of McCarthy's novels, is the excess time produced by the accomplishment of the modernizing mission, which is to say, the interval is the time that it takes a totalizing system to consume its own corpse, to strip away all remaining trace of itself in a paradoxical and ironic attempt to extend its life.

The Contemporary Writer

If McCarthy thinks the writer's job is to write the world, then the world he writes hides a persistent modernist failure, that of disappearing into form and formalisms, and a hopeful but dangerous commitment to it. U., after all, and despite Madison's experience, seems only to want to cause a catastrophe or collapse of his highly articulate yet inaccessible notion of the Project, of the automated system. He seems concerned primarily with the fact that its influence was present but indiscernible: this is what motivated the apparent desire for generalized destruction. Like Prometheus, he decides what

⁵⁸ This is the remainder of all attempts at ideological positivity, at the systematization of positivity. Baudrillard calls this excess or remainder, Evil: "The principle of Evil is not a moral principle but rather a principle of instability and vertigo, a principle of complexity and foreignness, a principle of seduction, a principle of incompatibility, of antagonism and irreducibility. It is not a death principle – far from it. It is a vital principle of disjunction" (*Transparency* 122).

society needs is fire; this is, however, not fire to found a society, but fire meant to clear the dead-wood and make way for that which is beyond the society in question. This is a clearly political antagonism, but one that leaves behind both modern right and left. It is an inarticulate antagonism, unable to train its focus on a specific target (lacking as it is the singular political narratives of left and right), it simply takes every opportunity provided by the mechanisms of communication to articulate itself, including through a reinvestment of faith in modernity's grand narrative failures, communism and fascism.

This general antagonism is in the process of re-formalizing, of coagulating around reified theorized terms, asserting the fixed universal meaning of both actions and words paradoxically through texts and modes (novel, theory, narrative) which demand interpretation and creative extension. McCarthy's novels demonstrate the literature of failure, of being hopelessly caught between continuity and death, only to realize that in the contemporary context illustrated by the novels, they are basically the same thing. To note these modernist movements (both literary and political) coming into being is to note their time of death. These movements die because they feel compelled to commit to radical narratives that might be popularly appealing, but whose continual exposure and creative reiteration by the masses online denude it as nothing more than another political meme, sound byte or trope in the endless series of attempted manipulations. This is the second of the dual outcomes of modernist formalisms returning: a kind of catastrophic "death" of the Western system of democratic values, or the continued circulation of dead political ideas as consumer products, as I.D. tags. McCarthy's novels demonstrate that there is no better way to ignore the world than to write about it, and that through this creative ignorance the glimmer of hope and the spectre of death might shine through the production and consumption of writing by the world.

The Political Challenge of the Interval

I would suggest that if there is a general political lesson to be taken, or political identification to be made with the novels, it is not with a self or character, but with the paradoxical Western relation to death. This is not, necessarily, an exclusively or even primarily positive identification; what it identifies with is an ugly truth, buried in the generalized humanism of contemporary bourgeois (literary and social) ethics: the refusal to put (one's own) death into play (in writing and actually) guarantees the continuity of death in the present, the revolving reports, statistics and images lifted by the algorithmic tides of the buffering circle. I believe this is the character of what I would call digital interval humanism: the desire to bring significant change to society or the world, but never through violence (of the physical or linguistic variety). Like the realism McCarthy denounces, interval humanism promotes the ethics of productivity and

creativity: the production of fiction and narrative becomes ethical, in other words. Hence, it operates on Simeon Carrefax's principles of communication, and on the post-modern totality of language: the expression of reason, logic and humanist values are the modes through which society will progress or improve, inside the vehicles of politics, commerce and technology. Death in this context, and its ethical availability to the historical subject, is exported to the digital and linguistic manifestations of conflict, and even justified, on behalf of those actually putting their lives at stake, in opinion pieces, videos and posts. Death is sometimes valuable but never acceptable to this humanism: if that death is exterior, morally or ethically potent (in didactic terms), and able to be drawn into the digital tracks of the buffering circle. Even if, as Gibson notes, the outside can now easily be found (via the screen) in the inside of our contemporary moment and McCarthy's novels, what remains on the outside (of their self-image) for the bourgeois Western subject is their own death, their *own* end, and that of Western society (that which has been taken out of their hands, and returned to them in the gift of consumerism and conformity). In the novels, this can be understood as the post-melancholic mode of attending the arrival of an inconceivable event, through a symbolic poetic mode of repetition and monotony.

The humanist impossibility of putting their own deaths or ethics at stake means that morality and ethics, especially in their general or social mode, must always resort to the positivity of passive production: of products, advertising, money, models, novels, texts, speeches, apps, TED talks, etc., meant to seduce bourgeois passivity out of both the powerful and all those impoverished and exploited people lurking online and in real life. Hence the celebration of the production of possibility by writing in the essays by and criticism or analysis of McCarthy and by Serge in *C* as he clears the battlefield of itself, gives it artificial and momentary life like Spitalfield the cat or Madison through the codification of a technological violence and death.

Writing of a particular type is identified as the source of non-identity by McCarthy, and as such it represents a dual mode, a dual mode that exposes dualistic, ugly truths about the contemporary Western subject (bourgeois). Without death or ethics being at stake, the sole remaining avenue for positive participation in history (the expansion of the humanist ethics of non-violence), is through the production of information and capital, and writing of all kinds fits perfectly into this schema. McCarthy is interested in the material as a mode of communication and of failure; its presence in the novels is that of one gear among many, keeping the chains of repetition going, precisely by occasionally appearing to seize them up. The material as an inevitable obstacle to and transmuter of the ideal is made operational and circulatory in the novels. The material is the mode of change and progress in the novels, inasmuch as it

serves to seduce the narrative perspective into revealing itself and expressing itself over the course of many poetic iterations. Despite its clear connections to death, the material serves as much to interrupt death in the novels as it does to represent it. Death is ubiquitous and at the same time elusive in that it is precisely this (death as stake of action and inaction) that is denied the characters and the reader, even in moments when it would seem imminent or automatic (the chaotic skies of WWI, or the narrator's airplane in *Remainder*).

To maintain a general and unimpeachable humanist ethic one must maintain a general and unimpeachable taboo on violent means to humanist ends. To maintain that taboo is to maintain a relation to violence as unhistorical and incidental or accidental in the present, the passive violence of production and expression; the violence of the self-obsessed trickster figure. To maintain that taboo is to take Madison's advice, and as such undoubtedly reflects a valuable ethical position: I will not hurt or kill others to achieve my own ends, even if those ends are humanist ones. The obverse side of that ethical currency is the inescapable consequence of feeling compelled to analyse, account for and process (watch) as the violence you oppose is enacted day-in and day-out on- and off-line. McCarthy illustrates the mode of repetition and monotony that represents the execution of this bourgeois ethic of humanist disappearance, of reality production (as resistance to the hegemony of reality), in all its irresistibly detached intellection. McCarthy has given the literary world of middle-brow realism what they propose to want: a transparent illustration of the bourgeois, novel-reading subject in all its Baudrillardian, dualistic indifferent fascination with the art of disappearance, with the space of reality and death, and with the actual ends of a humanist outlook; humanism that shrouds the Western bourgeois subject from its historical responsibility and the violence that responsibility has in the past represented. Humanism, like the characters in the novels, defers its own ends by its very execution of itself: to be an interval humanist is to forever defer or keep at bay humanist ends, while at the same time persisting with the production and reproduction of signs, icons or celebrations of humanism. Humanism might be understood in this sense as the novel's secular mode of worship that both anticipates and perpetually defers the sacred "event" placed at the end of this ideological mode.

If we live in a capitalist society, we cannot continue to pretend that we in the West have outgrown the violence inherent in that mode of historical progression, or that the moral refusal of violence on behalf of the Western subject equates to an enlightened ethical of progression: it is instead an enlightened mode of stasis, an interval of status quo circulation, that offers the experience of a game with no personal stakes, because the goal of freedom from violence sought out through the game is at the same time the sole

condition in which the game (like the orgy) might be played. McCarthy shows how to refuse responsibility by taking responsibility in a specifically bourgeois ethical fashion: to express, produce, relay, transmit, etc.

The Western subject must put its death into play, not in opposition to an other, but in opposition to the hegemony of the Western "self", to a self reflected in the operation of a system which produces violence at the same rate that its subjects reject it. This relation has to risk itself, its death, to reach its potential. It does so through violence and writing, through death and consumption of the self. This is precisely what McCarthy illustrates and accomplishes in his novels: he challenges the readers to see their absence, their already-accomplished disappearance or metaphorical death, inside the circulatory, circular formalisms of the novels. McCarthy's novels are effectively absent politics in the contemporary mode, which is to say, the politics of Twitter, Facebook or digital media discourse generally. Instead of being ubiquitous, politics are mostly absent in the novels, though the trace of politics can be seen in *C*'s treatment of WWI, Madison's encounter with the police, or the narrator of *Remainder*'s conceiving of himself as a king. What we might consider a banal form of politics (opinion, comment, speech, etc.) is, like the realist subject, absent from the text but silently invested into the formalisms at play. In particular, we can locate the political inside the formalism of the trickster figure, inside dual imperatives that come together to form an almost apolitical form of politics in the guise of the challenge or the gamble.

The political potential of the gamble and the challenge are closely intertwined. A radical trust in oneself becomes the gamble, but only *a challenge* if it is a trust unto death. If the world is intent on writing you on your behalf, then resistance to this particular imperative lies in the strategy of writing, not *yourself*, but your own non-identity, or non-self. There are two modes of this challenge, one of appearance and one of disappearance. The former constitutes the paradox of secret or absence, a secreting away, or an attempt at nothing, that always fails and leaves the trace of something (this is what is accomplished by McCarthy, an attempt at reducing the subject to nothing leaves the trace of endless formalisms). The latter constitutes the revenge of the trickster or the cannibal: self-consumption as vengeful and vital disappearance, and disappearance behind the daily rituals of accumulation and transmission (circulation), behind the compliant generation of the digital linguistic self. The former transmutes the self into the potential accident that kicks off the catastrophe, and as such appears from certain vantage points as ethically ambiguous or indefensible. The latter on the other hand, connects positivity to everything it consumes, and is ravenous in its appetite for more. This strategy avoids the ethical problematics of the former by consuming ethical discourse under the universal auspices of the "good" or positive: they are shuffled into the buffering circle with all else, where it joins the ghost dance of denuded objects,

simulating the end of the cycle that is kept forever out of reach. Conformity constitutes a challenge, but one that would require an outrageous investment of energy in order to overcome its target: in order for conformity to be a challenge, the conformist must give the system back more conformity than it can handle, must consume more than it is given. Given the multifarious aspects of the system, its appeal to all corners of the value and ethics spectrum, conformity seems to be the more pleasing and comfortable option, an option that can still claim some sense of disruption and resistance, without having to take on the associated responsibility or hardship of those imperatives or positions. McCarthy's novels hide their relation to negativity, they secret the death of the subject behind the positivity of connection, of tropic movement, and intertextual reference. In a sense, they demonstrate the loose borders between these two strategies, where modernist particularity or individuality (the modern tendency to separate) and its endless expression becomes a postmodern expression of a general devouring: the indifference of inside/outside, self/other, past/present/future, makes judging these strategies (separating them) almost impossible prior to their resolution, in their passage or processing. As such, each constitutes a gamble and challenge: the potential to break the house and shut the casino down, or to lose just enough to eternally let it ride. This depends on the potential for a bet or challenge to be irredeemable, unable to be absorbed by the system's accounting, and this is the ideal goal of the challenge: to offer a gift that helps widen the gap between gaze and object, perhaps to the ideological breaking point.

The universalist political-economic system is now being challenged by powerful and performative faults along ethnic, economic, racial, political and religious lines, and it is beginning to show the strain of its endless labours. All of these separations are attempts to escape this oppressive and simulated totality, ironically by the ecstatically positive deployment of its very mechanisms and logic. There is a double strain being put on the system by the dual imperatives of the trickster figure identified in the novels: that of carrying out these escape attempts on the backs of its logic chains and mechanisms of production, and on the other hand the efforts necessary to keep these attempts in the mode of simulation: consumed by reality like the bank robbery. Simulation is being challenged by the reactionary belief in it reflected in the increasingly popular distrust of the very form of mainstream media, academia, intellectualism, status quo politics, globalization economics, and to a similar extent McCarthy's dislike of literary realism as a "false consciousness". Arguably these forms share the same conceit: the endless heights of the post-historical bourgeois vantage point. Simulation only ends after its ubiquity is acknowledged; when faith in the frameworks of reality in society collapse to Baudrillard-like levels, this is when Serge's battlefield destruction acquires its strange association with life as opposed to death: erasing or breaking these

frameworks is a massive gamble whose pay-off is yet to be determined ethically, historically or philosophically.

The relation between subjective absence and formal presence in the novels equates to the subjective absence and formal presence in politics of the digital self. Political concerns like the ontology of media, class relations, and the impact of literature are all reduced like the subject to a formal presence. The class relation exists, it is simply no longer necessary to the functioning of late capitalism: there is no class relation to responsibility or authority, only the drive to abandon it to the purview of simulation and the world that writes itself. The distinction between reality and fiction exists, it is simply no longer necessary to the functioning of reality: as Baudrillard demonstrates in *Simulations*, despite being fake, the robbery is consumed, regurgitated and consumed again by reality, in precisely the same way that international politics can feed the media what it likes, and the media must consume and regurgitate it for the masses below, because what it has been fed is *by definition* the political. The form (or formalism) confers the truth, the particular truth, of the content. There may be a difference between truth and fiction, but that distinction is irrelevant to the *functioning* of information media, politics and much of social life itself. There may well be a distinction between middle-brow English fiction and some kind of modernist avant-garde, but it is irrelevant to the functioning of the literature industry: readers only care about such things inasmuch as they are broadcast online in a continuous feed of juicy updates and retorts that simulate an importance of literature that serves as alibi to the truth of its commodification and total equivalence.

The undecidability of the ethical and political in McCarthy's novels demonstrates the impossible dualism of contemporary political discourse, which is to say the *incapacity* to resolve political concepts. The semantic indifference and political incompetence put on display online allows for the seduction of all political and critical commentary, both desiring and conspiring to continue the endless circulation of these incompetent arguments and untenable verbal positions. The circularity of the formalisms deployed by McCarthy into the space vacated by the subject in the novel or narrative form (destiny), are in play in the actual circulation of information, drawing out performances of the dualist imperatives of the novels in the game of contemporary digital discourse and politics. Neither side is capable of closing down the incompetence or semantic indifference of the other through critique or debate, because the digital world responds to neither of these forms (no critique or debate could constitute a singularity, and if it did, could not escape the ridicule identified by Gibson and Baudrillard). Like the formalisms of the novel, the forms

of critique and debate are caught in an endless loop, never resolving *enough* to end the debate or the conversation, or the cyclical relation of narrative and critique.

Though it seems we are in a stage of traumatic political autopilot, the kind that precedes the death of the narrator in *Remainder*, we may also be in the process of turning away from our destination like Benjamin's angelic historical perspective, back towards the mythic structures that enact the beginning and ending of societies. Back to the mythic structures that distract from the power of capital by investing that power in the gods, or blood, or science. McCarthy's novels, through largely rejecting the active historical element of politics, are able to illustrate the state of contemporary politics in the indifferent, passive idealism that might allow the violence of the trickster to return to its heroic foundational form. The novels, in the end, attempt to promise the reader nothing, only the potential of nothingness and the comforting guarantee that this potential will be fulfilled, ethically or unethically, with or without them, one way or the other.

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Résumé : The Aesthetics and Ethics of the Absent Subject in the Novels of Tom McCarthy

Ben Staunton

Directeur du thèse: Jean-Michel Ganteau

Le moment contemporain se définit par son étendue et la profondeur étonnants de son interconnexion sociale à travers un réseau de communication numérique et le capitalisme mondial. Au sein de ces réseaux, c'est la signification des objets, des symboles, des représentations, ainsi que les mots qui dominent. Franco Berardi et les partisans d'opéraïsme, s'inspirant de Marx et des critiques de la postmodernité comme Jean Baudrillard et Frederic Jameson, focalisent sur l'immatérialité croissante de ce processus systématique de la reproduction.

Cette description utilise la notion de simulation proposée par Jean Baudrillard afin d'articuler le mouvement de toutes les formes de représentation (l'image, la langue, l'art, l'argent) vers ce que s'appelle Baudrillard le « degré zéro du sens » : le sens le plus populaire, ce point d'attrait publicitaire universel où l'objet acquiert la capacité de reproduire et distribuer sans entraves le mot ou l'image numérique, son signe. La « réalité de la civilisation sociale » devient accessible presque exclusivement par la production et la diffusion exhaustives d'informations sur la réalité par le biais de l'image, du langage, de l'art, et de l'argent. Notre foi contemporaine dans la réalité, qui dans le cadre de ce projet définit l'éthique du sujet contemporain, est fondée sur la facilité et la continuité de sa reproduction et de sa diffusion à travers nos réseaux d'information.

Dans ce contexte, le problème de la réalité est précisément qu'elle prend sans cesse l'apparence de ce qui la décrit, rendant l'acceptation du concept global de réalité indifférente à la diversité et à la particularité des formes qui la véhiculent ; non seulement indifférente à ses taches aveugles, mais dépendante de celles-ci. L'évidence de la réalité devient son propre échec : une réalité si facilement manipulée sous tant d'angles formels donne à la fois du pouvoir à l'individu et brise toute confiance dans sa capacité à distinguer entre le réel et le fictif. Cette

compréhension opératoire et postmoderne de la réalité contemporaine déplore la facilité avec laquelle l'abstraction capitaliste tardive surmonte l'incohérence fondamentale de la réalité matérielle (l'absence, le néant, la mort). Et pourtant, c'est précisément cette incohérence qui précède la détermination du réel par les voies de l'image, du langage, de l'art, de l'argent et de l'information. La réalité contemporaine est une position défensive dont les remparts sont des représentations fictives disposées spécifiquement contre la logique déconstruite de la représentation contemporaine, contre la capacité de ces mêmes représentations à laisser une trace irrévocable de leurs origines dans la fiction. En d'autres termes, la réalité est défendue et produite par ce qu'elle cherche à éliminer : la fiction.

L'art et la littérature dans ce contexte sont confrontés à un système de représentation qui dépasse en quelque sorte les plaisirs et la créativité de l'art et la certitude de l'objectivité en même temps. Cette constellation contemporaine d'expressions formelles de la réalité constitue une position défensive universellement accessible qui rappelle au processus de la lecture décrit par Marcel Proust dans *A la recherche du temps perdu* (de Man, *Allegories of Reading* 59-60), un processus d'isolement agréable dont le plaisir provient spécifiquement de la double expérience de la position sûre et du libre accès à tout au-delà de l'horizon de cet endroit. La condition contemporaine est définie par cette double posture occupée par le sujet face à la réalité et à la fiction : la sécurité ontologique de la réalité acquise à travers une variété de fictions. C'est la logique circulaire de la déconstruction telle qu'elle est comprise ici : la poursuite de la réalité exige la production de fiction, qui à son tour exige la poursuite de la réalité, à l'infini.

Tom McCarthy est un auteur, artiste et universitaire anglais qui s'est décrit dans un tribune libre publié dans *The Guardian* post-Brexit comme étant « complètement européen ». Il fait cette affirmation après avoir défini avec confiance la position politique de l'artiste dans le contexte du monde post-Brexit, capitaliste tardif : « L'art ne se passe pas en vase clos [...] Dans notre société, l'artiste n'a peut-être aucun pouvoir exécutif, mais son atout réside dans le

fait qu'il dispose d'un moyen - peut-être le premier - de mettre de la valeur dans le monde : un moyen de donner du sens. Ils peuvent utiliser ce statut pour renverser, ou renforcer, le pouvoir - parfois les deux en même temps - et ils peuvent le faire bien, mal ou indifféremment ; mais une chose qu'ils ne peuvent jamais faire est d'être politiquement neutre » (*"Don't call me a British artist"*). Deux leçons importantes sur la société contemporaine et la littérature peuvent être tirées de cette déclaration. Tout d'abord, l'art est décrit comme le déploiement d'un moyen « primaire » de production de valeur (un moyen de production qui transcende les particularités de la forme), une forme rituelle de répétition, une répétition qui crée de la valeur tant sur le plan économique que sémantique. Cette valeur (signification) porte en elle la capacité d'altérer les relations subjectives au pouvoir (et donc au pouvoir lui-même).

La deuxième leçon est évoquée par le ton de la sémantique inéluctable ; l'art est nécessairement conditionné par le monde dans lequel il est produit. L'art et les artistes dans la société contemporaine peuvent essayer d'être politiques, mais il y a quelque chose dans ce moyen primitif de valeur et de la création du sens qui échappe aux intentions de l'artiste. L'art d'aujourd'hui est, selon ses propres termes, toujours déjà politique. Il est toujours politique parce qu'elle ne peut que faire semblant d'être hors du champ de l'hégémonie mondiale contemporaine. Qu'est-ce que cela signifie de ne pas avoir de référence à l'extérieur ? Frédéric Jameson et Jean Baudrillard ont tous les deux identifié la postmodernité ou le capitalisme tardif comme un contexte sans capacité de contextualisation, un contexte dans lequel la critique prend nécessairement une forme morale ou éthique car il n'existe aucune alternative pour critiquer le monde ni concrètement ni historiquement. La condition de la société contemporaine qui nécessite la relation essentielle de l'art avec le politique est la même qui exemplifie le rapport de l'information avec le politique : la communication de masse. L'art est toujours déjà politique parce qu'il est produit par un sujet enfermé dans un réseau d'informations sur le monde ; l'art est toujours déjà politique parce qu'il est toujours déjà une forme d'information significative.

La difficulté est qu'il existe un désir humain que cette condition semble destinée à rassasier : celui du lien social. En d'autres termes, il y a un désir d'être comme un nœud au sein d'un système de relais d'information en temps réel partagé, ou en termes anthropologiques d'être un repère dans une production rituelle infinie de sens. Pour McCarthy, l'artiste est déjà un tel nœud, recevant et retransmettant obligatoirement les signaux auxquels ils sont confrontés dans son lieu et son temps matériellement inévitables. McCarthy laisse entendre que l'art est quelque chose qui ne peut échapper à la valeur ou au sens. Je dirais que l'information est une idée qui exprime cette même inévitabilité, tout en mettant davantage l'accent sur la valeur que sur le sens. Ils dépendent de l'acte imprévisible de la lecture, qui lui-même dépend de la non-décidabilité de la langue. Bien qu'il soit possible (théoriquement) de contrôler ces lectures par une manipulation stricte de la forme ou du contenu, il reste toujours un élément de lecture imprévisible dans tout texte. Il s'agit d'une déclaration importante et résonnante de la part d'un auteur dont l'œuvre a presque exclusivement ignoré les illustrations à la fois positives et critiques de la politique.

Notre contexte culturel contemporain est un contexte de mondialisation de l'économie, de la politique, de la communication et de la représentation. C'est un moment qui est sur le point de laisser derrière lui des choses comme le colonialisme, le fascisme et le communisme à travers une éthique de transparence appliquée à leurs transgressions historiques, par leur critique sans fin et leur déformation de l'information, et qui semble pourtant toujours en train de faire revivre ces idées par la représentation de l'itération continue de leur performance sociale. C'est le paradoxe de la transparence : l'information produite à leur sujet place ces traditions catégoriquement dans le passé, tout en trouvant leur éthique fondamentale représentée dans l'image, le texte, l'action et la représentation. Le fascisme, par exemple, est en général un concept historique ; il occupe une place apparemment fixe dans notre histoire en ce qu'il a eu un début et une fin. Et pourtant, à travers l'interminable production de discours et d'informations,

il se trouve ravivé et renouvelé, là où la formulation indispensable est perpétuée. Le fait que le fascisme soit « enfermé » dans notre conscience historique (par la télévision, le cinéma, le roman, la photographie, etc.), tel qu'il a commencé et pris fin, est paradoxalement ce qui lui permet d'être identifié partout ; cela, et la capacité du langage à confronter, étiqueter et adresser plus du monde que jamais auparavant par l'Internet.

Notre contexte

Notre contexte contemporain peut être décrit en termes du problème de la réalité et de son rapport à la fiction. Le capitalisme, le mode de production incontestablement dominant, consiste en un réseau total d'échanges ; tout et n'importe quoi a une valeur, et est échangeable comme tel. Rien n'échappe à cette possibilité d'échange. Ce réseau total d'échanges fonctionne sur la base d'une circulation continue de la représentation et du symbole : ce sont ces créateurs de sens qui constituent à la fois le moteur fondamental du capitalisme contemporain et l'horizon de sa fonction. Elle ne peut que continuer à circuler ; par conséquent, ce n'est pas seulement le réseau d'échange qui est inéluctable, mais aussi les conditions sémantiques et performatives de cet échange. Cette surface agitée de la société contemporaine repose, paradoxalement, sur un dualisme irrésoluble de fiction et de réalité. En d'autres termes, le sujet est contraint de confronter la sémantique du symbole et de la performance à travers le réseau même du sens qu'ils établissent comme réel. La poursuite du sens par la transmission et l'échange interminable peut donc être comprise comme une poursuite idéologique : l'ethos de la production de la réalité. Deux perspectives peuvent être remises en question dans ce contexte : la perspective de soi et la perspective du monde. La première peut être considérée comme le télos d'une poursuite éthique dans la société mondiale ; par l'immersion dans les réseaux d'échange d'informations, on peut raisonnablement s'attendre à apprendre la réalité de qui nous sommes (comme un individu, comme soi). On peut dire la même chose du monde : par une immersion engagée dans

le monde de l'information, le monde acquiert le potentiel de devenir identique à lui-même. Tels sont les objectifs parlés et tacites de l'ethos de la production de la réalité, un ethos que je considère central à notre totalité idéologique (l'hégémonie virtuelle de la mondialisation). Grâce à l'expansion apparemment illimitée des technologies de la communication, c'est le moment où tout ce que le monde moderne cherche est plus proche qu'il ne l'a jamais été, et en tant que tel, il révèle plus que jamais ses angles morts éthiques, ses points faibles moraux et ses points faibles logiques.

Aujourd'hui, nous avons tendance à ne pas considérer la théorie, la littérature ou la philosophie comme les modérateurs contemporains de ce que nous comprenons comme une réalité culturellement contextuelle. En termes simples, ce sont toutes des formes de lecture de la réalité qui ont connu leur apogée dans un passé récent ou pas si récent. Aujourd'hui, la forme dominante de réalité socialement acceptée est « l'information » : faits, données, code binaire, statistiques, mesures, observations.

Bernard Harcourt décrit une société anti-orwellienne, non pas axée sur l'effacement du plaisir mais sur son esthétisation technologique par la positivité irrésistible de l'accès formalisé et normalisé à celui-ci par la technologie numérique du « j'aime », du « partager », du « suivre », etc. Cette esthétique formalisée de la positivité devient un mode basé sur l'expérience de l'idéal vers lequel elle est censée conduire. La lecture de romans est bien sûr englobée dans cette notion de la réduction totale du social aux données ; le lecteur de roman et le roman se dissolvent dans la soupe des modèles numériques qui saisissent la résolution utopique de tous les problèmes par les données. Il y a donc une trace de différence dans la forme du roman, une trace de ce qui rend leur réduction à l'information essentielle et en même temps impossible. Ce qui est peut-être ainsi introduit clandestinement dans la domination de l'information, c'est l'idée qu'il y a (ou qu'il y avait) une différence formelle entre « information » et « roman ». À mon avis, nous devons dépasser l'idée que l'information est là pour être *absorbée* plutôt que pour être *lue*.

L'absorption implique un processus digestif (séparation *automatisée* des bons et des mauvais éléments ; le premier absorbé et le second expulsé par un pouvoir inconsciente), non pas un échange mais la réception d'un don ; un acte qui implique toujours deux positions de pouvoir distinctes. L'information nous est donnée apparemment par la grâce du monde lui-même (elle apparaît comme par magie sur tous les écrans), information que nous nous en servons ensuite pour contrôler et matérialiser le monde qu'elle représente. Le contexte contemporain embrouille ce paradoxe d'une réalité autonome et les sujets dont le sens et la performance l'altèrent. La nature imprévisible de la paternité elle-même constitue un obstacle à l'accumulation et à l'absorption harmonieuses de l'information. Pour les besoins du projet, cela constitue un exemple de ce que Jean Baudrillard appelle *l'art de la disparition*. En bref, l'art de la disparition est la forme d'art dominante (poétique) de la société capitaliste contemporaine ; c'est un art de produire la réalité en enlevant ou en éloignant le sujet d'elle (consommant le bon et expulsant discrètement le mauvais). Baudrillard décrit l'art de la disparition comme la poursuite de notre propre disparition dans les objets techniques et par la performance idéologique (*Why Hasn't Everything Already Disappeared?* 10). C'est, en effet, l'art de disparaître derrière les signes de nous-mêmes, signes dont la forme est désormais dictée par l'information. Absorber l'information est une façon de créer une distance entre notre subjectivité et notre réalité : l'information semble autonome et automatique, comme si elle poussait comme une herbe objective des pages et de l'écran de notre perception subjective. L'art de la disparition constitue l'esquive collective de notre relation rhétorique ou poétique aux choses, un détour permanent autour de l'instabilité de la relation linguistique entre soi et l'objet. Notre contexte culturel est dominé par l'attente et le désir d'information, de réalité objective et d'une certaine stabilité ontologique. Ce dont nous n'avons peut-être pas encore pleinement conscience, c'est que ces objectifs ne sont possibles qu'en notre absence, et donc la dynamique et l'énergie générales de l'Occident sont investies dans la simulation de notre propre disparition, ce qui est une autre

façon de dire que l'énergie et la structure du système hégémonique sont investies dans notre mort, dans notre disparition bénéfique dans des technologies de surveillance, de projection, d'expression et de stockage.

La littérature contemporaine dans la société capitaliste tardive

Notre contexte culturel contemporain nous est distribué à travers un réseau global de lignes, d'ondes, de mouvements et de transmissions visibles et invisibles ; c'est une communication implacable et inévitable. Hanna Meretoja décrit notre contexte culturel comme « l'âge de la narration », une conséquence de ce qu'elle appelle le « virage narratif ». En cette ère de narration, la forme romanesque ne peut plus être considérée comme le parangon de la narration. Le cinéma, la photographie, la radio, la télévision et maintenant l'Internet ont tous joué un rôle dans l'usurpation du pouvoir narratif. Lorsque Ménétoja affirme que « la littérature joue un rôle central dans le renouvellement et la transformation de ces modèles narratifs, ce basculement implique de considérer les récits littéraires comme essentiels au processus par lequel nous interprétons nous-mêmes et notre situation dans le monde », je soutiendrais que la littérature ne double la valeur sociale et subjective du narratif que quand cette valeur sera dégagée du caractère original par les technologies de production en série et de communications en masse, quand leurs limites formelles seront totalement critiques de ces derniers. Par conséquent, le retour du sujet qui accompagne le retour du récit n'est pas un retour en tant que tel, mais, comme l'affirme Ménétoja, une nouvelle réflexion ou une nouvelle vision de la subjectivité qui a commencé sous l'impulsion antinarrative d'après-guerre du Nouveau Romain. Dennis Duncan et Arne de Boever ont tous les deux souligné le lien de McCarthy avec Robbe-Grillet et le Nouveau Romain, mais il analyse Robbe-Grillet en fonction de la relation décrite ci-dessus par Meretoja : la littérature comme mode dans la relation avec le monde. Cependant, plutôt que de considérer le Nouveau Romain dans son sens négatif ou destructeur, McCarthy le décrit à

travers les romans de Robbe-Grillet comme « ultra-réaliste, transpercé à tous les niveaux par l'essence pure des environnements auxquels ils sont si fidèlement habitués. Ce qui se passe en eux, encore et encore, c'est l'espace et la matière qui s'inscrivent dans la conscience, dont la tâche, réciproquement, est d'accueillir l'espace et la matière ». Par conséquent, alors que Ménétoja comprend le Nouveau Romain comme une perturbation négative, McCarthy voit cette perturbation comme une sorte d'extension laide, une transgression du réalisme comme vanité littéraire formelle en vertu de sa poursuite sans entraves (non limitée par le formalisme du réalisme auquel le Nouveau Romain était censé s'opposer).

Le contexte culturel décrit ci-dessus est assailli par l'idée de réalité, et cette obsession de la réalité ne laisse rien (et seulement rien) derrière elle ; elle plonge la valeur de la littérature dans un flot interminable de récits contenus et exprimés par diverses formes ou formalistes qui seront étudiés plus en profondeur dans le texte qui va suivre. Dans les limites de l'hégémonie occidentale, le littéraire devient quelque chose comme une branche du projet-réalité raté (ou qui échouera sans répit) ; comparé au champ d'influence de la méthode scientifique, à la séduction ontologique de l'image numérique, à la facilité pratiquement incalculable de reproduire et consommer le texte par le numérique, on ne comprend la place du roman dans la production des réalités que par des termes strictement dualistes. Comprendre le roman en termes dualistes, c'est le comprendre comme une forme d'information échouée et donc potentiellement dangereuse, formellement inférieure à l'écran mais en même temps essentielle pour lui dans la mesure où elle donne de la valeur à l'écran en raison de ses limites formelles. Dans un sens, il y a un retour du concept du roman comme étant une sorte de forme féminine bourgeoise ; une évasion commerciale insensée pour ceux qui en ont le temps. Dans un autre sens, le roman continue d'être considéré comme une forme indissociable de l'évolution idéologique et de l'existence du sujet moderne. Cependant, à l'heure actuelle, cette idée est compliquée par la notion de mort ou d'épuisement de cette relation formaliste, et les romans du

XXIe siècle (comme ceux de Tom McCarthy) cherchent d'une certaine manière à confronter et à exposer l'idéalisme, ou l'idéologie, derrière cette relation présumée. Nous pourrions penser la littérature du XXIe siècle principalement en termes d'écriture et ne pas nécessairement accorder à la littérature le privilège d'une forme particulière ou du formalisme (le récit) que beaucoup associent au roman moderne. Comme McCarthy le reconnaît, le littéraire est mis à l'épreuve non pas par les particularités de son propre développement, mais par le développement coordonné du capital et de la technologie des communications.

Si nous limitons la notion de « contemporain » à la période commençant dans les années 1980 et se terminant maintenant, je dirais que le contexte littéraire contemporain est caractérisé par deux préoccupations majeures : 1) identité, soi et subjectivité, et 2) épuisement et mort (échec). Je vais d'abord expliquer brièvement comment ces préoccupations sont formulées dans le discours, puis je vais relier ces idées à certaines approches de la langue et de la littérature. Ce que j'entends démontrer ici, c'est que ces préoccupations sont en fait, dans un sens, des préoccupations humaines universelles et ahistoriques; c'est-à-dire, en théorie, immanentes non seulement à la forme d'un roman, mais à la forme du sujet moderne et son rapport avec le monde. L'accent littéraire contemporain et social mis sur ces concepts témoigne d'un mode de préoccupation ou de confrontation idéologiquement positif. Les préoccupations littéraires dans la postmodernité reflètent nécessairement les préoccupations sociales, culturelles et intellectuelles de l'individu né dans une incrédulité aux metanarratifs culturels et politiques ; le sujet est en face de sa capacité à raconter la réalité. On peut dire que la littérature, dans ce sens, a de nouveau atteint un stade d'auto-reconnaissance obscène et inconfortable ; elle peut voir en elle-même ces récits dévoilés et sans forme des mythes oraux et des peintures rupestres qui sont à l'origine de la tradition humaine d'écriture de toutes sortes, et qui engendrent aujourd'hui les analyses les plus abstraites et en même temps les plus scientifiques. Lorsque la réalité était encore comprise comme une illusion idéologiquement dépendante, toute réflexion sur soi

revenait à se regarder dans un miroir de carnaval ; on était par définition une image déformée (déformée par des disputes sur la vérité et la représentation). Le sujet contemporain ou postmoderne trouve son reflet soudainement et peut-être tragiquement redressé ou aligné par l'information ; même le personnage littéraire se retrouve dans la prison de la « chose en soi-même ».

Soi réel et Soi littéraire

La représentation de l'expérience humaine sous toutes ses formes porte toujours la menace implicite qu'elle va surmonter ou séduire la capacité de création ou d'action (libre, individuelle, autonome) avec l'intérêt de la prévisibilité et de la reproductibilité. En termes contemporains, issus des années 1980 et réverbérant jusqu'au présent, le concept d'identité dans la littérature anglaise semble avoir remplacé l'idée de subjectivité en fusionnant avec la notion de soi immuable (le soi en soi ?). En d'autres termes, le potentiel politique et historique du sujet a été incorporé dans la notion de plus en plus représentable et donc sûre d'identité et d'individualité ; le sujet et son potentiel ont été absorbés par les catégories identitaires, en tant que l'identité est issue des conditions et des réalisations historiques spécifiques. L'identité devient comme une chambre d'isolement à partir de laquelle tous les bénéfices de la subjectivité peuvent être vus et réalisés, comme si les cellules du panoptisme de Foucault étaient désormais équipées de webcams et d'écrans pour que ce ne soit plus la surveillance de la tour centrale vide qui garde les prisonniers cadrés, mais leur désir mutuellement concurrentiel de rester les plus auto-identiques.

La littérature anglaise contemporaine affronte ces questions en grande partie à travers les idées d'identité telles qu'elles ont été façonnées par l'impact politique et culturel de l'effondrement spectaculaire de l'Empire britannique après la Deuxième Guerre mondiale et la transition qui a mené à la création du néolibéralisme, avec la parution de Margaret Thatcher en

Angleterre et la destruction des Tours Jumelles le 11 septembre 2001, parmi d'autres éléments. Les idées de la minorité, de la majorité, de la classe et du cosmopolitisme, de la décomposition et de la construction de l'identité à cette époque se sont étendues au-delà des années 1990 et 2000 par des formes identitaires plus développées, variées et en même temps idéologiquement positives. Ces idées sont au cœur de ce que j'appellerais le courant dominant de la fiction britannique : elles ont tendance à occuper des styles qui ne sont ni réalistes d'un sens classique ni naturalistes, mais qui prolongent néanmoins la tradition générique et idéologique d'une écriture mimétique (car la confiance en cette capacité mimétique était en voie de se développer par la technologie). Une façon de le dire serait de dire que la recherche de l'identité se heurte à ce qui menace son existence même en tant que désir de coordination sociale : le reflet technologique de cette certitude. Par conséquent, le souci de soi conduit inévitablement au souci de la mort, de l'épuisement ou de la vulnérabilité. Le soi (dans les rapports littéraires et sociaux contemporains) peut-il être considéré comme une forme épuisée ou morte ? Et qu'est-ce que cela signifie d'essayer de penser le sujet littéraire moderne et social en termes d'une chose qui peut mourir ou s'épuiser ?

Dans la littérature britannique de l'après-guerre, l'identité apparaît confrontée à un échec ou à un effondrement : celui de l'Empire britannique. Les sujets impériaux, ostensiblement blancs, ont perdu de vue ce qui était à la base de leur identité supposée : les marques qui les différenciaient de l'autre inférieur. Ainsi, une grande partie de la littérature anglaise de l'après-Seconde Guerre mondiale s'est penchée sur ce bouleversement historique de l'identité dominante. Thatcher, le Thatcherisme et les romans associés à cette période (1979-1990) ont eu tendance à inverser cette tendance à illustrer et à considérer la dissolution de l'identité dominante. Phillip Tew, par exemple, soutient que le roman de cette époque avait tendance à tourner autour de la nature problématique de l'identité et de la vie urbaine dans l'Angleterre Thatcherite, et marquait un effort concerté pour la résurgence du sujet anglais de classe

moyenne, autrefois impérial et maintenant néolibéral Thatcherite. L'identité impériale était doublée sous la forme d'une nouvelle itération séparée de ses racines historiques (matérielles), de plus en plus associée à l'immatérialité des mécanismes du capitalisme financier. La forme contemporaine du roman, pour Tew, commence dans ce contexte d'après-guerre et passe des tentatives des sujets anglais de la classe moyenne de reconsidérer, de conserver ou de maintenir ensemble une partie de leur identité (alors qu'une ancre majeure de cette identité s'effrite autour d'eux) à une tentative résurgente de donner la priorité à une identité de classe moyenne fondée sur des discours culturels néolibéraux et une politique politico-économique. En parallèle, on assistait en France à la montée de l'écriture et de la théorie antinarrative d'après-guerre, comme celle de Robbe-Grillet, Georges Bataille et Michel Foucault. Ce mouvement antinarratif, plutôt que de simplement réinterpréter l'identité et la subjectivité dans une perspective d'après-guerre, a servi à problématiser le rapport entre les formes narratives et la forme du sujet. Bien qu'en Angleterre cette période ne soit pas associée à un mouvement littéraire aussi marquant, les deux traditions reflétaient une perte générale de foi dans les récits et les identités établies.

En d'autres termes, l'identité en Grande-Bretagne est en fluctuation, mais elle est aussi permanente. C'est une marque de double connaissance ; comme la conscience de soi de la narration, cette conscience de soi de l'identité nécessite une fluctuation, et la fluctuation donne une vie artificielle (en tant qu'un mouvement particulièrement linguistique et esthétique) à celui que le dernier système capitaliste a rendu nul dans une dualité réalité et fiction (ou réalité par fiction). Ce qui est dit, c'est que la fiction contemporaine illustre souvent ce qui est essentiellement une crise d'identité à l'échelle culturelle. En d'autres termes, il s'agit d'une crise d'identité par laquelle le concept d'identité lui-même est sécurisé et ontologiquement renforcé, tandis que le contenu de cette identité est moralement et éthiquement étiqueté et critiqué dans une circulation continue de données mêlées aux avis. Ce que le travail de McCarthy fait de manière implicite, c'est de chercher et de trouver la solution toute faite à cette crise prétendue,

apparemment fondée sur la vérité : que cette crise est au mieux abstrait, car elle omet ce qui tend à contredire ou à rejeter son authenticité. Ce qui est exclu de l'analyse littéraire de l'identité et de la subjectivité, c'est ce que McCarthy laisse dans : la réponse (automatisée) facile fournie par la culture même qui est censée être dans un état de flux-identité. C'est dans ce sens que je veux problématiser cette notion d'identité. Tew indique clairement qu'il veut aller au-delà du poststructuralisme et du textualisme de la postmodernité et, ce faisant, faciliter un retour à un « sens appréhensible » dans la forme roman. Le même sentiment est attribué à la fiction du bouleversement narratif de Ménétoja, dans la mesure où un retour à la narration est un retour à un sentiment d'achèvement. Présenter l'identité comme un problème à résoudre en termes littéraires, c'est ignorer le fait que ce problème a des solutions non littéraires instantanément accessibles, tout fait, qui peuvent être désirées, acceptées et utilisées.

La recherche d'identité et d'individualité ne peut pas être un vrai problème dans la société contemporaine (c'est pour cette raison que nous nous sommes concentrés sur votre individualité ou identité *sans conséquence négative*, sans excès ou reste qui pourrait perturber sa réalité), car l'identité est partout, elle est intégrée au système social marchand même. Ce n'est donc pas l'incertitude ou le manque d'identité qui est aujourd'hui en question dans la culture et la littérature, mais plutôt la facilité avec laquelle l'identité est simulée, présumée et réalisée, c'est-à-dire l'identité *excessive* qui en est le fruit. Le problème, en d'autres termes, c'est l'effort nécessaire pour maintenir un soi en accord avec sa propre image ou reflet : il y a toujours quelque chose de plus à faire pour correspondre à l'image que vous produisez, toujours un autre mouvement à mimer. L'excès produit toujours un problème pour l'exemple qu'il transcende : en allant au-delà de l'horizon de contrôle de cette masse, l'excès met en doute la réalité objective de cette masse. La résurgence de la religiosité, du nationalisme, de la politique de l'identité ethnique, ainsi que l'émergence de ce que l'on pourrait appeler des identités de genre « alternatives » qui ont principalement émergé en Europe occidentale et en Amérique du Nord

(cisgenre, trans, etc.) constituent pas seulement un glissement du discours littéraire largement colonial et postcolonial qui entoure l'identité, mais un mouvement vers un sens généralisé des masses qui acquièrent à nouveau ce pouvoir qui a survécu aux nombreuses morts du roman à travers les formes techniques du récit et du symbolique.

La poétique théorique et la fiction de la réalité

Afin de développer un paradigme d'investigation qui pourrait aborder à la fois la compréhension des formes dominantes de la littérature contemporaine et un concept de la façon dont ces formes sont traitées dans les romans de Tom McCarthy (et ce que ce traitement pourrait signifier en termes littéraires et sociaux), j'ai essayé d'organiser une constellation de théoriciens dont le travail (incluant le travail théorique de McCarthy) semble graviter autour d'un dualisme de fiction et réalité fondamentalement irrésoluble. Bien qu'il reste sans aucun doute de la place dans cet arrangement pour des voix supplémentaires, j'ai choisi de me concentrer sur l'œuvre de Paul de Man, Walter Benjamin, Jean Baudrillard, Georges Bataille et Tom McCarthy lui-même. Je vais tenter une synthèse de ces théories sous certaines catégories ou termes qui relient la littérature comme forme ou objet à une problématique fondamentale que j'appelle anthropologique. En d'autres termes, ces théories parlent à la fois du potentiel et de la difficulté de la littérature à une époque technologique avancée, ainsi que de la nécessité anthropologique très fondamentale de la fiction en tant que chiffrement de la réalité. Baudrillard et Bataille, en particulier, représentent un style d'investigation théorique idiosyncrasique qui porte simultanément sur la littérature et la condition humaine universelle. En outre, tous ces théoriciens, y compris McCarthy, déploient ou entreprennent ce que j'appellerais une logique de la déconstruction, ou une logique d'antagonisme interorganisationnel, qui les relie et relie leur travail comme critique à la réalité de la totalisation ou de la la totalisation du réel. S'il peut sembler nécessaire de s'engager dans l'œuvre fondatrice de Jacques Derrida, je suggérerais la

distinction suivante, qui justifie son exclusion. Alors que Derrida nous montre la *pratique* de la déconstruction textuelle, ces autres écrivains, chacun à sa manière et à travers des objets particuliers, démontrent que cette pratique est un processus presque automatique au cœur de tout objet, système ou collection de formalismes apparemment autonomes comme la réalité. Ce que je veux dire par là, c'est que le travail de Derrida met surtout l'accent, à mon avis, sur une méthode de lecture qui s'adresse principalement au lecteur critique et universitaire. D'autre part, les autres théoriciens font ici allusion, chacun d'une manière différente, à une sorte de déconstruction inconsciente, quelque chose de nébuleux et suffisamment littéraire pour être presque entièrement figuratif, mais plus appréciable dans son application en dehors du texte littéraire. Tout d'abord, j'aborderai brièvement certains points clés soulevés par McCarthy dans son travail théorique, des points qui indiquent une proximité intellectuelle avec les théoriciens mentionnés ci-dessus ainsi que de la force de la gravitation d'une problématique humaine fondamentale moderne (la relation entre fiction et réalité). Tom McCarthy a produit plusieurs ouvrages théoriques, seul ou en collaboration avec son collègue Simon Critchley, cofondateur et philosophe de l'International Necronautical Society. J'aimerais expliquer ici comment McCarthy comprend la position de l'écrivain dans la société contemporaine, ce qu'il considère comme l'aspect déterminant de la forme littéraire, et comment ces deux idées convergent dans la figure de la perspective anthropologique de la société contemporaine.

Son œuvre théorique la plus connue, *Tintin et le secret de la littérature*, commence peut-être par une explication de ce que McCarthy appelle « la séparation des niveaux de réalité », commune à la fois à la bande dessinée de Tintin et aux origines du roman. En raison d'un nouveau désir de représenter les perspicacités sociales et politiques, la bande dessinée, affirme McCarthy, « avait besoin d'entreprendre une série de rebondissements qui lui permettraient d'invoquer les notions de rigueur documentaire tout en ne pas cherchant à masquer le fait que tout cela était fictif ». La tournure que McCarthy décrit est la suggestion problématique que

Tintin était en fait en train de prendre les photos dont il était lui-même l'objet principal ; il était présumé être à la fois devant et derrière la caméra, une affirmation manifestement fausse étant donné la nature de l'action qu'il entreprend dans les vignettes. Il poursuit en suggérant que ce tour n'était pas original au format du dessin animé, mais qu'en fait, on pouvait le trouver des siècles auparavant dans certains des plus anciens exemples de la forme du roman, jusqu'à Cervantes. À travers une brève citation de plusieurs exemples de romans de début de l'ère moderne, McCarthy montre à quel point le roman a jugé nécessaire, à la manière de Hergé Tintin, de déployer « des dispositifs fictifs pour donner au roman lui-même le visage de l'authentique ». On peut en déduire que McCarthy reconnaît ce doublement nécessaire mais paradoxal (la fiction en tant qu'authentique, l'authenticité en tant que fiction) comme fondamental pour la forme moderne du roman. Elle représente la problématique fondamentale de la relation humaine à la réalité, ce que je considérerai à travers le travail de Baudrillard comme une problématique émergente et dominante de la société capitaliste contemporaine. En termes simples, cela démontre la relation dynamique et dualiste que la forme du roman et l'image comique révèlent entre la fiction et la réalité. Cette mobilité ou ce dynamisme est précisément ce qui est en jeu (bien que parfois silencieusement) dans les théories du sujet du roman moderne ; dans le travail d'écrivains comme Nancy Armstrong, Martha Nussbaum, Michael Mack et Pieter Vermeulen, le lien entre forme et sujet du roman est ainsi inscrit et constant. La consécration du sujet moderne dans la forme moderne du roman met en scène précisément ce dualisme de la fiction et de la réalité, en illustrant la séduction de cette dernière par le premier. *The Secret of Literature* offre également un aperçu des ancêtres théoriques de McCarthy, citant en particulier Paul De Man, Georges Bataille, Roland Barthes et Henri Bergson, suggérant de manière assez claire l'influence potentielle de leur pensée sur sa fiction. Baudrillard et Benjamin, en revanche, ne sont pas mentionnés, bien que je montre ci-dessous

comment leur travail constitue peut-être une vision singulière de la société capitaliste récente qui se joue dans les pages de ses romans.

Le sujet contemporain en tant qu'anthropologue

J'aimerais maintenant aborder brièvement la figure de l'anthropologue, dont la figure littéraire apparaît à la fois dans *C* et dans *Satin Island*, dans un article du *Guardian* écrit par McCarthy à l'époque de la sortie de *Satin Island*.

De l'anthropologue, McCarthy dit ce qui suit : « En tant que romancier, je suis fasciné par la figure de l'anthropologue. Ce qu'il incarne pour moi, c'est une version de l'écrivain moins toutes les conneries, tout le camouflage ou l'obscurcissement - incarne, c'est-à-dire la fonction de l'écrivain réduite à son strict minimum structurel. Vous regardez le monde et vous le relatez. C'est tout ». La distinction qu'il fait ici est instructive : ce qu'il dit, c'est que l'ethnographie, le récit produit par l'anthropologue, n'a pas les « conneries » de l'astuce littéraire, elle ne tente pas le prix d'appel que juge McCarthy endémique à la littérature contemporaine. Cela révèle les réflexions de McCarthy sur l'écriture en général et simultanément sur le sujet contemporain qui vit à « l'âge de la saturation des données ». On pourrait même dire que McCarthy voit Levi-Strauss comme transcendant la ruse du roman moderne, et que cette franchise indique une connaissance implicite de la division floue entre fiction et réalité, ou fiction et expérience subjective. La figure de l'anthropologue et le mode d'écriture de l'ethnographie peuvent être considérés comme un trope qui, dans les termes de Manian déployés par McCarthy dans *Tintin*, se déroule et se tourne vers les tropes du sujet contemporain de la communication numérique. Tout comme l'anthropologue, le sujet et l'écrivain contemporains opèrent dans un maelström de données et de signaux d'information, une tempête parfaite de réalité transmise et codée dont l'immensité même exclut tout arrangement dialectique ou conflictuel et exige donc une sorte de recherche perpétuelle du motif et du sens par le sujet qui se sent tout de suite chez lui et

désespérément étranger dans ce paysage. Ce qui est implicitement exigé du profil Facebook, sinon l'impératif de « Vous regardez le monde et vous le relatez. C'est tout. »?

Et pourtant, ce qui est vraiment en cause dans cet article, c'est l'état actuel de l'écriture, qui a été rendu opérationnel par les logiciels numériques. Plutôt que de se tourner vers le génie individuel de l'écrivain ou de l'ethnographe, la vie dans une société mondialisée est surveillée et tracée par la combinaison du matériel et du logiciel, un phénomène social que nous pouvons suivre de façon critique depuis les travaux du début du XXe siècle de Walter Benjamin à l'anthropologie théorique postmoderne de Jean Baudrillard. On pourrait dire que Benjamin et Baudrillard décrivent l'usurpation de l'écriture et de la narration par les moyens technologiques de production et de communication de la réalité, faisant du roman moderne une sorte d'objet nostalgique performatif qui représente la co-présence du passé et du présent décrite par Benjamin comme un mode de modernité et par des auteurs comme Baudrillard et Jameson comme une caractéristique culturelle du postmodernisme. McCarthy suggère que Lévi-Strauss et Mallarmé, « le père de la littérature moderne », croient que leur forme d'écriture (ethnographie et littérature) est une tentative idéaliste d'écrire ce qu'il appelle le 'Grand Rapport', un terme qu'il utilise comme figure centrale sur *Satin Island*. Sa description de l'effort de Lévi-Strauss pour développer « un sens de la structure, du modèle, du système (le récit des *Tristes Tropiques*, par exemple, des zaps de culture en culture, de continent en continent, comme il cartographie le globe entier selon des lignes d'association...) » est un autre trope qui se répète. Cette imagerie de l'interconnexion culturelle, avec des lignes croisées qui nient les obstacles du temps et de l'espace jusqu'à la fin d'une compréhension de l'universel dans la société humaine, se répète dans tous les romans de McCarthy comme un désir ou une fantaisie des protagonistes, donnant une orientation spécifiquement anthropologique au récit du désir dans ces romans.

McCarthy, dans ses romans et dans cet article, considère que le terrain de ce 'grand rapport' est celui du capitalisme en général et du capitalisme tardif en particulier. En d'autres termes, si la modernité est comprise comme émergeant à côté du capital, alors elle peut être comprise comme une tentative de produire une connexion universelle, une signification fondamentale pour tout cela. Le mode anthropologique de l'ethnographie en tant que tel s'universalise dans la société capitaliste ; le désir de connexion (paradoxalement détachée) qui produit une réalité cohérente au début du XXe siècle est une des leçons que l'on peut tirer du travail de Benjamin sur l'œuvre d'art à l'époque de la reproduction mécanique. Cependant, McCarthy indique : « Le problème, c'est que le modèle anthropologique est plein de problèmes ; il y a en lui une irréalisabilité presque systématique qui y est inscrite... ». C'est un exemple de la logique déconstructive à laquelle j'ai fait référence plus tôt. L'anthropologie en est venue à connaître cette impossibilité d'application sous le nom de 'double contrainte' : « la 'pureté' même qu'elle [l'anthropologie] recherche n'est qu'un état dans lequel tous les cadres de compréhension, d'interprétation ou d'analyse font défaut ; une fois ces cadres mis en œuvre, le mystère qui a attiré l'anthropologue vers son sujet s'évapore ». L'anthropologue, comme le sujet contemporain et les protagonistes des romans de McCarthy, cherche une forme idéale de détachement qui relève ici avant tout de l'objectivité de la connaissance de la réalité (l'art de la disparition). Cependant, lorsqu'elle est observée (ou recherchée) dans la pratique sociale et littéraire, la poursuite de ce désir démontre une certaine performance idéologique et donc éthique qui va au-delà de la poursuite consciente de l'objectivité, ce qui peut en fait obscurcir ce désir de 'réalité' derrière la poursuite capitaliste moderne de l'individualité, l'authenticité et la présence. L'anthropologique est donc au cœur des caractères dématérialisés et aplatis des romans, et pourtant, pour saisir le sens de sa présence (tantôt silencieuse, tantôt explicite), il faut la considérer sous la forme de son trope ; comme un passage entre l'indication d'un mode fiable de connaissance ou de production du réel et en même temps indiquer que cette poursuite

est toujours entravée par ses propres mécanismes (langage, image, lecture). McCarthy soutient qu'à l'ère de la communication numérique et de la production incessante d'informations, le grand rapport est 'ici, là, partout', et en tant que tel « La question est devenue une question de lecture automatique ». En tant que tel, je veux démontrer que la poétique de McCarthy (définie en termes de formalisme de répétition, de planéité, de non-affectuosité, de connexion, d'inhumanité, de dualisme et de doublement) démontre une parenté avec la poétique anthropologique du mal dans les œuvres de Jean Baudrillard et Georges Bataille, la poétique de la déconstruction dans De Man, et la poétique de la technologie et le sujet (ou vie) dans les œuvres de Benjamin et Henri Bergson.

Le crime parfait

Baudrillard utilise la figure rhétorique du « crime parfait » pour enquêter sur ce qu'il appelle « le meurtre de la réalité ». Une façon de réfléchir à cette poétique du meurtre et de la criminalité est de la considérer comme une continuation de la fictionnalisation de son concept de la simulation. Il offre en même temps au lecteur une compréhension de l'esthétique post-orgy, en soutenant que, selon lui,

Sans les apparences, le monde serait un crime parfait, c'est-à-dire un crime sans criminel, sans victime et sans mobile. Et la vérité s'en serait à jamais retirée et son secret ne serait jamais révélé, faute d'indices [de traces] laissés en arrière. Mais le fait est que le crime n'est jamais parfait, car le monde se trahit par les apparences, qui sont les indices de sa non-existence, les traces de la continuité du rien.

Il y a plusieurs aspects importants de cette description que nous pouvons contextualiser avec le travail de McCarthy : les apparences, le crime et la notion de laisser des traces du « rien », de l'inconnaissable ou de la mort. Bien que provocatrice, la notion de non-existence

du monde n'est pas si troublante si l'on prend en compte la logique de la déconstruction. Ce qui est en fait dit ici, c'est que le monde est le monde des apparences (images, texte, langue, perceptions), et en tant que tel révèle sa non-existence précisément par le mode de son existence ; le monde existe, mais jamais véritablement comme lui-même. Nous obtenons plus tard une description moins ambiguë du crime parfait en question, quand il le décrit comme « celui d'une réalisation inconditionnelle du monde par l'actualisation de toutes les données, la transformation de tous nos actes et de tous nos événements en information pure : bref, la solution finale, la résolution du monde en avant du temps par le clonage de la réalité et la destruction du réel par son double ». Le nom du chapitre qui est ouvert par la citation ci-dessus est *The Automatic Writing of the World* et décrit le moment au-delà des révoltes situationnistes de 1968 (tout comme dans la rêverie d'U. bordée de tarmac). La signification du passage du spectacle à la simulation (ici appelée virtualité) est décrite comme suit :

La virtualité est différente du spectacle, qui laissait encore place à une conscience critique et à la démystification. L'abstraction du " spectacle " n'a jamais été irrévocable, même pour les situationnistes. Alors que la réalisation inconditionnelle est irrévocable, puisque nous ne sommes plus ni aliénés ni dépossédés : nous sommes en possession de toutes les informations. Nous ne sommes plus des spectateurs, mais des acteurs de la performance, et des acteurs de plus en plus intégrés dans le déroulement de cette performance. Alors que nous pourrions faire face à l'irréalité du monde comme un spectacle, nous sommes sans défense devant l'extrême réalité de ce monde, devant cette perfection virtuelle. Nous sommes, en fait, au-delà de toute désaliénation. C'est la nouvelle forme de terreur, par rapport à laquelle les horreurs de l'aliénation étaient de très petites bières.

Le deuxième roman de McCarthy, *Men in Space*, porte précisément sur ce type de crime : un crime de doublement, un doublement visant à éliminer la trace de l'auteur, de la victime et du mobile. Le crime est le vol et la copie d'une icône byzantine inestimable, le plan est de retourner la copie parfaite aux autorités et de vendre l'original. Cependant, pour accomplir ce crime, l'artiste doit d'abord reproduire les calculs, les mesures et les rapports qui font de la pièce ce qu'elle est. Ce que nous avons donc, c'est un schéma de copie sans laisser de trace, une copie facilitée par la reproductibilité d'une icône qui est facilitée par la dépendance des iconographes aux codes, aux formules répétables et aux modèles mathématiques. Cependant, comme le crime de Baudrillard, l'artiste derrière la copie illégale ne peut s'empêcher de laisser une trace. Ce thème du doublement se retrouve dans chacun des romans en question sous diverses formes (modèles, reconstitutions, souvenirs, itérations, clips vidéo, reportages télévisés).

C'est le doublement du désir de la copie et de l'original à la fois : le désir d'un 'crime parfait'. La simultanéité et le caractère contradictoire de ces désirs trouvent une sorte de point culminant dans *Satin Island* où U. se trouve confronté à la qualité même du contexte qui rend ces contradictions et paradoxes endémiques : l'absence d'autorité et de responsabilité propre à l'automatisation idéologique capitaliste tardive. Sa confusion sur la question de savoir si la voix dans sa tête qui murmure à propos de 'l'état actuel des choses' est la sienne ou non illustre bien ce problème. Ce genre de personnage est à la fois troublé et excité par ce contexte, le contexte ahistorique du capitalisme tardif et le mouvement à la dérive qu'il impose. L'illustration poétique de McCarthy atteint à son tour cette double posture ; U. pense que c'est normal, ce qui est une chose, mais il semble aussi l'aimer tout à fait, et pas secrètement. C'est cette double posture qui sous-tend la performance occidentale bourgeoise de culpabilité, de honte et d'indignation, et le désir étrangement persistant de connexion dans un monde déjà connecté ; des campagnes de sensibilisation, des 'likes' et des 'partages' radicaux et des 'upvotes' et 'vues'

d'activisme numérique contemporain (subjectivité passive détachée dans son masque historique comme 'la conversation'). Les personnages de McCarthy sont particuliers en ce sens qu'il s'agit d'états très émotionnels dont ils semblent détachés et envers lesquels ils ne montrent rien d'autre que peut-être de l'indifférence.

Dans une grande partie du roman, cette double posture est maintenue ; en termes littéraires, il s'agit d'une tentative non pas d'illustrer le double rôle du récit pour le sujet, mais plutôt d'illustrer l'indécidabilité du langage (le continuum entre le rhétorique et le littéral) et un mode de satirisation automatique ou auto-satirisation qui empêchent le sujet de réaliser cette forme de double-conscience idéale. Mais il y a un moment en particulier où la lecture plus critique et rhétorique de son contexte culturel se manifeste précisément dans le désir d'une forme de résistance ; une forme postmoderne, post-orgie de violence contre l'ethos de la réalité qui est, comme l'explique Baudrillard, fatale au sujet et au système auquel il veut résister (U. le sait en cachette donc évite en définitive la mort, et qui lui fait choisir vie, continuité, refus du sabotage interne volontaire) :

Ces méditations ont eu une autre conséquence : à cette époque, mon attitude non seulement à l'égard du Grand Rapport, mais aussi à l'égard de Koob-Sassen, a subi un changement radical. J'ai commencé à voir le projet comme néfaste. Sinistre. Dangereux. En fait, c'est carrément diabolique. Se faufilant dans les moindres recoins de la vie des citoyens, remaniant ("reconfigurant") les systèmes qui se trouvent derrière eux et portant sur pratiquement toutes leurs actions et expériences, et ce sans même le savoir (...) Je ne pouvais, au début, mettre le doigt sur un aspect ou un effet particulier, ni sur un initiateur ou bénéficiaire particulier, qui était intrinsèquement et sans ambiguïté mauvais en lui-même. Mais au bout d'un moment, j'ai commencé à me dire que c'était précisément cela qui le rendait

mauvais : son imprécision même le rendait odieux, sinistre et dangereux. En n'ayant pas de visage, ni même de corps, le Projet s'est doté de capacités énormes et de grande portée, tout en réduisant sa responsabilité - et sa vulnérabilité - à presque zéro[...] Le Projet était supra-gouvernemental, supra-national, supra-tout - et infra- aussi : c'est ce qui le rend si efficace et si meurtrier. J'ai continué à réfléchir à ces choses pendant que je travaillais, semaine après semaine, semaine après semaine, pour aider à lancer le projet, pour aider à mettre en marche sa première phase ; et comme je l'ai fait, plus je réfléchissais, ruminais, ce que vous voulez, plus les pensées de cette nature pourrissaient encore.

Ce que U. décrit est précisément le mode de mort qui est endémique à la discussion littéraire et théorique de la forme, du pouvoir et de la totalité. Il confronte (implicitement) l'investigation littéraire d'une forme " morte " à travers la figure d'un centre absent ou d'une autorité responsable. Et pourtant, en même temps, la double posture du style de McCarthy révèle la mort du sujet avec cette autorité, c'est-à-dire la propre mort de U. en tant qu'être humain volontaire. La fin de ce passage rend explicite la forme de cette mort subjective : penser une chose (que le projet est mauvais) et en faire une autre (aider à "faire naître le projet"). En mourant, en disparaissant, la chose disparue acquiert une présence insidieuse et intérieure dans la vie dont elle a été ostensiblement exilée. Pour Baudrillard, cela est incarné par le concept de valeur après l'orgie ; la valeur, libérée de sa prémisse marxiste moderne d'origine, morte de ce fait, perd tous les liens qui en déterminaient une fois son expression et sa nature. Une fois libérée en tant que telle, elle perd, comme le suggère U., toute responsabilité quant à son sens originel (capitaliste) et sa vulnérabilité à la critique dont l'efficacité dépend d'une cible stable pour parler (qui connaît et exprime nécessairement ses propres principes). Cet extrait est indicatif du processus de pensée du sujet qui, soudainement, du fait d'être plongé dans le problème culturel

et historique de l'excès d'information, est suspendu entre conscience critique et ignorance essentielle ; c'est un exemple de rumination consciente dans les murs d'un programme auto-régulé et automatique, dans le monde qui écrit lui-même. McCarthy développe des personnages qui oscillent entre l'intuition contemplative et le mouvement inerte banal à travers le monde.

Le crime imparfait est perpétré sur le monde par l'écriture automatique du monde lui-même (synonyme de la poursuite automatisée et de la préservation de la 'bonne vie'). Bien que McCarthy suggère que l'accélération du capitalisme d'entreprise représente un défi pour l'écrivain, il y a un aspect particulier qui le préoccupe, et qui domine chacun de ses romans :

Si cette situation n'est pas entièrement ou catégoriquement nouvelle (les auteurs dépendent d'un marché depuis des temps immémoriaux, bien sûr), un aspect de la situation est parvenu (je vous dirais) au point critique, la question de la saturation des données. La littérature occidentale a peut-être plus ou moins commencé, dans *l'Oresteia* d'Eschyle, par un long récit d'un espace traversé par un signal, et du réseau de balises à travers lequel le message du signal (celui de la chute de Troie) est transmis - mais maintenant, deux millénaires et demi après, ce réseau, ce régime de signaux, est si omniprésent et si insistant, si indéniablement inséré ou installé à chaque strate de l'existence, que l'idée que nous pourrions avoir besoin de quelqu'un, d'un artisan compétent, pour composer n'importe quel message, encore moins incisif ou « épiphanique », semble désespérément étrange.

Cela démontre précisément l'idée de Baudrillard d'aller au-delà du spectacle et de la philosophie pleine d'espoir des Situationnistes pour aller vers ce qu'il appelle la réalité intégrale, et ce qu'il étiquettera finalement un système hégémonique. McCarthy démontre la futilité de « réclamer notre récit » (un mantra populaire de la politique identitaire contemporaine) dans un monde constamment en train d'écrire lui-même. La poétique du mal, sous toutes les formes mentionnées ici, est présente dans les récits de McCarty. Elles servent précisément de mode

poétique d'une sorte d'autoréflexion littéraire qui n'est pas face aux défis des formes, genres ou styles nouveaux précédents, mais plutôt à l'omniprésence de l'information sur ces formes et sur le monde que Baudrillard comprend comme la tentative d'un « crime parfait ». Je crois que cela justifie ici la prépondérance de théories qui ne sont pas évidemment ou exclusivement des théories littéraires, et qui sont pourtant, je dirais, elles-mêmes « littéraires ».

L'autoconsommation du sujet hégémonique

L'œuvre postérieure de Baudrillard du début du XXI^e siècle constitue une sorte d'aboutissement du problème de la réalité telle qu'il la conçoit, dans les termes plus philosophiquement cohérents d'un système global hégémonique. Tout d'abord, nous avons l'impression que l'origine du problème de la réalité est peut-être plus reconnaissable (bien qu'encore ambiguë) : « La disparition de Dieu nous a laissés face à la réalité et à la perspective idéale de transformer ce monde réel. Et nous nous sommes trouvés confrontés à l'entreprise de *réaliser* le monde, de le rendre techniquement, intégralement réel. Or, le monde libéré de toute illusion, ne se prête pas du tout à la réalité. Plus nous avançons dans cette entreprise, plus elle devient ambiguë, plus elle se perd de vue. La réalité a à peine eu le temps d'exister et elle est déjà en train de disparaître ». Si nous pensons au narrateur de *Remainder*, nous pourrions mieux comprendre la signification de ce passage. Le lien clé avec McCarthy ici est l'implication que le monde, la base matérielle de l'existence humaine, « ne se prête pas du tout à la réalité », c'est-à-dire qu'il exige l'inclusion de ce qui est absent, grotesque et absurde. Ce sens de la réalité refuse la résolution d'une forme idéale, et donc l'objet possible d'un doublement satirique. Dans *Remainder*, le narrateur cherche à retrouver un sens très spectral ou ambigu de l'authenticité, un désir dominant qui est continuellement confronté soit à la complicité indifférente soit à l'imprévisibilité obstinée du monde. Et, tout comme pour Baudrillard, plus la quête d'authenticité du narrateur s'approche de sa cible, plus vite il semble amplifier d'une certaine

manière un sentiment d'ambiguïté ontologique. Le narrateur se voit contraint de *faire preuve d'authenticité* alors qu'il se rend chez un ami :

Ça devait avoir l'air étrange. Je me sentais mal à l'aise, embarrassé.

J'ai pris la décision d'aller chercher les informations sur le vol après tout, mais je suis resté sur le trottoir quelques secondes de plus pendant que je faisais semblant d'évaluer plusieurs options et de prendre une décision éclairée. J'y ai même mis mon doigt, l'index de ma main droite. C'était une performance pour les deux hommes qui me regardaient, pour que mes mouvements paraissent plus authentiques.

Ce qui est exécuté, concrètement, c'est un moment de pensée, de calcul, *de choix* ; c'est l'exécution momentanée de l'indécision qui crée l'apparence de l'authenticité subjective. Ce qui est troublant dans cette scène, c'est que l'exécution de la pensée prend *le temps* et *l'espace* de la pensée ; la décision est déjà prise, ce qui semble nécessaire pour le narrateur est d'acquiescer la posture d'une personne en chemin vers une décision. La décision a déjà été prise, et pourtant, il faut un formalisme pour la faire apparaître comme une réalité partagée. Bien que le lien n'ait pas encore été établi par le narrateur, cette contrainte qu'il ressent se traduit finalement par l'expression d'un mode de dévotion religieuse à la répétition de ses reconstitutions. Dans mon analyse, ce mode représente la dévotion idéologique actuelle à la répétition consumériste, et McCarthy, dans ses essais, l'identifie à une forme particulière de temporalité littéraire. Citant *La Montagne magique* de Thomas Mann, McCarthy associe la temporalité du formalisme de la répétition médicale au temps de la mort et de la maladie, « un présent sans dimension dans lequel ils vous apportent éternellement le bouillon ». Il ajoute ensuite à cette image la répétition d'une variété religieuse offerte au personnage de Conrad, James Wait, un marin dont la maladie oblige ses compagnons de bord à « devenir des serviteurs loyaux mais épouvantés » à son endroit dans le navire qui a pris l'aspect « d'une église ». Cependant, lorsqu'il est révélé que

Wait avait trompé l'équipage en simulant sa maladie, les événements et le monde conspiraient pour décrire ce que McCarthy appelle le temps « intermédiaire » du roman, ou de la maladie et de la mort. Tout d'abord, même après avoir admis sa ruse, la toux qui ouvre le récit de sa maladie (et de la tromperie) dans le texte, continue sans relâche. Par conséquent, lorsque le capitaine l'accuse de tromperie, Wait prétend qu'il a récupéré. La confusion que produit ce doublement des contraires apparaît dans le texte sur les plans ontologique et environnemental : « Tout le vaisseau bascule au bord d'une ambiguïté abyssale » ; « rien en elle n'était réel. » Il dérive sur le Pot au Noir, ce qui (puisque'il est propulsé par la voile) retarde son passage vers l'avant - une pause qui semble affirmer que « L'univers a conspiré avec James Wait ». Cette temporalité démontre un monde en conspiration avec l'individu, avec le personnage qui semble destiné à simuler sa mort à *mort*. Wait commence l'histoire à l'extérieur de l'appel, son inclusion subséquente le qualifie à la fois de perturbateur et de malade ; son entrée dans l'histoire est une entrée et une sortie en même temps, il entre comme celui qui est déjà en cours de sortie. C'est la nature de l'intérim ou de l'intervalle tel qu'il est compris ici. Selon ses propres termes, un intervalle ou un intervalle de ce type est pour McCarthy une indication de l'époque « révolutionnaire » mûre avec le potentiel de la 'fiction'. Passant à un registre plus théorique, McCarthy relie l'esthétique temporelle de la mort et de la maladie à la notion de Conrad selon laquelle l'écriture devrait mener : « [...] non pas à la réussite d'un travail, mais plutôt à sa suspension : « Arrêter, pour l'espace d'un souffle, les mains occupées par le travail de la terre, et contraindre les hommes envoûtés par la vue de buts lointains à regarder un instant la vision environnante de la forme et des couleurs, du soleil et des ombres (...) ». McCarthy étend ensuite cette notion de suspension à travers l'analyse d'Orphée par Blanchot, l'identifiant non seulement à l'arrestation mais aussi à l'acte d'interrompre et de vandaliser son propre travail. Par conséquent, l'écriture de ce type hautement moderniste est identifiée par McCarthy avec le présent incontournable de la maladie de Mann, qui devient le Pot au Noir de la maladie simulée

à Conrad, et reçoit sa transmutation finale dans cet essai par le travail de Mallarmé. McCarthy cite l'expression par Mallarmé d'un sentiment qu'il exprimera plus tard en termes contemporains dans son article, « La mort de l'écriture » : « En dernière analyse, je considère l'époque contemporaine comme une sorte d'interrègne pour le poète, qui n'a rien à voir avec cela : elle est trop tombée ou trop pleine d'effervescence préparatoire pour qu'il fasse autre chose que continuer à travailler (...) ». Il décrit un poète mort dans le milieu de la suspension, envoyant parfois des signaux aux vivants. A l'intérieur de cette notion moderniste de suspension, l'intérim ou l'intervalle, se joue un mode de répétition intemporelle et sans espace, une sorte de dévotion à ce que la qualité suspendue de l'intérim ou de l'intervalle garde en réserve : l'événement non répétitif, ce que Gibson appelle une « singularité » et McCarthy décrit comme un événement qui « ne peut se nommer, ni même trouver une solide plate-forme de temps pour s'y dresser ». L'intervalle est à la fois une vanité moderniste pour McCarthy, et en même temps celle qui relie la poétique de ses romans au moment contemporain. En situant l'intervalle dans le haut modernisme et sa confrontation avec le mode universalisateur du colonialisme, McCarthy démontre que cette notion de suspension n'est pas purement littéraire, mais est plutôt la conséquence de la confrontation de l'écrivain avec les centres de pouvoir de la modernité : technologie, capital, échange. En apportant cette même temporalité, spatialité et suspension à sa propre poétique, je soutiens que McCarthy ne se contente pas de réitérer une esthétique moderniste critique, mais identifie plutôt la modernité elle-même comme le mode de suspension que ses romans partagent avec la théorie hégémonique contemporaine de Baudrillard.

Toutes les caractéristiques de l'intervalle décrit par McCarthy se retrouvent dans la conception de la modernité de Jean Baudrillard. J'ai lu la conception de Baudrillard de la modernité en termes de déploiement et de disparition tripartites : de l'authenticité en farce, de la nomination en désintégration, et enfin de la réalité dans son rapport troublé à la fiction. « Nous pouvons partir du célèbre dicton de Marx qui dit que l'histoire est d'abord un événement

authentique, puis qu'elle se répète comme une farce. Ainsi, nous pouvons considérer la modernité comme l'aventure initiale de l'Occident européen, puis comme une immense farce qui se répète à l'échelle planétaire, sous toutes les latitudes où les valeurs religieuses, techniques, économiques et politiques occidentales ont été exportées ». Baudrillard semble éviter spécifiquement l'utilisation du terme « tragédie » dans sa référence au célèbre dicton de Marx : il n'y a que de la farce, mais une farce qui manque de rire ou d'humour. Tel est le caractère de ces concepts : ils reflètent la positivité de ce qu'ils cherchent à décrire et, ce faisant, mettent en œuvre sa disparition. La même conclusion peut être tirée, en particulier en ce qui concerne l'écriture, lorsque Baudrillard suggère que « en nous représentant les choses, en les nommant et en les conceptualisant, les êtres humains les font exister et, en même temps, accélèrent leur ruine et les séparent subtilement de leur réalité brute. Par exemple, la lutte des classes existe à partir du moment où Marx la nomme. Mais elle n'existe sans doute dans sa plus grande intensité qu'avant d'être nommée ». En parlant du postmoderne dans le contexte de mon analyse, donc, nous parlons de la conception de Baudrillard de la modernité (et de ses principes) comme le début de sa propre fin. En d'autres termes, 'postmoderne' équivaut en l'occurrence à un sens temporel, plus précisément au moment prolongé, « où l'être humain, en s'attachant à analyser et transformer le monde, en sort tout en lui donnant force du réel. On peut donc dire que le monde réel commence, paradoxalement, à disparaître en même temps qu'il commence à exister ». Ce projet occidental est absurde, sans être tragique ni drôle, car le projet lui-même est compris comme la relégation de la folie humaine sous la forme de la réalisation d'un idéal. On a soutenu que Baudrillard fait preuve d'une totale indifférence à l'égard de la souffrance des opprimés dans le monde totalisateur qu'il décrit, et pourtant, dans son essai *Carnaval et Cannibale* de 2004, il démontre la réversibilité inhérente aux techniques d'exagération et d'absence, de manière à problématiser l'utilité de ce type de critique éthique et morale du capitalisme récent. En termes simples, il réduit cette critique à une sorte de *performance*

condescendante de la subjectivité hégémonique. Parlant de l'Occident et les 'autres' dans les termes provocateurs des 'Blancs' et des 'Noirs' ou de la 'blancheur' et de la 'noirceur', il illustre la positivité de cette division illusoire des peuples non seulement par l'utilisation exagérée de ces termes communs mais absurdes, mais par la logique de déconstruction qui relie irrévocablement ces deux groupes sémantiquement séparés par leur engagement commun pour la performance de leur réalité et la prolongation de leur suspension.

Le projet occidental de mondialisation de ses valeurs (d'où le projet de colonialisme est inextricable) produit pour Baudrillard la description suivante des 'noirs', « qui, plus qu'exploités ou opprimés, sont simplement transformés en risée et en caricatures des Blancs - comme ces singes qui étaient habillés en amiral et exposés dans les foires ». Il appelle cela la « carnavalisation » des peuples marginalisés : l'insistance qu'ils sont différents et ridicules, mais que cette différence peut être transcendée par l'adoption de la manière, des valeurs et du costume des "Blancs". Cependant, il décrit le processus inverse de « cannibalisation » comme « une stigmatisation de la domination utilisant les marques mêmes de cette domination » par ces peuples, la performance exagérée de la blancheur qui sert en fin de compte à produire ces peuples comme une image capable de représenter la blancheur elle-même comme rien qu'une illusion idéologique au cœur de laquelle se trouve une absence ultime d'authenticité (ou une similarité dangereuse pour la hiérarchie dominante). Dans les connotations manifestement racistes de cette description, que je lis comme un double absurde des connotations racistes du colonialisme et du discours post-colonial, Baudrillard identifie la semence de sa propre destruction, sans doute la seule forme de résistance capable de démanteler le système hégémonique perpétré sur le monde. Il décrit ce processus, ce que j'appellerais une logique de déconstruction matérialisée ou réalisée, comme suit :

Si tous les peuples habillés des signes de la blancheur et avec toutes
les technologies exotiques sont en même temps la parodie vivante de ces

choses, un raillerie d'elles, c'est parce que ces choses sont tout simplement risibles, mais nous ne pouvons plus le voir. C'est lorsqu'elles s'étendent au niveau mondial que les valeurs universelles se révèlent comme une escroquerie. S'il y a eu un événement original - historique et occidental - de la modernité, nous avons épuisé toutes ses conséquences et il a pris une tournure fatale et grotesque pour nous. Mais la logique de la modernité exigeait que nous l'imposions au monde entier, que le fatum des Blancs soit celui de la race de Caïn, et que personne n'échappe à cette homogénéisation, cette mystification de l'espèce.

Lorsque les Noirs tentent de se blanchir, ils ne sont que le miroir déformé de la négriification des Blancs, auto-mystifiés dès le départ par leur propre maîtrise. Tout le décor de la civilisation multiraciale moderne n'est donc qu'un univers en trompe-l'œil dans lequel toutes les particularités de la race, du sexe et de la culture ont été falsifiées au point d'être des parodies d'elles-mêmes.

Pour Baudrillard, le sujet disparaît dans des performances parodiques d'eux-mêmes. La logique déconstructive peut donc être identifiée comme un processus d'autoconsommation dans un monde où la convergence du littéral et du rhétorique domine sous forme de données et d'informations. Plus nous nous efforçons de réaliser et de légitimer notre sens de nous-mêmes et de notre position dans le monde, plus la réalisation menace de révéler sa dépendance à la rhétorique ou à la fiction et donc de nous retrouver nez à nez avec la réalité cachée derrière l'esthétique indécidable de McCarthy : qu'il n'y a aucun soi fondamental derrière l'écran de notre individualité personnelle, que les textes dont nous choisissons de nous imprégner ne contiennent aucun sens principal. Ce que nous pouvons comprendre à travers Baudrillard comme l'art de la disparition derrière la répétition, le langage et l'esthétique de la réalité, nous

pouvons le voir dans la théorie de McCarthy comme un intérêt et un dévouement pour l'absence du sujet. Comme Baudrillard, Harcourt et Irving Goh décrivent les modes contemporains de résistance en termes de refus ou d'abandon des structures contemporaines de (respectivement) politique et de subjectivité. Goh soutient en effet que dans l'espace contemporain de « contagion », d'inévitable « toucher », le rejet n'est pas tant une aspiration qu'une réalité qu'il faut accepter et agir en nous. Cependant, comme le sujet en disparition de Baudrillard, la prémisse positive *du rejet* dépend de sa capacité à détourner la négativité potentielle du toucher, où le toucher constitue le potentiel du pouvoir à contraindre ou à manipuler :

Le rejet ne met aucune prééminence sur son toucher, comme s'il pouvait réaliser quelque chose que le toucher des autres ne peut réaliser. C'est ce rejet automatique de tout toucher exceptionnel qui donne *au rejet* une retenue avec tact dans ses relations avec les autres, s'abstenant toujours d'initier le toucher, et laissant toujours l'autre être ou partir comme il ou elle le désire. Ici, l'auto-rejet dans *le rejet* esquivé à la fois le toucher excessif et négationniste du sujet cartésien et la caresse dénigrante du sujet sartrien. On peut dire que *le rejet* est toujours en train de penser ou d'expérimenter à nouveau comment toucher avec tact en relation les uns avec les autres dans un espace et un temps différents.

Le rejet de Goh emploie le tact dans son contact avec les autres, dans un mode destiné à permettre aux autres la liberté de rejeter ce toucher, et de ne pas mettre l'accent sur un toucher sur l'autre. En effet, le rejet cherche à toucher, mais à adopter un mode de toucher qui dévalorise et positivise l'acte : en permettant à l'autre de rejeter votre toucher tout court, le rejet tente d'éviter les pièges moraux et éthiques du toucher tout en le maintenant comme une pratique essentielle. Comme Harcourt, qui loue le mouvement d'occupation de Wall Street comme un exemple de désobéissance politique dans ses tentatives d'éviter tous les objectifs déclarés, tous

les avantages et les inconvénients du leadership ou du charisme, le rejet met en scène l'art de la disparition non pas par un engagement avec les problèmes de structure ou de leadership, mais par la performance engagée de l'aliénation ou du détachement qui découlent des stratégies de renvoi esthétique ou du déni. Les stratégies positives de Goh et Harcourt, et la stratégie indécidable de l'art de la disparition de Baudrillard, tous exigent l'absence du sujet (et sa négativité irrévocable) à travers des modes de remplacement esthétique performatif, un mode de simulation formalisé que nous pouvons identifier à Baudrillard mais qui est peut-être aussi en jeu dans certaines formes de littérature.

McCarthy, par exemple, note un type particulier d'absence subjective à la fois décrétée et recherchée dans l'œuvre de Kathy Acker. Il décrit les protagonistes d'Acker comme des « corps » : « Ouverts, se métamorphosant, pénétrant sans fin ou étant pénétrés par les scènes qui les entourent, les corps d'Acker canalisent et agissent comme des centres ou des piliers dans un monde de continuité viscéralement en réseau - comme des méduses frémissant lorsque les signaux de pouls les atteignent par une mer visqueuse. Ou plutôt (de peur que nous ne commençons à devenir holistes), ils ancrent ce monde *et* servent de sa disjonction *à la fois*: plus de gifles que de proliférations ». Cela amène McCarthy à nommer une « situation impossible » dans l'œuvre d'Acker qui est réitérée dans ses propres romans : « celui de s'identifier à la non-identité ». Les corps d'Acker sont, selon McCarthy, « un espace de maîtrise technologique, comme des robots télécommandés ». C'est par son intérêt pour ce mode subjectif de présence/absence, et par la référence répétée dans la littérature critique à son antagonisme envers le sujet du réalisme contemporain que je propose le lien de McCarthy avec l'art de la disparition de Baudrillard. Afin de contextualiser et de détailler la pertinence de cette affirmation, je vais maintenant aborder brièvement ce qui est peut-être le texte le plus complet sur McCarthy à ce jour, *Tom McCarthy : Critical Essays*, en particulier dans le chapitre d'Andrew Gibson.

Comme son évaluation des personnages d'Acker, les protagonistes de McCarthy ont également été lus en termes d'être robotique, inhumain, voire mort. Ce que je vais tenter de démontrer dans les chapitres qui suivent, c'est que McCarthy cherche la révolte par la conformité, la violence par la passivité, dans le mode de l'art hégémonique de la disparition. En d'autres termes, il invoque la logique de la représentation, du réalisme et de la satire (leurs formalismes) dans un mode excessif qui réduit ironiquement ces formes à leur appel constitutif le plus fondamental : leur capacité à refléter une subjectivité absente et ontologiquement fragile. McCarthy défie le lecteur, selon des lignes semblables à celles qu'il attribue au style plagiaire d'Acker, de s'identifier à un manque d'identité. Il relève ce défi en offrant, à la place du sujet traditionnel, un mode de représentation et de relation au formalisme.

Gibson tire ce concept de *C*, décrivant un formalisme comme « un ensemble d'unités, d'éléments ou d'entités et leurs relations auxquelles il existe des limites aussi précisément fixées qu'un cadre, et aussi évidemment définies comme une ligne », mais qui, en même temps, « communiquent, prolifèrent, se croisent, produisent un palimpseste ». Ainsi, les limites précises du formalisme et de ses relations internes sont toujours transgressées par d'autres formalismes. Il fournit la liste suivante de formalismes qui « obsèdent McCarthy » : « répétitions, bien sûr (...), mais aussi mécanismes, systèmes, positionnements, réseaux, codes, processus, grilles, layouts, matrices, câblages, webs, structures, géométries, motifs, diagrammes, logiques, labyrinthes, zones, tableaux, noeuds et relais, plans et ordres, échanges et connectivités, séquences de recouvrement, vecteurs et lignes de contrôle, liens entre eux, principes, règles et instructions, intersections, formules, mandala. . . ». Il ajoute ensuite à cette liste les formalismes représentés par les « systèmes du langage et de la littérature », à partir desquels la précision, la définition et la fixité du formalisme commencent à être remises en question. La combinaison des formalismes linguistiques, théoriques et matériels est unifiée dans les romans et dans la description de Gibson par la sérialité de leur effacement ou

disparition derrière le formalisme suivant, leur désintégration apparemment automatique par la transmission tropicale des valeurs et du sens qui constituent les limites du formalisme. Par exemple, Gibson localise les formalismes dans tout *C*, et pourtant il souligne qu'ils ne sont pas perturbés par ce qu'il appelle des dysfonctionnements ou singularités, mais sont capables de « dépasser toute chose ». Les formalismes sont présentés comme irrésistibles et précurseurs de l'intrigue du roman et des personnages, tandis que les singularités, décrites avec nébulosité comme « une présentation de ce qui apparaît une seule fois, ici et maintenant, seulement ici et maintenant » comme lorsque l'avion de Serge tangue une obus dans le ciel, « devient dérisoire, drôle » dans le roman. En d'autres termes, le formalisme est capable de contenir et de superposer même ce qui est censé le perturber, ce qui amène Gibson à le suggérer : « Il pourrait sembler que l'absorption éternelle de la singularité chez McCarthy témoigne de l'absence absolue d'un extérieur. Mais quelque chose comme l'inverse si c'est le cas : ce qui est en jeu, c'est plutôt la disponibilité, partout, de l'extérieur à l'intérieur et à l'intérieur ». Les interminables séries de formalismes absorbent la singularité et l'événement, la négativité de l'extérieur, dans l'intérieur, dans un mode qui est synonyme de l'idéologie de l'hégémonie occidentale de Jean Baudrillard.

Cette domination idéologique du négatif par la positivité esthétique du formalisme crée une situation en *C* où « Tout est déjà mort (...) dans ce formalisme précède toujours la singularité (...) par son intimité croissante avec la vérité des formalismes, la singularité humaine animée revient sans cesse au domaine inanimé qui l'avait toujours capturée dès le début ». Comparant l'esthétique de McCarthy à la philosophie du réalisme spéculatif, Gibson suggère que les deux sont vulnérables à la critique selon laquelle ils ne contiennent « aucune théorie de l'événement ». Tout en citant la proposition d'Alain Badiou selon laquelle les Réalistes spéculatifs ne vont pas au-delà d'un « détachement du présent », Gibson tente de défendre ce détachement jusqu'à un certain point :

Ils [réalistes spéculatifs] conçoivent le présent de l'extérieur et conçoivent l'extérieur dans le présent - comme le fait McCarthy. Il s'agit en soi d'une entreprise importante à l'heure actuelle, et c'est ce que McCarthy (1999) veut dire lorsqu'il écrit que la tâche nécronautique (inverser le vecteur, il faut bien l'admettre) consiste à " mettre la mort au monde ". Néanmoins : le manifeste de la société nécronautique déclare que les " processus et avatars " de la mort sont " actifs " dans les formalismes, comme la radio, la télévision, Internet (McCarthy, 1999). Jusqu'à présent, je souscris aux nécronautes et suis le complice de McCarthy. Au-delà, je me sépare de lui, comme Badiou le fait avec les réalistes spéculatifs.

C'est ici que je commence à m'éloigner de la lecture de Gibson de l'absence d'événement et de politique dans l'œuvre de McCarthy. Tout d'abord, il convient de noter que l'intention de cette recherche n'est pas d'élucider ou de développer un lien entre l'auteur McCarthy et le théoricien et ses romans, et en tant que tel, les œuvres et transmissions de la Société Nécronautique ne figurent pas en bonne place ici. Je commencerai donc par suggérer que la mort identifiée par la Société Nécronautique comme devant être mise au monde n'est précisément pas la mort contenue dans les formalismes techniques de la radio et d'Internet, mais plutôt la mort niée par ces formalismes du roman : la mort déjà accomplie de l'Occident et du sujet occidental. A ce titre, je m'efforcerai de démontrer dans ce qui suit que les formalismes en jeu dans les romans, toujours à la fois poétiques et techniques, prennent l'espace abandonné par le sujet bourgeois dans son art de la disparition. Là où l'on pourrait s'attendre à un portail vers l'histoire d'un sujet, la profondeur émotionnelle, le champ social des relations ou la motivation politique, je soutiens que les romans nous mettent plutôt au défi de localiser ces éléments manquants dans ce qui apparaît comme une vaste série automatisée de formalismes linguistiques et technologiques.

Ces affirmations prennent de plus en plus d'importance à mesure que Gibson continue de développer sa critique de McCarthy et des réalistes spéculateurs : « Une façon de penser à la fois d'eux et de McCarthy est d'être l'avant-garde intellectuelle d'une génération désabusée qui, dans le meilleur des cas, reconnaît durement l'effondrement - apparemment définitif à l'heure actuelle - de la politique et refuse sévèrement de se réfugier de l'effondrement d'une éthique contemporaine improbable et finalement complice, tout en faisant preuve d'une superbe indifférence face aux Panglossianismes et théologies autrichiennes contemporains ». En d'autres termes, McCarthy est félicité ici pour avoir signalé poétiquement la ruine de la politique, mais sans rien offrir de résolu ou de positif à sa place. Je dirais que l'évaluation par Gibson de la positivité du style de McCarthy (son illustration d'une politique ruinée) est la chose même qui nécessite la critique ultime de Gibson, l'absence d'une théorie de l'événement. Je suis d'accord que les romans illustrent un état de politique que l'on pourrait considérer comme « effondré », si l'on se réfère à l'idéalisme politique du sujet qui contribue à générer le roman avec son « intrigue, ses personnages, sa perception subjective, ses thèmes, sa psychologie, le drame de l'incident ». Cependant, si les romans de McCarthy refusent d'échapper à cet effondrement, les ruines de cet effondrement, ses débris, se présentent précisément sous la forme d'une infinité de formalismes et leur contenu, dont l'expression littéraire devient un alibi pour l'absence du sujet dans les romans. Enfermés dans l'épave du politique, je soutiens ici que les personnages de McCarthy établissent un rapport au monde qui nie leur responsabilité politique, éthique et historique en tant que sujets occidentaux bourgeois, en adoptant à leur place une éthique de collaboration indifférente et de révolte, une théologie séculaire de répétition rituelle qui promet la mort et la résolution du dernier événement (celui qui mettra fin au besoin de répétition). Alors que Gibson reproche à McCarthy de manquer d'une « théorie de l'événement », McCarthy, dans son analyse de Robbe-Grillet et Conrad, propose une autre lecture de cette absence qui étend l'importance de l'absence originale, celle du sujet.

Le sujet, je prétends ici, est précisément un point aveugle narratif des romans, que son obscurcissement et son dépassement par l'irrésistibilité sérielle du formalisme dans la société capitaliste tardive (l'idéologie de l'art de la disparition). Comme le suggère Gibson, dans les romans de McCarthy (comme dans le capitalisme tardif), le formalisme est tout, est capable d'attirer tout dans ses lignes et frontières changeantes ; et pourtant, contrairement à Gibson, je soutiens dans les chapitres qui suivent que cela ne signifie pas que McCarthy est capable d'éviter une éthique complice ou des théologies séculaires. Au contraire, le refus de la fin ou de la résolution est précisément ce que McCarthy considère comme l'essence même de son mode d'écriture particulier.

Par conséquent, l'irrésolution peut être une faiblesse lorsque l'on s'attend à ce que le roman crée quelque chose de *différent* ; cependant, lorsque le roman se comprend lui-même comme étant au cœur des formalismes informatiques et technologiques contemporains, la nouveauté est tacitement rejetée, avec la résolution. Peu importe ses efforts, les romans de McCarthy seront toujours subsumables aux formalismes du genre ; leur irrésolution nie certaines attributions génériques (celles qui exigent une forme particulière de fin ou de protagoniste), tout en invitant la critique de Gibson : si l'on veut déployer une esthétique moderniste contre le réalisme idéologique, on doit pouvoir en démontrer le résultat et non (comme McCarthy) laisser ambigu les faits en question. Cette ambiguïté est cependant le point essentiel : McCarthy dépose ses outils avant la fin, avant que son mode ne puisse être nommé et donc défait, et de cette façon, situe la créativité du sujet bourgeois en dehors de l'acte d'écriture expressionniste du roman et des formalismes de la perception idéologique. Ce qui est rempli de potentiel, c'est toujours ce qui vient *après* la conclusion des récits de McCarthy, après que le lecteur en ait fini avec eux. L'absence du protagoniste traditionnel dans les romans génère cette absence de résolution qui ne se produit pas seulement à la fin des romans, mais tout au long sous forme de circularité et de dualité ; rien n'est résolu dans les romans, les contraires se

mêlent, l'humain devient métaphoriquement insecte et puis machine, et revient ensuite dans le corps. Je soutiens donc que les formalismes de McCarthy ne sont pas la résolution que Gibson pourrait espérer, non seulement parce qu'ils interagissent et transgressent les limites les uns des autres, mais parce qu'ils mettent en œuvre la logique déconstructive du système autonome : ils structurent leur propre dissolution ou disparition. Ainsi, ce qui reste dans les romans sans sujet, c'est que le monde qui tente de s'écrire est indécidable ; la boîte, en l'absence de Schrödinger, décrit le chat à la fois vivant et mort, et objectivement, comme tel.

Ce que je veux dire ici, c'est que McCarthy emploie dans ses romans la poétique de cette condition hégémonique, de manière à reproduire simultanément l'indifférence et le désir d'espoir tacite de l'idéologie dominante, tant de la forme romanesque que de la société hégémonique. Aussi bien la forme contemporaine du roman que la société sont faussées par la démonstration (et la réitération créative ou l'allégorisation) de leurs tentatives infructueuses et continues de résoudre la relation entre signe et chose. Les romans eux-mêmes constituent *des histoires sur* le désir de transcender la condition humaine, sans être eux-mêmes des histoires qui cherchent à transcender cette condition ou illustrent la transcendance de cette condition. Le désir très universel (pour l'achèvement, pour l'image globale) qui s'exprime dans chacun de ses romans est donc nécessairement obscurci par l'absence des modes traditionnels de désir et d'expérience affective qui constituent habituellement la relation entre le roman moderne et le lecteur. On pourrait dire que les romans de McCarthy peuvent être lus comme la stigmatisation de cette forme idéale de littérature moderne et contemporaine, plus qu'une expression d'affinité pour remettre en scène les manoeuvres de l'avant-garde moderniste.

Il peut sembler inhabituel de poursuivre l'analyse des romans de McCarthy à travers le travail d'un théoricien qui est largement associé au postmodernisme, alors qu'une grande partie du travail critique effectué sur McCarthy a situé son travail à côté ou en relation avec le modernisme. Il peut sembler tout aussi inhabituel de poursuivre cet angle d'analyse alors que

l'auteur lui-même semble avoir écarté l'importance relative de l'un des concepts les plus courants de Baudrillard, la simulation :

Tom McCarthy : Je veux dire, je suis un traditionaliste. Je suis assez conservateur. J'ai lu Baudrillard, mais Platon a tout dit. L'idée que le simulacre soit une copie sans original, ce qui est le principal argument de vente de Baudrillard, c'est dans le *Sophist* de Platon. Beaucoup de gens ont décrit *Remainder* comme un livre très postmoderne, parce qu'il y a ce type qui reconstitue des moments très stylisés dans une quête d'authenticité, et dans l'ère postmoderne, ils disent, nous n'avons pas d'authenticité. Mais je pensais autant à *Don Quichotte*, le premier roman, ou l'un des premiers romans, qui est exactement le même. Il s'agit d'un homme qui se sent inauthentique en 1605 et qui, dans le but d'acquérir, d'accéder à l'authenticité, réagit à des moments de romans à quatre sous, une sorte de la télévision de l'époque. Je pense donc qu'il faut faire un peu attention à ce culte de la nouveauté, à l'idée que, d'une façon ou d'une autre, après 1962 environ, nous sommes soudainement postmodernes - ce n'est tout simplement pas le cas. Il y a toujours un précédent. (Alizart)

Ce sont les derniers mots d'une interview qui passe en revue le terrain critique de l'analyse typique de McCarthy : Cocteau, Robbe-Grillet, Mallarmé, Joyce, la plupart des suspects habituels de McCarthy. Cependant, si l'on regarde de près le langage de ce rejet de l'œuvre de Baudrillard et qu'on le compare à l'idée que McCarthy reconstitue ou réanime une certaine esthétique moderniste, donc sa relation avec lui devient moins certaine et plus ouverte à l'interprétation. Premièrement, McCarthy rejette Baudrillard pour avoir fait de la simulation précisément ce qu'il a fait du modernisme : revenir à un moment antérieur de la tradition et le reconstituer à travers les spécificités de leurs conditions contemporaines. Deuxièmement, ce

renvoi est suivi de la suggestion qu'il « pensait autant » à *Don Quichotte* en écrivant *Remainder*, c'est-à-dire autant à *Don Quichotte* qu'à Baudrillard. Il ne s'agit pas d'une lecture à contre-courant, la comparaison dans ce contexte ne peut se faire qu'avec Baudrillard. Il semble que McCarthy rejette alors Baudrillard, tout en suggérant que son travail était dans son esprit autant que Cervantes, ce qui placerait le travail de Baudrillard sur la simulation à un niveau inattendu avec « le premier roman », surtout vu le ton de la réponse. À mon tour, je crois que, particulièrement dans ses œuvres ultérieures, Baudrillard n'a plus mis l'accent sur une temporalité aussi stricte de la simulation, décrivant plutôt, comme je l'ai cité plus haut, la modernité et le concept de réalité lui-même comme prémonitoires de la période des simulations. Ainsi, à mon avis, le rejet de McCarthy ressemble davantage à un report ou à un détour autour d'une dette théorique ou littéraire qu'il ne peut pas trouver un moyen de rembourser. En termes simples, écarter Baudrillard en vertu du concept même que vous écarterez, semble une contradiction trop évidente pour être involontaire, surtout lorsqu'elle vient des lèvres de McCarthy. Ainsi, cette analyse des romans en tant qu'illustration d'un sujet et d'une société autoconsommateurs, où la performance, l'action, la satire et leurs objets deviennent une seule et même chose, est partiellement motivée par le désir d'explorer le potentiel de cette déclaration paradoxale de McCarthy.

Dans la première partie, j'aborderai les conditions de l'espace dans les romans de McCarthy, en étudiant la nature de son illustration et de sa présence, son effet sur le temps et sa relation avec les théories de l'hégémonie qui ont été examinées ici. Je démontrerai que le monde des romans de McCarthy (et le texte lui-même) est un réseau d'illustrations et de surfaces réfléchissantes, et que l'inéluctabilité de ce réseau de surfaces allégorise la prison de la « chose en soi », l'horizon toujours insaisissable de la totalité promise par une immersion totale dans l'information. En même temps, l'espace et le temps seront montrés par rapport à la perméabilité des formalismes de Gibson, comme offrant des limites et des lignes qui ne sont que

potentiellement stables. La première partie se termine par une discussion sur le destin du sujet dans un contexte où les formalismes du temps et de l'espace convergent et deviennent indifférents les uns aux autres. Là où le mouvement est général et non particulier, le destin du sujet est lié à ses propres excréta : signaux, écrans et surfaces en tout genre.

Dans la deuxième partie, je tenterai de montrer que la littérature de McCarthy est définie par un déploiement excessif, mais intentionnel, de symboles, de signes, d'illustrations et de marques du grand homme moderne et roman. Les romans de McCarthy montrent comment l'insistance rigoureuse ou la reproduction d'un formalisme, ou d'une tradition, est en fait la seule voie que le formalisme connaît vers sa propre fin, vers une libération de ce qui le limite. Les romans démontrent qu'une répétition et une reproduction excessives peuvent aider à convaincre ou à fasciner, mais seulement jusqu'à un certain point ; le point où la figure répétée en vient à prendre un caractère comique et absurde, sinon irrationnel et inconnaissable. Dans cette section, le symbolisme, l'a-signification et la mélancolie sont tous abordés comme des formalismes littéraires et sociaux qui occupent une place importante dans les romans. Chacun de ces formalismes sera illustré de la manière dont ils pourraient miner leur propre projet ou leur propre logique, pour tomber plutôt dans le dualisme qui définit le mode littéraire en l'absence du sujet. La poétique de McCarthy sera présentée comme un miroir anthropologique, nous montrant les rituels du sujet contemporain (blanc, hétérosexuel, masculin, bourgeois) dans toute leur banalité excessive. La répétition et l'itération constituent le muscle de l'ethos capitaliste, et en même temps une performance rituelle régressive faisant allusion à un sujet idéal à venir mais absent. Je veux démontrer dans cette section que ce processus d'itération et de réitération rituelles constitue une convergence (au sein de l'hégémonie susmentionnée) d'expression de soi, d'autodestruction et d'effacement de soi. Dans cette section, je veux donc montrer comment les formalismes du symbole, de l'a-signification et de la mélancolie indiquent tous, dans les romans,

l'absence du sujet et le potentiel destructrice et violente que représente l'écriture du sujet par la performance rituelle des sociétés capitalistes récentes.

La troisième partie examine la condition de l'éthique dans les romans de McCarthy. Commenant par une enquête sur la réversibilité de l'éthique du pouvoir dans les romans du chapitre 7, cette section illustre l'éthique dans le contexte sans fin de la réitération esthétique moderniste identifié en C par Gibson. Ce qui s'avère éthique à partir de la position de pouvoir s'avère éthique à partir de la position d'impuissance du chapitre 8 : la production d'une réalité ainsi définie pourrait cacher de façon permanente le désordre, l'indécision et l'insubstantialité de l'objet. C'est pourtant dans cette réitération de l'éthique du pouvoir que le sujet adopte une éthique à la fois négative et positive : celle de sa propre disparition. Il s'agit là d'une éthique motivée par la figure de l'ironie et son potentiel de circularité sans fin. La neutralité et l'absence d'affect dont font preuve les personnages de McCarthy illustrent le sujet privilégié bourgeois dans leur absence de tension particulière, et cette absence de tension est abordée dans le chapitre 9 à travers la personnalité anthropologique de l'escroc. En identifiant le formalisme de la personnalité de l'escroc tant dans la société occidentale contemporaine que dans la poétique des romans, je tente de démontrer (à travers la théorie du défi de Baudrillard) l'éthique de la résistance à l'hégémonie occidentale qui pourrait constituer la clé pour déstabiliser l'hégémonie de Baudrillard sur la simulation.

Résumé en anglais : This study engages with the novels and theory of the English author and artist Tom McCarthy, specifically the novels *Remainder* (2005), *Men in Space* (2007), *C* (2010) and *Satin Island* (2015), as well as his works of theory, *Tintin and the Secret of Literature* (2006) and *Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* (2017). McCarthy's literary connection to certain brands of avant-garde modernism has been analysed and made explicit both through their critical reception inside and outside of academia, and through McCarthy's own works of theory. However, in this study McCarthy's literary oeuvre is engaged with through the lens of Jean Baudrillard's particular brand of postmodernity and cultural criticism. It has been suggested that McCarthy's novels reject the traditional subject of the modern novel, and as such avoid turning to ideological or structural resolutions, leaving open the space for new modes of subjectivity to emerge. It is the contention of this study that the ethics and aesthetics of this refusal and absence are in fact expressions of a specifically bourgeois ideological positivity and passivity. The first section serves to approach the conditions of time, space and individual destiny in the novels, relating these to the conditions of postmodernity. These conditions serve to foster, in the second section of the study, a series of literary modes and formalisms that simulate the presence of the 'absent subject' in the novels. Looking specifically at Symbolism, a-signification and melancholy as literary markers of an absent subjectivity, this second section elaborates on the aesthetics of absence (linguistic and technological) that are essential to this mode of simulated presence. The third section brings together, through the figure of irony and the mythic trickster figure, the conditions and aesthetics of this absent subject in the form of a mode of ethics that is cyclical, as opposed to infinite or discriminatory, and which produces both the capacity for fatal challenge and the pleasure of conformity at once.

Mots-clés en anglais: Tom McCarthy, the novel, Baudrillard, ethics, aesthetics, mass communication, postmodernity, absence.

Résumé en français : Ce projet s'intéresse à la fois aux œuvres et à la théorie de l'écrivain-artiste Tom McCarthy, précisément en analysant ses livres *Remainder* (2005), *Men in Space* (2007), *C* (2010), et *Satin Island* (2015), ainsi que ses œuvres théoriques, *Tintin and the Secret of Literature* (2006) et *Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish : Essays* (2017). Son rapport avec certains styles littéraires d'avant-garde et de modernisme a provoqué des analyses qui l'ont rendu explicite à travers les accueils critiques au sein de et en dehors du monde universitaire, et également à travers ses propres œuvres de théorie. Toutefois, cette analyse de McCarthy prend comme point de vue l'angle de Jean Baudrillard et son regard postmoderne et critique culturel. On a suggéré que les œuvres de McCarthy rejettent le sujet traditionnel du roman moderne et de ce fait évitent les résolutions de l'ordre idéologique ou structurelle, ce qui permet l'émergence de nouvelles façons subjectives. C'est l'affirmation de ce travail que l'éthique et l'esthétique du choix de McCarthy, le refus et l'absence du sujet, sont en fait des expressions d'une positivité et passivité relevant de leurs origines d'une idéologie qui est purement bourgeoise. La première partie s'engage à explorer les conditions du temps, de l'espace, et du destin individuel dans les romans, afin de les lier aux conditions postmodernes. Ces conditions-ci facilitent l'analyse, dans la deuxième partie de ce mémoire, d'une série des styles littéraires et « *formalisms* », ce qui simule la présence d'un sujet « absent » dans les romans. Avec un regard visé sur la notion de Symbolisme, de l'« *a-signification* » et de la mélancolie en tant que repère littéraire d'une subjectivité absente, cette deuxième partie élabore l'esthétique de l'absence (d'un perspectif linguistique et technologique), développant l'essentiel de la notion d'une présence simulée. La troisième partie réunit, à travers l'ironie et le personnage mythique du farceur, les conditions et l'esthétique de ce sujet absent sous la forme

d'une vision d'éthique cyclique, plutôt qu'infini ou discriminatoire, et c'est cette éthique qui produit à la fois la capacité d'un défi mortel et le plaisir de la conformité en même temps.

Mots-clés en français : Tom McCarthy, roman, Baudrillard, éthique, esthétique, communication de masse, le postmoderne, absence